

A man with short brown hair, wearing a dark jacket, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a black handgun in his right hand, pointing it towards the camera. The background is a dark, urban setting with tall buildings and some lights visible in the distance. The overall tone is gritty and suspenseful.

“Exciting, immersive, fast-paced...”

NO MORE HEROES

SEQUEL TO *TWISTING DAGGER*

CHERIE WAGGIE

No More Heroes
A Philip Chandler Mystery
by Cherie Waggie
Published by Clean Reads
www.cleanreads.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, characters, and events are fictitious in every regard. Any similarities to actual events and persons, living or dead, are purely coincidental. Any trademarks, service marks, product names, or named features are assumed to be the property of their respective owners, and are used only for reference. There is no implied endorsement if any of these terms are used. Except for review purposes, the reproduction of this book in whole or part, electronically or mechanically, constitutes a copyright violation.

NO MORE HEROES
Copyright © 2018 CHERIE WAGGIE
ISBN 978-1-62135-787-2
Cover Art Designed by AM DESIGNS STUDIO

I'd like to give all praise to my Lord Jesus first, and my mama, Billie Jane for all of her love and support over the years; and to my friends Donna and Sevi who always believe in me.

Chapter One

It was like a fantasy, descending from the clouds into the Orient horizon. The sky was alive with purple, scarlet, gold, blue, orange, nearly every color of the rainbow. Philip couldn't remember seeing anything as beautiful.

Leaning against his seat, he readied for the landing. He wasn't sure what he was doing. He wasn't sure why he was doing it. Everyone in the small coastal town of Baytown, Washington where he'd been living for the past seven years had encouraged him. His best friend, Anthony Ferrone, Captain of the Homicide Division of the Baytown Police, his assistant, Darla, his girlfriend, Ellen, even his parents with whom he'd just reconnected all told him he needed to take some time for himself, see the world, and allow himself to enjoy the inheritance left to him by his deceased ex-wife, Lily.

Choosing a destination had been easy. He'd never been to Hong Kong and Eddie Tseung, the Asian action mega-star he'd met the year before, had been after him to come.

Philip smiled when he thought of his new friend. He and Eddie had met on the movie set after Philip had been assigned as Eddie's bodyguard. The star, a decade older than Philip's thirty-six years, was constantly on the move, working all the time on his movies and keeping an eye on his cast and crew, so much so, he'd lost a great deal of time with his wife and son. That was what had pulled him and Philip together. It was Eddie who had persuaded Philip to at last reconnect with his own parents.

Philip hadn't let Eddie know he was finally accepting the invitation to visit Eddie's hometown. He'd wanted to surprise him but had made some inquiries, so he would know exactly where Eddie would be since Eddie was constantly on the move. Locating him at any given time was an adventure in and of itself, so Philip

had waited until he knew for certain Eddie was in Hong Kong filming his newest movie.

The plane landed smoothly and Philip released a sigh of relief. He wasn't the best of fliers, and fourteen hours on a non-stop flight over an ocean didn't exactly instill him with ease. The flight had been tedious. Even the movie hadn't kept his attention. He listened to music, but that didn't help either. After the first eight hours, he was ready to be back on the ground. He finally managed to fall into an uneasy sleep, awakened by the hostess serving breakfast.

As soon as departure was announced, Philip stood and retrieved his duffle from the overhead compartment. With tension and security so high in airline travel, he had opted to travel with only the small duffle and one suitcase checked through cargo.

He cleared customs faster than he anticipated, glad not to answer any questions other than "Why are you visiting Hong Kong?" His passport was in order, and his underwear didn't interest the customs official who allowed him through with a smile and "Welcome to Hong Kong."

Trying to remember what little Cantonese Eddie had taught him, Philip walked out of the cool airport into unexpected heat. He remembered Eddie had told him summer in Hong Kong could be sweltering at times.

"Cab? Cab?" A small man dressed to rival any New York cabbie hurried over to him. "You need cab?" He pointed to his cab parked along the curb.

Before Philip could answer, the cabbie snatched the suitcase and was walking quickly to his transport. Philip had to trot after him, reaching him as the cabbie placed the suitcase into the trunk of the cab and then grabbed the duffle from Philip's hand to place it in with the suitcase.

Looking pleased, the cabbie smiled at Philip as he opened the passenger door. "Where to, Mister?"

Philip slid into the backseat. "The Hilton."

The cabbie's smile broadened as he hurried around to the driver's seat and slid in. "Good decision," he declared as he pulled heedless into the traffic and barely missed colliding with another cab. He let out a stream of Cantonese that Philip didn't understand but had the gist of by the hand signals the man made to the other driver. Cab drivers, Philip decided, no matter where they were, all seemed to come from the same mold. The blame of near misses was placed on the other drivers, no matter who was at fault.

"You love Hong Kong," the driver said. "Firs' time here?"

Gritting his teeth and praying they would arrive in one piece at the hotel, Philip said, "Yes."

"Many thing to see here," the cabbie said.

"I'm sure," Philip said, "And I would love to see them other than from a hospital bed."

An explosive laugh erupted from the cabbie. "Good joke, mister."

Philip decided not to tell the cabbie that he wasn't joking. He had the distinct feeling he'd been safer in the airplane.

"Know where you go firs'?" The cabbie was peering at Philip in the rear-view mirror.

"Uh, would you mind keeping your eyes on the road?" Philip asked.

The cabbie laughed again but did as asked.

"You not going to stay in the hotel all the time?" The cabbie sounded concerned.

"No, I have a friend here. I thought I might look him up."

The cabbie nodded as if he understood exactly what Philip meant. "Who the frien'? Eddie Tseung?" He laughed, obviously thinking he'd made a joke since Eddie was the biggest star in Hong Kong.

"As a matter of fact, it is," Philip said.

The cabbie stared at Philip and failed to notice the light ahead turn red.

“Hey!” Phillip grabbed the back of the seat. “Watch what you’re doing.”

The cabbie slammed on the brakes. The cab stopped with inches to spare behind the car in front of them. Philip felt his seat belt dig into his abdomen as it clenched to keep him from hurtling out of his seat.

“There’s going to be a bruise there tomorrow,” Philip muttered as he straightened. His shoulders and neck felt as if every muscle had just been stretched to their limits.

The cab driver looked sheepish as he turned to check his passenger. “Sorry. You okay?” Then wonder seemed to seep into his dark eyes. “Really? I mean, you really...”

Irritated, tired, and not a little afraid, Philip nodded then pointed for the driver to turn his attention back to the road. The light had turned green.

Again smiling broadly and looking excited, the driver turned back to his driving. “Then I know where you go. He filming a new movie. I know where. I take you to hotel, drop off luggage, then take you to movie.”

A few minutes later, the cab screeched to a halt in front of the hotel. The cabbie, looking pleased with his self-appointed task, carried the suitcase and duffle to the desk as Philip checked in. Philip directed his luggage be taken to his room and was then hurriedly ushered back to the cab and whisked breakneck through the crowded Hong Kong streets to Eddie's movie site. Philip closed his eyes and prayed they would make it alive.

Chapter Two

Eddie settled into the trunk of the car, took several deep breaths as he'd been instructed by the free diver, and gave a thumbs up as the lid was snapped into place. The stunt was one he'd never attempted before, but the stunt coordinator and director thought it would add suspense in this film. Eddie had confidence in them, in himself, and in his crew.

He heard the start of the engine and began his count. *One, two, three...*

He imagined the crew breathless, watching as the car surged forward and flew off the end of the pier. Every safety precaution had been taken. *Four, five, six...*

He glanced at the luminous face of his watch. He knew the techs and divers would be doing the same. *Seven, Eight, Nine...*

Philip bolted from the cab as soon as it slid to a stop two feet from a crowd of spectators on hand to watch the filming. He didn't wait to see if the cabbie joined the throng or not. He was just glad to get out of that cab.

Threading his way through the bodies, he made his way to the front where his trained eyes took in the activity on the set. There was tension in the bodies of the technicians, camera crews, and stuntmen, all their eyes on dark bubbling water. He moved to the edge of the pier to get a better look.

One man dressed in a wet suit was shaking his head. "Something's wrong. I told him not to do this stunt himself." He was speaking to another slender Asian man dressed in what was probably stunt gear.

Philip glanced at them. The second man chewed on his bottom lip as he stared into the water. Philip could see the anxiety on his face. "What's taking so long?" the stuntman mumbled.

"Where's the detonator?" A voice called out from behind where Philip and the other two men stood. Both the diver and the stuntman whirled around and appeared to be searching for the speaker.

"What?" The diver demanded. "The techs have it."

A third man, this one draped with wires and small black boxes hurried over to him. "We can't find it."

The three crewmen ran across the pier. Philip watched as they reached a cluster of other crew personnel, all of them gesturing and shouting. They began tearing through boxes, searching among equipment, demanding in various languages to know who had the detonator.

Philip waited for the divers to go into the water. They seemed to be waiting for orders. The detonator, whatever it was, seemed to be vital to whatever was in the water. Philip didn't hesitate. He kicked off his shoes, threw off his jacket and hit the water just as the divers went into action.

All sound was silenced as Philip, an experienced swimmer and diver, swam into the darkness. Directly below him, he saw the faint headlights of a car. Threading through the water, he pulled his pocket knife from his pants pocket, glad that he'd taken it out of his suitcase after clearing customs. He turned his head to see if he could glimpse the other divers, but they were some yards behind him. He couldn't wait for them. He didn't know how long Eddie, and it had to be Eddie in the car, had been trapped.

Eddie glanced at the luminous numbers on his watch for the third time. He'd not been wrong. The trunk should have popped. He didn't panic. He was certain there was no reason to. He'd miscalculated, that was all. The stunt would work. He waited. There was nothing but silence and darkness. He hoped the tiny camera inside the trunk worked as it was supposed to. The scene would be great.

His legs were beginning to fall asleep and his back cramped. He wished he could straighten. The air was growing stale. His air tank was at his side if he needed it, but he was positive the trunk would pop at any minute. It had to. This stunt could not go wrong.

He felt water pool beneath him. He'd been told to expect a little seepage, but he didn't think there should be that much. He felt for the air tank, wanting the breath mask close to his face if he needed to use it. The tank was wedged under his right side and against the side of the trunk. He pulled and yanked, but it wouldn't come free.

Water was rising. Eddie pushed at the back of the car seat, hoping to dislodge it and escape through the car, but the seat wouldn't budge. He felt water in his ears and knew he had only a few seconds before he would be submerged. He prepared to take a deep breath and hold it. As a practiced diver, he was aware he only had a few minutes. The pressure in his head and ears intensified as panic started to rise. Eddie forced himself to stay calm as he tried to kick the trunk open. The divers were there. They had to be. That was their job.

His chest felt as if it was being squeezed by a huge vice. His lungs burned. He couldn't hold his breath much longer. How long had it been? His eyesight dimmed. This couldn't be happening. This couldn't be his final stunt, not after all the thousands of dangerous others. Where were the divers?

Philip worked fast at the lock and the trunk popped, the lid came free. Philip shoved it open and reached in to lock an arm around Eddie's silent figure. He pulled him free, saw the air tank, grabbed it, and held the mask to Eddie's face as he swam for the surface. He met the divers arriving at the car but ignored them and swam with strong strokes until he and Eddie broke into the fresh air. Hands reached to help pull Eddie out first, then Philip. Chaos erupted as people began shouting in a multitude of languages as the two men were pulled further onto dry land.

Philip heard only babbling as he knelt by Eddie's side and felt for a pulse. Eddie's lips were turning blue. Philip began respiration and CPR, watching as Eddie's chest rose and fell, praying that Eddie would breathe on his own.

Someone knelt next to him and gently edged him away with soft assurances. He sat back on his heels and saw two paramedics. Exhausted, he let them take over. They worked together until Eddie at last coughed, regurgitated the water, and pulled in a deep breath. He was lifted onto a stretcher and a blanket was placed over him. As he was placed into the back of an ambulance, one of the paramedics helped Philip to his feet and escorted him to the ambulance. Someone wrapped a blanket around him and handed him his shoes and jacket, but his attention was focused on the face of his friend.

Eddie was awake, his dark eyes showing his surprise and pleasure at seeing Philip. He reached out his hand and Philip took it. Eddie was grinning under the oxygen mask. Philip laughed and shook his head. This was the second time since they'd met that Philip had saved Eddie from drowning due to a stunt that went wrong.

Chapter Three

As the nurse took blood from his arm, Eddie focused on his manager, Tsang Renshu, otherwise known as 'Don' to make communication with foreign business counterparts easier, twiddling with an unlit cigarette. Still feeling wobbly from his near drowning and from the blood being drawn, Eddie fidgeted for a comfortable position in the hospital bed. Sitting propped up by his pillows, he smiled at the nurse as she completed her task. After she left the room, he turned his attention to his bodyguard, Tran, sitting on the other side of the bed looking worried.

"Are you sure you didn't know this guy?" Eddie asked.

He vaguely remembered what had happened, remembered being freed from the car, pulling in deep breaths of air, lifted into the ambulance, and could have sworn he'd seen his American friend, Philip sitting next to him. He could have been hallucinating. Everything was fuzzy.

"He just came out of nowhere," Tran said. "He was in the water before we even knew he was there. He must have been in the crowd."

"And you don't know where he went?" Eddie was anxious. If it had been Philip, he wanted to know where he was and if he was okay; and that he hadn't imagined Philip being there.

Tran shook his head. "There was so much going on around you, I was too busy to notice."

Tran sounded upset. "I should have been paying closer attention to everything. I can't figure out what went wrong."

A soft knock came on the door.

"Come." Eddie straightened again in his bed. He was expecting a representative from his Team, and they were about to receive a royal dressing down for having lost the detonator. To his surprise and delight, it was Philip who stuck his head inside.

"Eddie? Up for visitors?"

"Philip." He threw back the blanket and tried to swing his legs out of bed. The quick movements made him dizzy and he grabbed the bed rail to keep from falling to the floor.

Philip hurried over to him. "Hey, better take it easy." He helped Eddie settle back and pulled the blanket over him.

"You, you are the one." Tran was pointing at Philip. "Dai Goh, this is your rescuer."

Eddie sighed, relieved and glad that he hadn't been imagining Philip's presence. He switched to speaking English for Philip's sake. "I thought so. I wasn't sure, but I thought I saw you in the ambulance."

Philip found a chair and sat, it seemed to Eddie, gingerly and stiffly.

"Seems to me," Philip said, "I pulled you out of the water the first time we met."

Eddie laughed. "I remember. This is a little different though."

He thought he saw a spark of doubt in Philip's eyes. Philip was a private investigator, and a good one. Something must have happened on the pier that made him wonder if the accident was really an accident. Eddie wondered the same thing. He had a lot to discuss with his friend as soon as they were alone.

Philip greeted Don Tsang. "How are you, Don?"

Don shook his hand. "I'm fine. Very well, indeed, and very grateful that you chose this time to finally accept Eddie's invitation."

There was a wry expression on Philip's face. Eddie agreed with Don. He firmly believed that sometimes things happened for a reason. Phillip coming to Hong Kong was no accident.

"So, what do you do for your next trick, Houdini?" Philip asked, returning his attention to Eddie.

Eddie caught a glare aimed in Philip's direction from Tran. He saw Philip's own gaze drift to Tran's face, but he didn't turn his head.

"Tran, it was a joke." Eddie said. "This is Philip. I told you about him."

Philip did turn his head in Tran's direction at that. "You're Tran? I heard a lot of good things about you. How's the leg? No permanent damage, I hope."

Eddie was glad to see that Tran had the decency to blush.

Tran squirmed in his chair. "No, none."

Don stood. "Come on, Tran, we need to see what's happening, if anything is being done about what caused the accident." He turned to Eddie. "I'll see you later. Be good. It's only overnight."

Don and Tran left, leaving Eddie alone with Philip. He hated the idea of staying in the hospital, even for one night. "*Observation*" the doctor had said, due to the amount of water he had swallowed and the fact he'd not been breathing when he was brought up.

Philip was studying him, no longer smiling but looking concerned. He knew Philip's instincts and trusted his judgment.

"So, what's really going on? That wasn't just an accident," Philip said. "There was a lot of shouting about a lost detonator. I assume it was to free you from the trunk before you drowned?"

Eddie tried to look innocent, as if he didn't know what Philip was talking about.

"Oh no, my friend," Philip said. "I know that look. This isn't the first accident on this shoot, is it?"

Eddie was almost too embarrassed to tell him. "You're too good. Okay, more than normal."

"What exactly is normal for you?" Philip asked. "Didn't we go down this road before?"

Eddie remembered all too well the last time they'd been together, with Philip serving as a substitute bodyguard after Tran had been injured on one of the sets of the movie he was making at the time. Someone had tried to destroy that movie in order to force Eddie to stay in the Asian market instead of making American

movies. This time had to be something different. He was already in Hong Kong.

"Four injuries so far," he said. "The others weren't so bad, but people were hurt. This one . . ." He shrugged. "I will tell you about what's happened, but not here. I hate hospitals, for more reasons than one. They aren't good places to talk privately."

Philip nodded. "I agree. When are they cutting you loose?"

"Tomorrow, early, as early as I can make them. I'm okay, just shaken up."

"So was I, pal," Philip said. "When I realized what happened, it scared the daylights out of me."

"Oh sure, so much so you dove in without thinking of the danger." Eddie grinned broadly.

"Well, there are priorities." Philip grinned back. "I was quaking when it was all over with."

Eddie laughed even though he knew Philip probably meant it. He changed the subject.

"Why are you here?"

Philip coughed a laugh. "You. You've been after me forever to come for a visit, so here I am."

"I know, but why now?"

Philip suddenly looked tired. "Everyone decided I needed a vacation, even Ellen. Mom and Dad wanted me to travel, go someplace I'd never been and enjoy myself."

"You don't seem very happy," Eddie said.

"You know me, Eddie. Like you, I'm not one for wasting time."

Eddie watched him closely. He could see emotion etched on Philip's face that didn't belong there; sadness, worry—Eddie wasn't sure.

"This is not a waste of time," Eddie said. "You need time to yourself. You've been through a lot these past—seven years? Enjoy your blessing."

The frown Philip gave him made him laugh. "Look who's talking, huh? I know, but Philip, I agree with your family. You're an excellent detective, one of the best. But the start was rough. Time to take time to enjoy life a little."

"Just one of the best? Thanks a lot." Philip was smiling again. "And I didn't exactly come by all these 'blessings' the easy way. You know that. It takes some getting used to. At times, I'd rather not have it at all if I could change things."

"But you can't," Eddie said. "The past is over. You have to go forward."

Philip shook his head, the light in his eyes showing amusement. "My guru. Inactivity drives us both nuts and you know it."

Eddie brightened. "Well, plenty to do in Hong Kong. And I'm here to show you around. You can come to the filming."

"I don't know. Tran might object," Philip said. "He didn't seem too impressed."

"Tran is my bodyguard, remember? He's supposed to keep me safe. He takes what happened personal. I told him it wasn't his fault. I should have checked that detonator myself. I usually do but have been distracted lately. No excuse."

"That's really not your job, Eddie. That's why you have technicians and props people and all that."

"I know, but they're my Team, my crew. It's my job to make sure they're doing their jobs. Believe me, I'll have a lot to say to them."

"I don't doubt that," Philip said. "Who's after you? What is it this time?"

"I don't know," Eddie said. "This isn't like before. The accidents aren't random. They're all aimed at me and my director, Andy." He lowered his voice and leaned forward. "His brakes failed the other day. He didn't tell anyone except me. Luckily he found it before anything bad happened." He sat back. "A camera fell and almost hit both of us. There was no reason for it to fall."

Yesterday . . ." He swallowed hard at the memory. "Our mascot, a cat we found with babies the first day of shooting and kept as good luck, was killed, poisoned. She liked to drink tea and she drank my tea yesterday. She died right away. We called a rescue group to take the kittens."

Chapter Four

"That poison was meant for you," Philip said.

Eddie nodded. "It kill her. Police say it make me very sick."

Philip picked up on Eddie's fragmented English, a tell-tale sign that Eddie was becoming upset. The more agitated he became, the worse his English.

"Who've you ticked off lately?"

"I can think of no one." Eddie spoke carefully. He, too, had noticed his broken speech. "I just don't know. I do know I'm worry—worried about it. I don't tell anyone I do because I don't want them to worry."

"Not even Tran?"

"Tran knows. I have to tell him. I have to tell Don but no one else. This is Hong Kong. The press after me all the time. They would have field day."

"Eddie, take a deep breath. Calm down."

Eddie drew in a deep breath and slowly exhaled. Philip saw his shoulders relax. He gave Eddie's hand a brief pat.

"I've been here too long. You need to rest. So do I. It was a long flight and the unexpected swim is beginning to catch up to me." He stood, prepared to return to his hotel.

Eddie sat up. "You okay? I should have asked. I didn't say thank you."

Philip smiled at him. "I'm fine. I just got wet, that's all. The hospital loaned me these greens to wear while they ran my clothes through the dryer. They said they'll leave them here with you. I can pick them up in the morning."

"Did the doctors check you out?"

"I came in the ambulance with you, remember? I was given a thorough going over before I came up here. The doctor told me to go back to my hotel and rest, but I wanted to make sure you were

okay and talk to you. I wasn't exactly ready for so much excitement so soon."

"Call the hotel," Eddie said. "Tell them to deliver your things to my place. You stay with me while you're here."

"Oh, no, I can't..."

Eddie leaned into his pillows, looking pleased with himself. "All set. No arguments. You're my guest."

Philip laughed. There was no point in arguing. "I don't want to impose."

"Fair trade," Eddie said. "I imposed on you last time."

That was true, Philip thought. While in Baytown, he'd insisted Eddie stay at his apartment rather than the set trailer. It had been safer for the star, who was being menaced by an unknown assailant at the time.

"Okay. I promise I won't be a nuisance."

Eddie's face showed his concern. "No, not nuisance, but maybe a big help. I'm in trouble, Philip. I don't know what, but somebody is going to get hurt. I don't want that somebody to be me, or anyone else. Too many close calls. I need your help."

The desk clerk at the Hilton informed Philip when he arrived at the hotel that Eddie had already had his things moved to Eddie's apartment. A limousine waited to take him, and he was soon settled in Eddie's private apartment for a night of fitful sleep, mostly from jet lag but also because of the chaos running through his mind.

He'd told Eddie the truth, after a fashion. His friends and family had urged him to take time off, but it wasn't due to overwork. Or maybe it was, he couldn't decide.

He knew he shouldn't have taken the case the minute the girl had walked into his office. Her story had struck a disturbingly familiar chord with him. All his instincts had screamed at him to turn her away, but his curiosity hadn't let him.

The girl, actually a young woman in her early twenties, was adopted at birth. She'd had a wonderful childhood with loving parents, but she planned on getting married in a few weeks. She and her fiancé wanted children and she wanted to be certain no medical problems lay on either side of her real parents' families.

The reason had seemed valid. Philip had felt she was being pragmatic and agreed to see what he could find out. Her adoptive parents were no longer living. She was alone. He took the case. It had been a mistake.

Following the trail of her adoption from Los Angeles, where she'd been handed over to her adoptive parents a few minutes after her birth, he traveled to Phoenix, Arizona, where her birth mother had stayed during her pregnancy, then to Arkansas, where her birth mother had returned after giving up her baby. In the small town of Bat Holler, nestled in the Ozarks, he'd discovered the mother working as a waitress. The father, a mechanic, owned the only garage in the tiny town that boasted a population of 1000.

He had no trouble finding the mother, Maggie, a tall thin woman with mousy blond hair and a face that showed a hard life. When he'd introduced himself at the diner where she worked and told her he'd like to talk to her, she'd given him a frightened look, shaken her head, and busied herself with the few customers as if every seat in the diner was filled.

Philip had nosed around town, paid Maggie's husband, Tork Derguson, a brief visit at his garage. Tork had the build of someone who was used to lifting heavy engines and transmissions. Time and a passion for drink, evidenced by Tork's beer gut, had taken their toll. The man had an ugly, bullying way about him as he'd informed Philip "*foreigners' weren't much welcome*" in Bat Holler and he'd be wise to leave "*the same way he came.*"

Philip had been unimpressed and had returned to the ancient motel on the edge of town for the night, deciding it might be better if his client didn't discover who her parents were.

Maggie unexpectedly appeared at his motel room later that night, her manner furtive as she slipped into the room. She admitted she drank too much, mostly to ease the pain of being knocked around. According to Maggie, Tork ran the biggest moonshine racket in the state, as well as using his garage as a front for *"reconditioning"* stolen cars. He was *"big and mean and suspicious."*

The more she told Philip, the less he wanted to know. Strings of his own life began to unravel as she told him she hadn't wanted children, not being married to Tork. She'd only been pregnant twice, had never told Tork, and had run away to a childhood friend who lived in Arizona. That friend had put her in touch with an adoption agency in Los Angeles, who had put her in touch with couples waiting to adopt babies.

That was all she'd been willing to tell him. She'd kept her secret all those years, afraid if Tork ever found out, he'd kill her. She told Philip to take the information he had and leave Bat Holler first thing in the morning. There was nothing there for the girl. She was better off not knowing.

Philip had driven away the next morning feeling sick and strained. He'd found what he'd been looking for, and something he hadn't expected, or wanted to know. When he next met with his client, Laney, he told her only that her parents had lived in a small Arkansas town, her mother a waitress, her father a mechanic, and that they were both deceased.

He'd discovered the morning after Maggie's talk she'd gone home to a house filled with kegs of moonshine that for some strange reason exploded in the middle of the night. She and Tork both died.

When Laney asked how her birth parents had died, he told her it was in a house fire. As far as he'd found out, there were no medical problems for her to be concerned about. She accepted the report and walked out of his office, never knowing her older brother watched her go.

He'd tried to put the case out of mind. He'd told no one what he'd discovered, but it ate at him. He forced himself to concentrate on his work and little else. He thought his life had finally been in the upswing, but that had taken him straight down a well. He'd been headed for a breakdown when Don Tsang called Captain Tony Ferrone to ask if he could persuade Philip to come to Hong Kong, something Philip had found out just before he left.

Don had told him his arrival had to appear as if he'd simply taken up the invitation that Eddie had been plaguing him with for months. Only Don would know he'd come because of the problems Eddie had been having. Eddie wasn't to know the real reason he was there. Don explained during their phone conversation the night before Philip flew out of Seattle that he felt Philip's abilities would be of great use. Eddie's Team worked hard to insure Eddie wasn't injured during the filming of his movies, but sometimes they were too close to the situation to see what a stranger might notice right away.

Philip agreed with Don's consensus. He'd already seen something. Tran, the bodyguard, was too protective, his attention too focused on Eddie and not on what was happening around him. Tran wasn't a detective, just muscle to keep Eddie safe. He wouldn't like knowing Philip was there to be Eddie's eyes and ears and to observe and ask questions.

The sound of movement in the apartment woke him. He glanced at the clock by his bed. It was five o'clock in the morning. Feeling as if he'd just gone to sleep, he rose and dressed, then went to see who had arrived so early.

Eddie bustled around in the kitchen, evidently to fix breakfast. "Hey, I see you found everything. Sleep good?"

"How'd you get out of the hospital so early?" Philip sank into a chair at a small round breakfast table situated in a comfortable nook in the sizable kitchen.

Eddie busied himself with eggs, fresh vegetables, oil, and spices. The aroma of whatever he was cooking soon had Philip's stomach growling. He hadn't realized he was hungry.

Eddie placed a glass of orange juice in front of him. "Did you sleep?"

"Not really." Philip drank some of the freshly squeezed juice. "Jet lag."

He looked up as Don came into the kitchen and wondered where he'd been. He hadn't seen the manager when he passed through the apartment on his way from the bedroom. Don gave him a brief nod.

"I think I'll drop Tran off and toddle back to the office," Don said. "Behave yourself. Remember what the doctor said. One day, take it easy, no running around. Call me if you need me." He turned to Philip. "Eddie is to rest today. No excitement. Sit on him if you have to. I'll see you both later." He winked. Philip stifled a smile.

After the older man had gone, Eddie set plates of food on the table and sat down. "Don worries like an old woman. I'm too busy to sit around. I want to go back to work. There's still much to do."

"One day," Philip reminded him. "How do you think I'd feel on my own my first day here?"

Eddie perked up. "I promised to show you Hong Kong." He got to his feet. "I'll change and we can go."

Philip pointed at the untouched food. "Breakfast? I don't know about you, but I'm hungry. Besides, you're supposed to rest."

Eddie dropped into his chair. "You're supposed to rest, too. Isn't that why you're here?"

Philip detected a note of suspicion in Eddie's question. "Yeah, sure. Why?"

Eddie burst out with a laugh. "Look behind you, my friend."

Philip twisted in his chair and saw a mirrored wall directly behind.

"I saw the wink," Eddie said. "Don sent for you, didn't he?"

Philip shook his head, amazed. People were forever underestimating Eddie's perceptiveness. He hadn't been fooled.

"Guilty," Philip said. "Don called, yes. But I did need to get away."

Eddie watched him, nodding as if he understood. "Hard case?"

What was he thinking about people underestimating Eddie's perceptiveness? "Yeah, pretty rough. And no, I don't want to talk about it. I don't even want to think about it. That's not why I'm here."

Eddie was silent for a long moment, then shrugged. "Then I guess, we watch out for each other, Sai Lo. But don't tell Tran."

Chapter Five

Philip listened attentively as Eddie explained the series of accidents that began upon his return to Hong Kong after the premier of *Twisting Dagger*. He'd attended a few charity events, gone to the ground breaking of his new school, and started filming *Hong Kong Underground*. Nothing out of the ordinary happened that he could recall.

When *Underground* wrapped, he'd begun the new film with a new director, Andy Seng.

"What do you know about him?" Philip asked.

Eddie shrugged. "I started my own movie company to encourage new talent from Hong Kong and China. He showed promise in the few little things he'd done. I liked what I saw. This is his first big project."

"Did you do a background check?" Philip knew it was a foolish question. Eddie was very careful in whom he chose to be part of his projects.

Eddie didn't hesitate in answering. "Yes. He was born in Hong Kong, average family life, good school work, degree in filmography and directing. He has a good eye and is willing to listen to experience."

"No problems—gambling, drinking—anything like that?" Philip asked.

"No gambling. Drinking, well, it's not a problem. All of us drink sometime." Eddie smiled ruefully. "Well, not all."

Philip smiled too. He knew what Eddie was referring to. Drinking would never be one of his own vices. Alcohol made him deathly ill, a condition he'd been born with. Since the Arkansas case, he felt he had a pretty good idea why.

Eddie was giving him a stern look.

"What?" The man's perceptiveness always startled Philip. "Something just caused you pain," Eddie said. "Recent. What?"

"You should've been a detective for real," Philip said. He related the details of Laney's case.

When he'd finished, Eddie asked, "Does anyone else know the truth?"

Philip shook his head. "No, that little bit of history belongs solely to me. I never had any desire to find my birth parents. I figured they'd done me a favor putting me up for adoption."

He paused. "It's not them—well, Maggie a little. She said she never wanted to be pregnant because she was afraid of what Tork might do to any children. Trouble is, she always went back to him. I can only feel a little sympathy for her."

"It's the girl," Eddie said. "Laney?"

Philip nodded, but he wasn't sure that was all of it. "I suppose. She's alone, but she'll have her husband's family, and I'm sure there are relatives on the side of her adopted parents. The problem is more the upheaval in my own life, like somebody twisted my insides into knots."

"I understand," Eddie said. "When my parents told me of my own siblings from long before they knew each other, I wasn't sure how to react. I wanted to meet them and I didn't. It was hard."

The apartment phone rang, causing them both to jump. Philip looked at his watch.

Eddie answered, "Wei?" and listened for a long moment, a deep frown creasing his forehead. "Who is this?"

Philip leaned forward in interest, closely watching Eddie react to whomever was speaking on the other end of the line.

"Wei? Who are you? What do you want?" Eddie was angry. He slammed down the receiver. He looked shaken.

"Wei? Mait si ah?" Philip asked.

Eddie grinned. "I'm pleased to see you remembered how to say "what" and "what is happening". I don't know. The other person didn't say anything. I could hear only strange music playing and voices, but couldn't understand what they were saying."

Philip pulled a small notebook that he always carried from his pocket. He checked his watch, then wrote down the time, date, and a brief synopsis of the phone call. He'd already written about the near drowning. Before he could question Eddie further, the phone rang a second time. He and Eddie both looked at it, not sure they wanted to answer. It continued to ring until Philip picked up the receiver.

The explosion from the bedroom knocked them both flying across the living room. Glass and debris rained down on them from every direction. Philip landed hard on the floor after being slammed into the wall. Eddie landed two feet to his left. The couch and chair they'd been sitting in were kindling.

Coughing from the dust and smoke, his ears ringing, Philip crawled on bloodied hands and knees to Eddie who was struggling to push himself up from where he was lying facedown on the carpet. A line of blood ran from his forehead down his cheek. His hands were covered with cuts from tiny glass splinters, as were Philip's. Their clothes looked like mummy's rags hanging from their bodies, shredded by flying glass.

"Don't move." Philip grabbed Eddie's shoulders to keep him still. "You need to lie down and be still."

Eddie's eyes were glazed. He traced his finger through the blood running down Philip's nose. "You, too." His voice rasped from the dust and he coughed raggedly. He stayed in a sitting position.

Philip heard screaming sirens and distant shouting. It felt like an eternity before the apartment door burst open and paramedics ran to him and Eddie as police combed over Eddie's home and firemen doused the fire in the bedroom.

Philip studied Eddie's face as one of the paramedics cleaned and sutured the gash in his hairline. Eddie's eyes, he noticed, were fixed on a single China figurine sitting in the middle of the floor that had miraculously survived. He remembered Eddie's fondness for collecting antiques when he traveled and wondered how many

had just been destroyed by the blast. The thought infuriated him. Unable to bear the anguish in Eddie's dark eyes, Philip turned his gaze to a piece of paper on the floor near him and carefully picked it up by the corner to turn it over. A wave of sadness wafted through him. The 8 x 10 glossy photograph of Eddie's beloved mother was torn and scratched beyond repair. The antique Chinese porcelain frame had disintegrated.

Philip closed his eyes and placed the photo inside of his shirt, not wanting Eddie to see, not yet.

Don and Tran raced into the apartment, horror and relief showing on their faces in succession. They ran to Eddie's side.

"Sai Lo, nei mo se ah? Are you all right?" Don asked, taking Eddie by the shoulders to examine him.

Only then did Eddie appear to realize there were people everywhere. He looked as if he'd just awakened. A smile tried to find its way to his lips but was lost on the journey. Two large tears rolled through the grime on his cheeks. With the greatest of care, he gathered the unbroken figurine into his hands. The fragile figurine fell into pieces.

Philip tried to swallow the lump that had formed in his throat, but the effort lapsed him into a fit of coughing.

Eddie stared at him, looking bewildered and hurt. "Why? Who would do this? What have I done?"

The paramedic tending to him carefully removed the china fragments from his hand. "We need to get you both to the hospital."

Eddie looked alarmed. "No. No hospital. I'm okay. I have to stay..." He looked around him. "Home? But home is not here." He swayed.

The paramedic caught his shoulders. He and his partner lifted Eddie onto the stretcher then helped Philip to his feet. "Can you walk?"

Philip gave himself a moment to check his balance. His ears were still ringing, but not as bad. His entire body felt like it had

been pulled apart, but the blood had been wiped from his face. Sure of his steadiness, he nodded and let one of the policemen help him down to the ambulance waiting outside of the apartment building. The second time in two days, he sat in the back of an ambulance with an injured Eddie. This wasn't going to be a simple or easy case. This was more than a few accidents. Whoever caused the explosion wasn't playing. The poison, the near drowning, and now the explosion; the perpetrator wanted Eddie dead. The question was who, and why.

Chapter Six

Philip stared out of the window, seeing only the reflection of the suite behind him. He wished for a drink stronger than ginger ale, something more akin to whatever Eddie had been drinking all night.

He and Eddie had been released from the hospital after being declared unscathed except for bruises and minor cuts. Eddie sported six stitches along his hairline and Philip had eight. They were shaken but otherwise sound in body.

Don had leased a hotel suite at the Hilton and purchased clothing for Philip until things could be properly sorted out. Tran had brought Eddie a change of clothes from his office.

The argument between Eddie and Tran had been ongoing since leaving the hospital. Philip, unable to understand a word, had stopped listening. He sighed, moved from the window, and sank into a soft leather cushioned chair. He noted that Don calmly smoked a cigarette on the couch where he was sitting, evidently used to such dust ups between his star and his star's bodyguard.

It sounded as if Eddie had reached a boiling point when he suddenly stopped whatever he was saying in mid-sentence and poked an unsteady finger in Tran's face. "Spea' En'lish," he said, his words slurring.

Philip shook his head at the irony of Eddie's order. Eddie had long since passed drunk, and the more he drank, the more argumentative he became.

Tran, seeming to be unaffected by Eddie's belligerence, stood face-to-face with him. "You need to go to bed."

Eddie pulled himself straight, nearly toppling over backwards before regaining his balance, and did his best to look indignant. "I fine." He swung his arms in a sweeping motion, nearly falling over as he stumbled backwards a couple of steps.

"Philip fine. Everybody fine." His face puckered like a baby about to cry. "Everything fine, 'cep my china doll."

Philip hid a smile behind his hand and saw Don roll his eyes. For hours, all Eddie seemed concerned with was the loss of the single china figurine. No other destruction seemed to have registered.

"Just the one," Tran said. "The rest are at the other house. I told you."

Eddie grabbed Tran by the front of his shirt. "I tol' you, spea' En'lish!"

Philip glanced at Don for an explanation. Don shook his head. Whatever Tran said wasn't important.

Eddie released his grip and turned in a circle as if confused. "Where Philip?"

"I'm right here," Philip said.

Eddie blinked in his direction as if to focus his eyes. His bottom lip trembled.

"My house gone," he whimpered.

He'd said the same thing more than a dozen times, in English and in Cantonese.

Philip was tired. Every bone in his body was tormented with pain. Hammers throbbed in his temples. He wished Eddie would fall asleep, or at least pass out so they all could get some rest.

Eddie reached for the bottle of wine sitting on the coffee table, but Tran snatched it out of his reach.

"Give back to me," Eddie demanded.

"No. You've had enough." Tran spoke in English and his tone was adamant.

Eddie stomped his foot like a petulant child who had just had his candy taken away. "Give back now."

Philip watched the demonstration with fascinated interest. This was a side to Eddie he'd never seen. He'd heard stories that Eddie had, in his youth, been referred to as Hong Kong's "bad

boy." It appeared that despite his mature years and outward mild temperament, that bad boy still lurked.

"Eddie, you don't need any more to drink," Don finally intervened. "You should go to bed. You've had a terrible shock. So has Philip, and I'm sure he finds your behavior unimpressive. You both need to sleep."

"Don' wan' sleep," Eddie said. "My bed gone—in tiny pieces." He held the thumb and index fingers of his right hand an inch apart. He hiccupped. "Everything gone!"

He tried to snag the bottle from Tran's hands, but Tran kept the wine bottle behind his back. Eddie lurched at him and fell over the coffee table and nearly into him. He landed on his knees, his arms wrapped around Tran's thighs, his hands doing their best to pry the bottle away from Tran.

Philip decided enough was enough. He felt like he was witnessing a bad comedy. He stood and pulled Eddie to his feet. Eddie swayed and stared dumbly at him.

"Come on, pal." Philip turned Eddie in the direction of his bedroom.

"You know, Eddie," Don said, "You haven't been fair to Philip."

Philip nearly stepped on Eddie's heels when Eddie stopped abruptly and turned to face Don.

"Huh? Why not fair?" Eddie asked.

Firmly holding Eddie upright, Philip answered the question. "Because you can get drunk and act like an idiot and I can't. That's not fair. I'm so worn out, I'd love to get plastered right now."

A look of exaggerated sympathy flowed over Eddie's face as he draped his arm companionably around Philip's shoulders.

"Poor Ph'lip. S'not fair. You right. I being selfish." He patted Philip's chest. "Sorry. Forgive me?"

Philip was having a hard time trying not to laugh. If he hadn't been so dog tired and hadn't had such a headache, he might have. "Go to bed. And I'll go to bed. I think we both need to."

Seeming to be satisfied, Eddie nodded and smile. "Kay'o. I go to bed. You go to bed. Everybody go to bed." He whirled around to start toward the bedroom and nearly fell over the ottoman. Tran caught him and steered him around the furniture to his room.

Philip sank back into his chair and rested his elbows on his knees. He leaned forward, his chin on his hands, and fixed his blue eyes on Don.

"I think it's time we told Tran what's going on," he said. Before Don could argue, he went on. "I didn't realize the depth of this. You said there had been accidents, but that's not it. Someone is trying to kill Eddie, someone with a serious grudge. If I'm to do him any good at all, I'll need help protecting him, especially when he's filming." He paused, turning his glass slowly in his hands. "Do you have any idea who might be doing this and why?"

Don shook his head. "Not one. The accidents just started. There was no warning. It's like I told you in the beginning. Everything was going smoothly, then Eddie and Andy became targets."

"Is there anyone he's made angry, anyone he might have had a bad argument with? Is anyone in the crew or one of the other actors jealous or angry at him? Did he fire someone recently? If you know anything, I need to know."

Don continued shaking his head.

Philip sighed. "Did you do as I asked? Have you checked further into Andy's background? Could this be against him?"

"I looked," Don said, "but there's simply nothing out of the ordinary. I still have a detective working on it, but..." He stopped speaking as Tran entered the room.

The bodyguard looked as tired and worried as Philip felt. He glanced at Don and saw the older man's reluctance.

"It's either you or I," Philip said.

He saw resignation cross Don's face. Don motioned for Tran to sit down.

"What?" he asked. Tran looked wary.

Don heaved a heavy sigh. "Philip and I have something important to discuss with you."

Chapter Seven

Philip and Tran watched in apprehension as Eddie loosened up for his stunt. For a week, they had closely scrutinized every new stunt, examining and reexamining every aspect to insure there was no tampering.

On Tran's suggestion, only three Team members were advised of Philip's presence and purpose. Some of them remembered him from the filming in Baytown and were glad to see him. Tran and four of the Team members prowled the filming perimeters to keep a sharp eye on the crowds of daily onlookers. Tran assigned other members to check and recheck the props and equipment. Philip remained in close proximity to Eddie but in the background so as not to be in the way. He kept surveillance over the faces, learning who seemed to be regulars on the set, who seemed to belong and who didn't. He kept watch for anyone acting suspicious, everyone who came near Eddie.

When the day's filming ended, he and Tran accompanied Eddie everywhere he went. So far that week, Philip had attended five charity events, two weddings, three grand openings, six meetings, and one dinner. He found himself hard put to keep pace with Eddie's breakneck schedule. After the second day, he caught a second wind and managed to keep stride, if not exactly even.

Eddie was constantly surrounded with business associates, filming crew, and enthusiastic fans. Philip developed camera vision so he could scan the faces, catalog, and file them. He possessed a retentive memory, enabling him to know who always seemed to be present. It wasn't long before he could identify most of them. Those he couldn't, he took special notice of for future reference.

Eddie's focus was on the shoot. He left the concerns of the attacks on him and on Andy to his friends. At the moment, he was preparing for a fight scene on a balcony forty feet off the ground.

He had told Philip the stunt was simple and shouldn't take long to film.

Philip had seen Eddie perform at greater heights. That didn't worry him. What did trouble him was the openness of the balcony and the closeness of the opposite buildings. Tran had told him they were an abandoned warehouse undergoing renovation and a deserted office building with windows directly in line with the balcony. Eddie would be visible and vulnerable from any one of those windows. Philip kept his eyes trained on them for signs of movement.

Don provided security for Andy Seng and reported to Philip that so far, nothing untoward had occurred. He did report, however, that Andy had confessed the car used for the water stunt was an old car that belonged to him. He had driven it to the set that day to use it. That news set Philip's nerves to override. He could have strangled the director for not admitting that sooner.

After the explosion at Eddie's apartment, Philip noticed a stronger police presence in and around the neighborhood where that apartment and Eddie's second apartment, to which he and Eddie had moved, was located. The police had advised Eddie to send his wife and his father to a residence in Shandong until the culprit could be identified and captured. Philip knew Eddie's son was still at school in California. Eddie, concerned about the possibility of kidnap, had always seen to it that his son was well protected. Every precaution that could be taken had been.

Philip saw Eddie glance at him and offer a small wave. He was ready. Philip nodded in acknowledgment. The set had gone quiet. The action began. Eddie and his younger co-star began their fight. As far as Philip could tell, everything proceeded smoothly, but Eddie wasn't satisfied and wanted to do the shot over.

"Cut," Andy called.

The scene was reset and the actors began again. Philip scanned the building across the street. For a split second, he saw the glint of the sun in the window directly in line with the balcony

on the fourth floor. He wrenched the radio provided to him from his belt, shouting as he ran towards the building.

“Eddie, get down.”

A second after Philip called his warning, he heard the crack of a rifle. Philip heard screaming from the crowd behind him. He glanced over his shoulder long enough to see that most of the people had dropped to the ground. Tran sprinted up the fire escape stairs to Eddie, and another one of Eddie's Team, whose name Philip couldn't remember, caught up with him at the door of the office building. He motioned for the man to move quietly as they entered the building.

Philip listened for the sound of running feet as he cautiously moved up the stairs to the fourth floor. The building was hot, the air humid and stale. The higher he climbed, the harder it became to breathe. Sweat streamed down his face and he felt his shirt starting to cling to him. Behind him, the stuntman climbed, seeming to have an easier time. Philip reminded himself it was because the other man was probably used to the humidity and heat.

When they reached the fourth floor, Philip paused and listened. He didn't hear anything as he moved into the hall, the other man close on his heels. They made their way carefully down the hall to the room where Philip was sure he'd seen the glint of sun on metal. The door was slightly open. He motioned Brad, whose name finally came to him, to stay close to the wall as they inched closer.

When he reached the door, Philip peered into the empty room. The window in the opposite wall stood open. He hurried over to it and looked out. He'd been right. The balcony was in direct line with the window. He could see Eddie sitting on the floor of the balcony, Tran hovering over him. Several times he nodded at something Tran apparently asked him and didn't appear to be hurt. The second stuntman, whose name Philip recalled was Yau, knelt next to Eddie's costar Daniel who cradled his arm to his chest. The front of Daniel's shirt was red.

Philip yanked the radio from his belt. "What happened?"

Yau looked over to the window and spoke into his own radio. "Daniel shoved Eddie out of the way when you shouted. Good thing, too. That bullet would have hit Eddie in the back."

"How bad is Daniel injured?" Philip asked.

"It's his arm. We'll know better when the paramedics arrive," Yau said.

Philip replaced his radio to his belt and examined the sill and floor of the window. The dust that covered the floor and should have shown footprints had been swept clear. The shooter had cleaned up his brass. There was nothing, no visible smudges or nicks on the window sill where the rifle must have rested. Maybe the police would be able to lift some fingerprints, but Philip had an uneasy feeling the shooter had worn gloves.

Brad was also prowling the room, which Philip thought had probably been an office at one time, and meticulously searching, but he found nothing. The wail of sirens reached through the open window.

"Let's get down there." Philip walked quickly into the hall and down the stairs. He heard Brad following.

By the time they reached Eddie, the paramedics were carrying Daniel down on a stretcher. Eddie and Tran stood to one side. Philip noted Eddie's face was white, the crease between his dark eyes deep.

"You okay?" Philip asked.

Eddie nodded wordlessly, his eyes riveted on the wounded actor being loaded into the ambulance.

Andy Seng sprinted over to his star. "Eddie, you okay? Don is talking to the police. They want to know what happened and to clear the scene for their investigation. Don has explained the next shoot is in another location, so we'll not be in the way. The police do want to question everyone."

Philip could see Eddie's attention was still focused on the receding ambulance.

“Did you get the shot?” Eddie asked absently, then seemed to suddenly become aware of the inappropriateness of his question. “I mean, of the fight.”

Philip noticed a tinge of red appear on Eddie's pale cheeks.

“Don't worry,” Andy said. “We have it. But it will need editing.”

“I think we better call it a day,” Philip said. “The police will take over and I think we all need to calm our nerves. I, for one, am still shaking.” He could see Eddie's hands trembling and knew he was shaken up more than anyone.

Eddie seemed to pull himself together but with an effort. He took a deep breath and straightened. He shook his body to loosen his muscles.

“No. Too much to do. I okay. We re-shoot the scene later when Daniel out of hospital.”

“But the police . . .” Andy started to argue.

Philip briefly closed his eyes and shook his head. Eddie's English was disintegrating which meant he was worse off than he pretended.

Eddie was determined to do the shoot, arguing with the lead detective who had arrived shortly after the officers that to do so was the best therapy, that he and his Team could take care of themselves.

The lead detective, a man named Cha Tsuk, pointed out, “That hasn't worked out so well since one of your actors has been shot.

“Investigate those buildings.” Eddie pointed to the abandoned offices. “That's where the shots come from.”

Philip stepped in. “Eddie, you're being unreasonable. Finding the shooter is more important in case he tries again, which is a distinct possibility.”

Eddie gave Philip a surly look then sense seemed to return.

"You right. We can write Daniel's injury into the script later," he said.

Eddie turned to Detective Tsuk. "The shooter was in those buildings, but I know you must search everywhere. I'm not thinking straight. Everything happen too fast."

Detective Tsuk, seeming relieved the argument had come to a close, said, "I know this is difficult and how much of a sacrifice it is for you to halt your filming. We are well aware of the trouble you have been experiencing lately. We must do everything we can to find out who is behind this and why. You are an important man in Hong Kong; in all of Asia. Mr. Tseung, Let us protect you."

For some reason, that sentiment seemed to irritate Eddie. "Do your investigation. Please let me know when this site is cleared. There is too much delay already." He walked away without another word.

"I apologize," Don told Detective Tsuk. "Eddie is upset. I have already told the cast and crew to take the rest of the evening off. We'll shoot the movie around this scene until we can come back to it. I will get you a list of everyone who was here today, should you need it. Of course, Eddie's fans here to watch --- I think most of them ran when the shooting started."

"Don't worry about that," Detective Tsuk said. "There's little we can do about those people except ask them to voluntarily let the police know they had been here and if they had witnessed anyone or anything suspicious."

Philip was impressed by Don's diplomacy. Feathers unruffled, Detective Tsuk seemed pleased with the conclusion of the matter, insofar as the investigation of the area was concerned, not so much with the fact he was going to have to trace any onlookers who might have been there.

The shooting incident had been too close. Eddie had been totally absorbed in the scene. If Daniel hadn't been younger and

quicker, the consequences could have been far worse. Philip hoped Eddie realized that either he or Daniel could have been killed.

Eddie seemed to be in a silly mood, probably in an effort to cover his jangled nerves. He laughed and joked all the way home. To Philip, the jocularity sounded forced. He noticed Tran frowning as if concerned about his boss's peculiar mood. Once they arrived at the apartment, Eddie went to the refrigerator and returned with three beers. He handed one to Tran and one to Philip, who discreetly set his to one side. He caught Tran's eye and the bodyguard smiled slightly. Eddie hadn't been thinking, which was understandable after what he'd been through.

Philip sank onto the couch, letting the air conditioning cool him off. He considered that he should take a shower and put on clean clothes but was too tired. Tran nudged his shoulder and he looked up to find him offering a glass of iced tea.

"Thanks," he said, accepting the drink. Iced tea in Hong Kong was a rarity and he appreciated the gesture. He took a long drink, letting the cold liquid slide down his parched throat as he leaned back into the cushions of the couch.

"I know." Eddie suddenly became animated. "Let's play cards."

Philip started from a half doze and looked through slit eyes at his friend. "What?" He shoved himself straight. "What game?"

Eddie looked uncertain. "Uh, Poker?"

Philip stifled a smile. He knew Eddie was a lousy poker player. He looked over at Tran. "You play?"

Tran shook his head. "Pool or snooker," he said. "Not cards. Dominoes or mahjong though."

Philip turned to Eddie. "Well?"

Eddie looked less assured. "Maybe I just watch TV." He dropped into a recliner and picked up the remote. He held it but didn't turn it on, just stared at the blank television screen.

Philip recognized the symptoms of someone coming out of shock. Reality was encroaching on Eddie's defenses. The bottle in

his hand began to shake. Tran gently removed it and set it on the coffee table.

Eddie clasped his hands in his lap as if to keep them under control. His entire body was rigid in an effort to keep still. "I . . ." He blinked, his eyes watering. "I—scared. I feel that bullet pass my ear, hear whistling. So close." He closed his eyes and tears spilled down his cheeks.

"Take it easy, buddy," Philip said. "It's okay now. You're safe."

Eddie's dark brown eyes opened and fastened on Philip's face. "You know."

It was a statement, not a question. Philip nodded. "Only too well."

Eddie heaved a heavy sigh.

Philip thought about how close he'd come to dying when his ex-wife shot him. He remembered how close he'd come once again in the explosion the year before he'd met Eddie. He understood exactly what Eddie was going through.

"Someone blow you up once," Eddie said.

Tran turned to Philip with a look of surprise. Philip let his gaze drop.

"First case," he explained. "After I went back into practice. Missing husband. His wife asked me to help find him. She failed to tell me that she was the reason he was missing in the first place." He shook his head. The memory was difficult. "Black widow," he said.

"Huh?" Tran asked.

"Many husbands," Eddie explained.

"Six to be exact," Philip said. "We found out later she'd poisoned every one of them." He paused, looking at the ceiling. "It was too soon after Lily. I wasn't ready for that kind of emotional rollercoaster."

"Pretty?" Eddie asked.

Philip looked back at him and smiled. "Unfortunately. It was stupid, getting involved with a client. I knew better, or should have. I was still getting my feet back under me. I let myself believe her. She poisoned my cup of coffee, but I didn't drink all of it, so it didn't kill me. I was on my way out of her house when it blew up. When I came to, I was halfway across the yard on my back."

"The woman?" Tran asked.

"The police found what was left of her tied to what had been a rafter in the attic. After poisoning me, she hung herself. Why? We'll never know."

He fell silent. He had always wondered why, after killing six husbands and trying to kill him, she had chosen to take her own life. It had been bizarre and was a memory he'd rather live without.

Eddie's gaze fell on the untouched bottle of beer on the end table. Saying nothing, he retrieved it and returned it to the refrigerator. When he came back, he held out a bottle of ginger ale. Philip hadn't finished his tea, but he accepted the offer.

The phone rang. All three men froze and stared at the instrument. Philip knew none of them wanted to answer it after what happened the last time. The answering machine picked up the call.

"Eddie, are you there?" It was Brad.

Eddie picked up the receiver. "Wei?"

Philip and Tran couldn't hear the other end of the conversation, but when Eddie hung up, he turned to them with a look of relief.

"Daniel's arm is broken, but he will be okay."

Chapter Eight

Daniel was soon out of the hospital and back at work. The injury to his arm was written into the script and filming continued with no more interruptions. Philip doubled his vigilance, going without sleep on more than a few nights to keep Eddie company.

Eddie had grown restless and spent off time from the set editing or prowling the streets of Hong Kong after midnight when most of his fans were home asleep. Since the shooting, Philip noticed, as was always the case, the more stressed Eddie became, the more fragmented his English when he spoke it. He was barely able to make a complete sentence, even in his own language. The only time he didn't seem to have a problem was when speaking his lines during filming. Philip was beginning to be concerned, and he wasn't the only one.

Eddie had made a cameo appearance in a new movie by a friend and agreed to attend the premier to help with publicity. Despite the upheavals, he greeted his public with his usual wit and humor and with a bright smile in place. He high-fived his fans along the walk barricaded by police.

Philip walked two steps behind Eddie, nearly deafened by the shouts and squeals of the female fans, and kept a close eye on the crowd for anything or anyone out of place. He couldn't imagine being so famous that women literally threw themselves at his feet. Tran walked ahead of Eddie, clearing the way for him to the entrance of the theater. He didn't see the girl slip the barricade to appear directly in front of Eddie. Philip moved quickly to grab her, but before he could reach Eddie, the girl threw her arms around Eddie's neck and pulled him into a tight hug, her mouth close to his ear.

Philip grabbed her around her waist and tugged as Eddie did his best to pry her arms away. Her grip was so tight, Eddie looked as if he might choke. Philip fought to wrench her hands

apart while Tran took his place at her waist. The girl was Chinese and only came to Eddie's shoulders. Philip estimated she couldn't have weighed more than 100 pounds, but she was strong and determined. Her long black hair hung straight to the waist of her blue denim jeans and the seam of her white silk blouse ripped as she fought against Tran's attempt to get her away from Eddie.

Philip could hear her shouting something in Eddie's ear, but the pandemonium of the crowd made it impossible to make out what she was saying.

Eddie did his best to help get free and was having as much trouble as Philip and Tran.

The police arrived and with their help, Philip finally jerked her hands from her death grip around Eddie's neck, earning a deep scratch to his own hands as her long scarlet fingernails dug a groove into his flesh and into Eddie's neck. The police pulled her kicking and screaming a safe distance from Eddie and put her in handcuffs before leading her to their vehicle. Philip and Tran hurried Eddie into the theater office and slammed the door shut against the noise inside and outside of the building.

Eddie collapsed into a chair as the theater manager hurried in looking harried and worried at the same time.

"You're bleeding." The manager, who had been introduced earlier in the day by Don as Mr. Lu, grabbed a tissue from a box on his desk and handed it to Philip.

"Scatched," Philip said. "I'll be okay."

Eddie sat with his head in his hands and Philip could see streaks of red on the back of his neck.

"You have a first aid kit?" Philip asked Mr. Lu.

The little man looked confused then seemed to understand and made a phone call. A few minutes later there was a knock at the door. Mr. Lu opened the door a crack, drew in the first aid kit from whoever brought it, and handed it to Philip.

Philip pulled out some alcohol swabs and carefully wiped the blood from Eddie's neck. He felt him flinch from the sting.

"The scratches aren't deep," Philip said. "But they are going to hurt." He put a gauze bandage across the back of Eddie's neck and secured it with adhesive tape. "I'm sure you've had a tetanus shot recently."

"What about you?" Eddie's voice was muffled by his hands.

Philip wiped his arms down with the alcohol swabs, gritting his teeth against the sting. "I had one before I left home." He finished with the first aid kit and returned it to Mr. Lu.

"Dai Goh." Tran had been standing silently at the door looking worried. "Your jacket is torn."

Eddie nodded. "I don't care."

"But your suit was just delivered this afternoon," Tran said.

Philip shook his head, amused that Tran was worried about the blue silk Chinese suit Eddie had tailored for him for the occasion.

"You're bleeding, Tran." He took the first aid kit back from Mr. Lu and pulled out another alcohol swab.

Tran swiped at his face with the back of his hand, smearing the blood. Philip handed him the swab.

"That cat had claws," Philip said. "For such a tiny thing, she was strong, too."

Eddie abruptly stood. "Nguk kei. Yiga. Faai di!"

Philip frowned. The only words he understood were 'hurry up.'

Tran had understood and used his radio to call for the car to be brought to the back of the theater. He carefully peered out the door then motioned for Eddie and Philip to follow him through the now empty lobby. Philip heard the movie soundtrack and knew everyone was inside the theater, leaving the way clear for him, Eddie, and Tran to slip unseen to the back entrance. The car was waiting when they exited the building.

Brad, a young man from London, England and the only non-Asian member of Eddie's Team, was in the driver's seat and

drove as fast as he could without alerting the crowd outside the theater to the car.

"What happened?" he asked.

Tran, sitting in the front seat, explained. Philip sat in the back with Eddie. He didn't like the wild gleam in Eddie's eyes as he sat, hands loosely held in his lap and eyes staring straight ahead.

"She only fan." Eddie spoke as if to himself. "Why it scare me?"

Philip felt he understood why the incident had rattled Eddie. His own nerves were strung tight. "I think it took all of us by surprise. Our nerves are all on edge with all that's been going on. Until we find out what's happening..." He fell silent as they came into view of the apartment building.

Brad slammed on the brakes as police and firefighters scrambled around the building, their vehicles blocking the street.

"What the—?" Philip shoved the car door open and jumped out into ankle deep water running down the street. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. It couldn't be happening.

Eddie's apartment was fully engulfed in flames.

Philip barely noticed Eddie standing on the other side of the car or Brad and Tran. All of them stared open-mouthed at the conflagration.

A policeman hurried over to the car. "You must leave the area."

Philip started to speak, but Eddie spoke first.

"Dis my house!"

The policeman stared at him, then seemed to realize who he was. "Dum je, Tseung sensan." He glanced behind him at the fire then back to Eddie. "I'm sorry, but you cannot stay."

Eddie seemed in no mood to cooperate. "What happen my house?"

The policeman started to answer. Eddie shoved him aside and started toward the fire. Philip grabbed him by the arm.

"Forget it, Eddie. There's nothing we can do."

Eddie struggled to free himself. Tran grabbed his other arm.

“Who's in charge?” Philip turned to the policeman.

Tran translated the question and the policeman hurried away. A few minutes later two other men approached, introducing themselves as the Fire Chief and Police Superintendent. They solemnly spoke to Eddie who grew more agitated.

“No, no, no!” Eddie struggled against Philip and Tran's firm grips.

Philip turned to Tran. “What did they say?”

“Arson,” Tran said. “They're sure.”

Philip felt as if his heart dropped into the pit of his stomach. He'd been in Hong Kong two weeks and had found out nothing. He knew he was going to have to dig to find out what was going on before the matter grew any more dangerous, before Eddie was seriously injured—or worse.

Chapter Nine

Philip found it hard to keep his eyes open the following morning while he waited to see Don. After locating a hotel suite for Eddie and himself, he'd called Don to make the appointment. They needed to talk.

Tran had wanted to stay at the hotel, but after the late night and all the excitement, Philip sent him home. Tran needed to get some sleep, not babysit his employer. That was Philip's job.

Yau remained to keep Philip company while Eddie slept. They played cards and talked, listening to Eddie tossing and turning all night in his room. He'd left the door open. Several times, he'd mumbled something in his sleep, but neither Philip nor Yau understood what he was saying. Twice during the night, Eddie made a trip to the restroom.

"Eddie is always restless," Yau said, watching his employer make his second trip. "When he goes at night, I think he is on automatic. I don't think he ever opens his eyes."

Philip was glad Eddie's instincts were good as to where he chose to go.

At three in the morning, Yau fell asleep on the couch. Philip checked the suite thoroughly, checked on Eddie, who was sleeping quietly, then fell asleep in a chair. When he woke to daylight sliding through the draperies on the windows, he was stiff, sore, and smelled of smoke.

All of his and Eddie's clothes had been destroyed for a second time. Philip had nothing save what he'd been wearing at the theater. Don had assured him on the phone when they'd spoken the previous night that everything would be replaced. Don had sincerely hoped Philip hadn't lost anything of value. Other than his passport, he hadn't—well, he silently amended, the Photostat of his P.I. License and a picture of Ellen had been in his luggage, but those could be replaced.

Philip took transport to Kowloon where Eddie's offices were located. Don's office was located on the third floor of the corporate building. Philip was surprised by the open arrangement of each floor. The floors were encased by three walls of glass and one solid wall, allowing natural light and alleviating the boxed in feeling of most American business offices. The wide aisles gave employees room to maneuver and no cubicles allowed them to speak to one another freely. Philip was greeted with smiles and many "good mornings" before he reached Don's office.

In contrast to the outer area, Don's office, though spacious, was enclosed with only one window on the outside wall. The furniture had seen better days, the desk covered with papers, magazines, books, files, a desktop computer, and a telephone. The clutter made the office look smaller than it really was. Stale cigarette smoke filled the air despite the air filtering system.

Don stood and offered his hand in greeting. "Good morning, Philip. Did you sleep well last night?" He motioned to one of the two leather guest chairs in front of his desk. "Please, have a seat."

Philip sat.

"Would you like some coffee, tea?" Don asked.

"Water would be fine," Philip said.

Don buzzed his secretary on an old-fashioned intercom.

"I didn't think anyone used those anymore," Philip said.

Don grinned. "I'm sure you've noticed my office is a little out of date. I've been here a long time and this is my area. I like it. It's comfortable. Eddie wants to redecorate, but I won't let him."

The secretary, a slim young woman who appeared to Philip to be in her late twenties, entered the office.

"Naia, please bring us some coffee and water, also something to eat." Don looked sideways at Philip. "I'm sure Mr. Chandler has not had breakfast."

Naia nodded. Philip watched her leave with interest. She was Asian, and like most Asian women, she was small and petite,

her shining black hair held away from her pretty face by combs that looked jade. She was dressed in a chic shift of muted red. Philip didn't know much about women's fashions or clothing, but to him, the dress looked to be silk.

Philip became aware that Don was watching his reaction to the secretary and felt embarrassed.

"She's pretty."

"Yes, she is," Don said. "Naia is very intelligent and exceptional at her job. She's been with me for two years now. She has a wonderful husband and a beautiful baby daughter."

Philip smiled at the subtle warning. "You're both very lucky." He shifted in his chair, ready to get down to business.

Naia returned with a tray filled with a coffee decanter, two china cups and saucers, two bottles of water, and a small basket of sweet breads. Don thanked her and she left.

Don poured the coffee as Philip helped himself to one of the bottles of water. His throat was still raw from fire smoke and the cigarette smell of the office wasn't helping.

"I have checked into the fire," Don said as he settled back into his chair. "The police are certain it was arson and are going over all the surveillance videos in the hotel to see if they can see who was on that floor. That will take some time. They are most concerned with Eddie's safety."

"So am I." Philip took a long drink of his water. "When you called and asked me to come to Hong Kong, I never expected to walk into anything like what's been happening the past few weeks. I need to ask some questions."

"Ask me," Don said. "Maybe I can help. Mostly I want you to be backup for Eddie. I thought fresh eyes and ears might help see and hear things we are too busy to notice. We don't know what to look for and the police don't have the manpower to follow Eddie twenty-four hours."

"Let's start with that woman last night," Philip said. "Did the police find out anything about her?"

"She's a fan," Don said. "An overenthusiastic fan, but that's all. There are many like her. The police were able to take her home and her husband told them she is one of Eddie's biggest admirers, that she had only wanted to kiss him, but when you tried to pull her away, she grabbed Eddie to tell him what she wanted. The police said the husband didn't sound too happy about it either. I daresay she will remember that 'kiss' for a long time."

Philip agreed. The woman's desire to kiss Eddie had nearly earned her jail time and she could've been injured breaking the barricade as she had.

"Anything on the stunt car?" he asked.

Don shook his head. "Nothing. I am most concerned. That car was my old one that I had sold to Andy. He and I thought using it would be a good idea. I don't understand what happened. Eddie and his Team fitted it with everything needed for the stunt and checked it over several times."

"Is there any way anyone could get to it unnoticed?" Philip asked. "Anyone not part of the film crew?"

Don shook his head. "The Team did all the work here in the underground garage. The car was there until Andy drove it to the set that morning. After that, the crew was constantly around."

Philip had a sinking feeling. If no outsider could have gotten to the car, that only left the crew.

"I know what you're thinking," Don said. "It's not possible. The men and women on the crew and Team are dedicated. Some of them have been with Eddie for many years. They have too much pride and too much time invested to do anything to jeopardize the movie."

"This isn't about the movie," Philip said. "This is personal. I know you know that. I don't know how many attempts on Eddie's life occurred before I arrived, but there's been three since I landed only two weeks ago. Eddie is who the person or persons is after. What we need to know is why."

Don looked tired. Worry clouded his eyes. He sipped his coffee before answering. "I know. You are right, but we have run into nothing but dead ends." He pulled a stack of files from the clutter on his desk and handed them to Philip. "These are all the personnel files of every single person involved in the film. I have read, reread, checked, and rechecked and have had Eddie do the same, all these files. There is nothing to indicate any of them have a grievance against him. Some of them have never worked with him before. Those that have never had any problems. It doesn't make sense."

"There has to be a reason," Philip said, passing the files back to Don. "The trouble is I'm coming in from the cold. I don't know where to start. Whoever is doing this knows what he or she or they are doing. How about the things Eddie's involved in, charities, business deals, investments, things like that?"

"The only controversy he has been involved in lately had to do with his endorsement of a local political leader, but he wasn't alone in that, and no one else involved has been threatened. Many of them are as famous as he is."

Philip couldn't sit still any longer. He stood and paced the office, trying to think of anything Don and Eddie's people might have overlooked. The situation was driving him to distraction.

"We need to view the footage filmed at the warehouse," he said. "Maybe there's something the cameras caught that no one else noticed."

"I can arrange that," Don said. "This afternoon, be at the viewing room at three."

"Okay," Philip said. It wasn't much, but it was a place for him to begin.

Don stood and handed him an envelope. "There should be enough money in here to buy all you need. I apologize that you lost all your belongings."

Philip smiled at the older man. "You don't have to do this. I can afford to replace everything myself."

Don looked confused for a moment, then he laughed. "Of course. I had forgotten your substantial inheritance. Excuse my absent-mindedness, but please, accept the reimbursement. It's only fair."

Philip accepted the envelope and gave a slight bow. "Thank you."

Don looked pleased and relieved. "You are most welcome. I will see you this afternoon."

Chapter Ten

Philip called Brad and arranged to meet him and Eddie for lunch. Philip arrived first, asking to be shown to a private dining room and told the maître d' who was expected, and asked that the two men be brought straight back. He ordered a carafe of water and a pot of tea.

The maître d' left the door open so Philip could watch the front of the restaurant. Ten minutes later, Eddie and Brad arrived. Philip smothered a smile as he watched Eddie wind his way through the tables, looking anxious and doing his best to ignore the stares and greeting calls from the other patrons. He and Brad slipped into the private dining room and Brad closed the door firmly against interruptions.

Once Eddie was seated, Philip asked him the same questions he'd asked Don. "This is nuts, you know. There has to be something, anything, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem. Think."

Eddie rubbed his temples. His restless night showed on his face. His skin was drawn tight, fine lines showing at his eyes and the corners of his mouth. There were bags from lack of sleep under his eyes.

"I don' know. I jus' don' know. I feel sick."

Brad sat straight in his chair, instantly alert. "How sick?"

Eddie gave him a confused look then seemed to realize the sudden concern. "No, not like that. I have headache. Too much happen at one time."

Philip noticed Eddie was speaking English for his benefit, but though clear, the words were still fragmented from stress and probably exhaustion.

"What's your agenda today?" Philip asked.

"Film tonight, on street. My Team keep everyone back."

Philip poured Eddie a cup of tea and slid the cup to him. "Drink that. You'll feel better."

Eddie shook his head and pointed at the carafe. Philip poured water in a crystal tumbler and handed it to him.

"How much light on the set?" Philip asked.

Eddie drank the water without pausing before he answered. "Night shot. Not much. Enough for effect."

Philip didn't like the sound of that. Night filming meant areas of shadow, especially while the big lights were on. "You're going to have to tell the Team what happened last night, if they haven't already heard. It's the only way to insure your safety. The five of us, six if you count Don, can't handle this alone. We've already found that out."

Eddie's face clouded in deep worry. "Philip, I very worried. Somebody blow up my house. Somebody burn my apartment. I have two more homes."

Philip knew what he was thinking. The homes were in Shandong, where Eddie's father and wife had been sent for their protection during this crisis. "Arrange for tight security. Don't leave your father and wife alone for a minute. They probably won't like feeling like prisoners, but it's for their own safety."

Brad pulled his cell phone from his belt and began making calls. Eddie sipped his tea.

"Have you had breakfast?" Philip asked.

Eddie shook his head. Philip pressed a button under the table to summon a wait person. A waiter came in. Eddie ordered for them, which was fine with Philip since he had no idea what was on the menu. The waiter left and Brad completed his phone calls.

"All set," he said. "Don is contacting the authorities in Shandong, then will call your father."

"I think," Eddie said, his expression set in a pensive stare, "I carry my gun."

Philip sucked air through his teeth. "I'd rather you didn't. I know you're a crack shot, but you have to see your enemy to shoot

him. So far, we haven't seen anyone and have no idea who he or she or they might be. As tight as you're wound up, any sudden or unexpected noise or movement could cause a nasty accident."

"Philip is right," Brad said. "Tran, Yau, and I can carry ours. We'll be watching for trouble. You'll be focusing on the filming."

Philip didn't like that idea any better, but he remained silent. It didn't make him happy, but Eddie's Team knew what they were doing. He wished he had his .38, but traveling with a gun would have been frowned on by the authorities. He would ask Brad later if he could borrow one from the Team.

Philip was unable to relax during the filming that night. He kept his eyes constantly roving the sea of faces, watching every movement of the cast, crew, and the crowd of fans and onlookers who never seemed to be absent. He remembered Eddie's visit to Baytown and the crowds there. They were nothing compared to Hong Kong. He spied Brad and Yau walking the perimeters and knew they were doing the same thing as him. They were such good actors, no one appeared to suspect what they were doing. Philip saw Tran hovering at the edge of the filming. He stayed just out of camera shot but always with a clear view of Eddie, and room to get to him in a second's notice.

The filming was uneventful as far as a stalker or would be assassin was concerned. Eddie did have one mishap that landed him rather hard on his backside. He appeared stunned for a moment as hands reached out to help him to his feet.

He grinned, rubbing the back of his jeans. "Ow."

That broke the tension that had been in the air all night. Everyone laughed, including Philip.

At one point, a dark car pulled up. Philip was relieved to see Don exit the car and walk over to the director, probably to see how things were going. Philip walked over to join them, being careful not to call attention to himself.

"Everything seems to be going smoothly." He spoke loud enough for only Don to hear him.

They watched the filming for a few minutes.

"I'm sorry our afternoon viewing produced no clues," Don said.

Philip nodded. He and Don had sat through four hours of footage doing the same thing he'd been doing all night, all to no avail.

Don nodded towards where Eddie stood waiting for the next setup. "You know he is wearing his .38, don't you?"

"I noticed." Philip had noted the familiar bulge at the back of Eddie's belt under his jacket. "I told him it was a bad idea."

Don laughed. "That is like telling a tree not to grow. Eddie didn't tell you because he didn't want to put you in that position, and I'm sure he knew you would worry much more if you knew. Of course, he seems to have forgotten you are a trained observer."

Philip felt a slight tug at his jacket pocket. The look on Don's face was a dead giveaway.

"You can't protect him if you are without means," Don said carefully. He glanced around. "Use it only if there is no other option. Goodnight, Philip."

Don walked back to his car and slid in behind the wheel. As he drove away, Philip felt inside his pocket and wrapped his hand around the cold metal of the gun. This was getting out of hand. He didn't like carrying a weapon, much less having to fire one, and hoped he wouldn't have to.

After the wrap of the night's filming, he, Eddie, Yau, and Tran drove to their hotel in silence.

Philip knew the other three were as tired as he was. When they reached their suite, Eddie went straight to the shower while Philip unpacked the purchases he'd made earlier in the afternoon.

Brad wandered into the kitchenette and returned with two beers and a soft drink which he handed to Philip.

"Thanks." Philip wasn't interested in the drink, but they'd all had a long day. He almost envied the other two men and their ability to drink beer.

Eddie reappeared dressed in a white terry cloth robe, a towel to dry his wet hair draped over his shoulders.

Philip stood. "It's my turn at the shower."

He went into the bathroom decorated in soothing sea green Chinese tile, and stepped into the glassed-in shower large enough to hold three people. Standing under the rainforest showerhead, he let hot water ease the aches in his body for several long minutes before lathering with liquid soap from a crystal dispenser, the label of which indicated the scent as Sandalwood. He couldn't remember the last time he'd been so tired.

The shower completed, Philip dried off, and stepped into a pair of new briefs and jeans, part of his afternoon purchases. He'd be going to bed soon, so there was no reason to pull on a shirt, or worry about propriety in the presence of his friends.

Eddie had put on a pair of sweatpants but was also shirtless. He sat on the couch, a beer in his hand, his feet resting on the coffee table. Brad excused himself and went to bathe. While Brad was gone, Eddie told Philip about the new sports car being created with Eddie's signature.

"It's a beautiful car," Eddie said. "I'm very excited. I have worked with the company for many years. This car will be sleek, fast, and have all the modern technology. I plan to hold a contest with my fans so someone will win one of the first cars."

Philip knew how excited Eddie was about his projects. Eddie loved cars and once confided to Philip that at one time he had owned over one hundred different vehicles, but decided that was wasteful and selfish. The cars had been auctioned to collectors and the money given to charities. He'd done the same thing with many earlier expensive assets, and never regretted a single dollar turned over to be used in his charitable projects.

"How is Tony?"

Philip was caught off guard by the abrupt change of subject and it took a couple of beats for him to switch tracks. "Uh, fine. Busy. About to be a father for the third time."

"Really? That's wonderful. Good for him. He had sweet children." Eddie stifled a yawn.

Eddie had met Tony's children during the Baytown shoot. He'd admitted to Philip that he loved kids and one of his regrets was not being a better father to his own son.

Philip loved Tony's rambunctious girls as well. Tony's wife, Nan, had taken him into the folds of the family practically the moment they met. She fussed and worried like a mother hen, but didn't push him. Nan urged female companionship, but knew recovering from his first disastrous marriage would take time. She had invited him to attend church with the family.

Philip was surprised to recover a faith he thought lost a long time before. That faith helped with the healing and gave strength when times were darkest.

The Ferrone girls, seven-year-old Danielle and five-year-old Pauline, called him "Uncle" Phil. Nan bequeathed the honor of godfather to the girls' unofficial uncle to the new baby when he or she arrived in a few months' time.

"How about you and Ellen?"

Eddie's question broke into his thoughts. He felt a blush creep over his face. "No plans." He looked at his hands. "Actually, I think it's over between us."

He felt the dark cloud cover his mind. Ellen was a nurse at the Baytown Hospital. They'd met after his ex-wife had shot him. After he left the hospital, Ellen became his private nurse during his convalescence. Their relationship blossomed from friends to a higher level, but not beyond. He blamed himself. Lily had tainted his desire for a closer commitment. He wasn't ready, at least, that's what he told himself.

"What happened?" Eddie's dark eyes were sympathetic.

Philip shrugged. "I'm not sure. We grew apart, maybe. She told me just before I left that she couldn't stand the life I lead. I guess I've been hurt too many times. She's a nurse. I can understand how she feels. Anyway, she's found someone else, one of the doctors at the hospital."

"How do you feel about that?" Eddie asked.

"I really wish her the best," Philip said. "She needs someone safe and settled, not someone carrying so much baggage."

Chapter Eleven

Eddie knew the feeling well. Relationships were hard, even with his own wife. His life was constantly on the move. Sometimes he wondered what was wrong with him. If he was running from something or maybe trying to find something. He didn't know.

The silence had lengthened.

"I'm going to bed," Brad said.

Eddie started and dropped the bottle of beer he'd been rolling between his palms. Fortunately, the bottle was empty.

"I had my gun today," he said.

Philip glared at and scolded Eddie like an irate parent. "I know. I saw. I told you not to do that. It could get you hurt."

Eddie hadn't expected such a fierce reaction and came to his feet. "I could get hurt without it. I was hurt."

The rush of blood in Philip's face subsided as he took a calming breath. He leaned forward, elbows on knees, and fixed his eyes on Eddie. Eddie sat down in his chair.

"Look," Philip said, "let me do the detective work, please. I know I haven't made much progress, but I will..."

For some inexplicable reason, Eddie suddenly found their tableau funny. He began to laugh. The fit caught him in its tentacles and he couldn't escape. Holding his stomach, he fell back, tears streaming from his eyes as he became fully engulfed in hysterics that scared him, but he couldn't make himself stop.

Philip gripped him by the shoulders and shook him hard.

"Stop it."

Eddie stopped laughing as abruptly as he began. He opened his eyes wide to stare into his friend's concerned face. Fear he'd denied for so many days shouted silently in his gut. The incident terrified him. "I'm sorry. I don't—I don't know...."

Heaving a deep gulp of air, he managed to sit upright. His body began to shake as if he were freezing. He had no idea what was happening.

Philip went into one of the bedrooms and returned with a blanket. He wrapped it around Eddie's shoulders.

"It's okay," he said. "Delayed reaction. You're okay."

Eddie didn't understand his fear. Delayed reaction? Shock?

"I have jumped out of windows, off cliffs, out of airplanes, raced down snow mountains, swam with sharks, but I have never been as scared as I am now."

"It's a different type of fear," Philip said. "When someone hates you, wants you dead, it's not something you control. You can't understand it. You don't know who your enemy is, when or where he or she is going to strike. Trust me, Eddie, we will find out who. I promise you."

"It's not your place," Eddie said. "You're on vacation, or supposed to be."

Philip just stared at him, and Eddie suddenly realized something.

"I forgot. You aren't just on vacation," he said. "Don asked you to come." He shook his head, his anger rising. He stood and began to pace. "I have plenty of people to watch out for me. I can watch out for myself. You shouldn't be involved in this. You're my friend, not my babysitter. You should be enjoying Hong Kong, not risking getting hurt, or killed." He turned to face a silent Philip who was watching him. "No. From now on, you're just my friend. No more work."

Philip shook his head. "Too late for that. I'm here and I've been through too much to quit now."

"Then you be with me. Tran can't always be with me. He has work."

"Now you're asking me to be a bodyguard." Philip said.

Eddie noticed the edges of Philip's lip twitched as he tried not to smile.

"No. A friend. We'll watch out for each other, okay?"

"Fine," Philip said. He stood. "I'm going to bed. Good-night, pang yau."

Eddie fumbled for the ringing phone and squinted at the bedside clock.

"Wei?" he answered sleepily.

"Good morning, Eddie," came a cheerful voice on the other end.

"Do you know it's three in the morning?" Eddie asked. "What is it?"

"I wanted to be sure and let you know there is a production meeting this morning at seven," Don's assistant, Soo, told him. "Don will be going, but it isn't necessary for you to be there."

Eddie swiped his face with his hand and frowned as he sat up in bed. "Then why are you calling me?"

Soo, sounding unabashed and disgustingly cheerful, laughed. "I didn't want you to find out afterward. You would be furious."

Eddie ran his hand through his hair. He had to begrudge the fact Soo was right about that. "Prob'ly. What's the meeting for?"

There were a few seconds of silence, then he heard Soo take a deep breath.

"There will be a discussion on postponing the filming for a while." Soo's statement had come out all in one breath.

"What? No!" Eddie swung his feet to the floor. "We've worked too hard, come too far. No, this is all my fault. Too many people depend on me. No."

"Dai Goh, listen." Soo was trying to reason with him. "It will be better for you. Take a few days to spend with your friend doing something other than worrying."

Eddie could feel his irritation climbing through his shoulder muscles. "I'll take a few days and finish the film. Then we'll have time. Tell Don I refuse. I won't agree."

"I'm afraid you won't have much say, Dai Goh," Soo said then hung up before Eddie could argue.

Eddie, fuming, slammed his cell phone on the nightstand then picked it up to make sure he hadn't broken it. He laid it down more carefully. He doubted he'd be able to find out where if Don didn't want him to know.

His bedroom door was open and he heard someone moving around. Directly in his line of vision was the kitchenette. He saw Philip standing in the light of the refrigerator. Philip reached for something, closed the refrigerator door, and moved into the living room area. Slipping into his jeans, Eddie went to join him.

Philip stood by the window looking out at the city.

"Can't sleep, Sai Lo?" Eddie asked as he pulled a bottle of water from the refrigerator then went to stand next to Philip.

Philip turned his head slightly. "No. Too much on my mind. My bed looks like a battlefield."

"Yeah." Eddie dropped into one of the overstuffed chairs. "I was asleep, but..."

"Who called?" Philip moved to the couch and took a seat. "I heard you yelling."

"Soo, Don's second assistant." Eddie took a pull from his water bottle. "He called me to tell me there is a meeting at seven that I'm not invited to."

Philip laughed. "Why? I mean, why call you?"

Eddie shrugged. "So I wouldn't kill him later when I found out, I guess." He took another swig of water. "Don wants to postpone the film because of what has happened."

"Oh boy," Philip said. "I know that doesn't make you happy. How are we going to draw this nut out if—well, maybe it's not such a bad idea."

Eddie went rigid. "What? Not you too?"

Philip yawned and waved him off. "I don't know, pang yau. This entire thing has me completely baffled. And right now, I'm too tired to make any sense."

Eddie relaxed. "Me, too. I was sleeping well until Soo called. Now I don't know if I can."

"Try," Philip said. "We'll need all the strength we can get. If we get too tired, we leave ourselves vulnerable."

Eddie rose to his feet and pulled Philip up by his hand. "You're right. Goodnight, Sai Lo."

He waited until Philip's light went off before returning to his own room and dropped into the bed, wide awake, thinking about the meeting he wouldn't be privy to. He didn't like being excluded, and he certainly didn't like the idea of postponing the film. There was too much tied up in the film to put it off.

This sort of thing was happening to his films with too much frequency and he was tired of it.

First the Baytown shoot being delayed due to film bootleggers and now this. He'd been in the film industry for over thirty years. There were always ups and downs, problems and problem people to deal with, but never anything like what had happened lately. Things were becoming too crazy. He'd have to stand his ground against Don's plan, but he might not have any say in the matter. He'd have to wait until he could confront Don.

Eddie and Philip arrived at the filming location on time later that morning. Don was there ahead of them and had called the cast and crew together. Eddie knew that didn't bode well.

He headed straight for Don, ready to argue, but Don raised his hand to stop him before he started.

"It has been decided in everyone's best interest," Don said to the gathered film personnel, "until the stalker is apprehended, we are postponing the rest of the filming. There have been too many close calls. We want to make sure no one is—well, killed. Until further notice, I'm afraid we are closing the filming. Hopefully, it won't be for long. You are all free to go."

He turned a calm exterior to meet Eddie's glare.

Eddie's hand shook in anger as he pointed his finger at his manager's nose. "You—you—how could you? This is all wrong. We need to finish. Everybody needs to work. Call them back."

"Calm down, Sai Lo," Don said. "We will talk 'bout this later. Right now, I want Philip to take you back to your suite and keep you there. I will be along soon."

Eddie was completely taken aback. He felt like a child who had just been sent to his room.

"I am not a baby and won't be sent to my room like a naughty child. You can't do this. I'll call them back and finish without the rest of you."

Philip placed his hand on Eddie's arm. "Calm. Stay calm."

Eddie turned to argue but saw Philip's eyes were unfriendly as he stared at Don.

"You have Eddie's cell number," Philip said. "Call us when you're ready to talk. We'll meet you."

"Very well," Don said. "Be careful. Both of you."

Don turned and walked to his waiting car. Eddie jerked his arm away from Philip.

"This has gone far enough. No more. I'm tired of this."

Chapter Twelve

Although neither man was hungry, Eddie guided Philip to a sidewalk vendor. Philip ordered shrimp and rice, not sure what other delicacies were being sold and not wanting to find out. While they ate, Eddie led him on a tour of the streets, but Philip could tell his friend's heart wasn't in being a guide. Eddie's entire schedule for the day had *been* the schedule. Unable to continue filming the movie he seemed adrift and frustrated.

To make things more difficult, fans constantly approached. Eddie greeted them as always with a smile, agreeing to have his picture taken with them or signing his autograph, but Philip could see, in Eddie's present mood, he didn't appreciate or want the attention.

After an hour, Philip thought it best they return to their hotel. Eddie looked almost relieved at the suggestion.

In the suite, Philip was watching Eddie occupy his time with a game of old fashioned jacks. Philip was fascinated that anyone even remembered the game, let alone played it, and did so with such dexterity.

"This game helps with hand-to-eye coordination," Eddie explained, his focus never straying from the game. "I've played it for years, mostly when I'm alone. It's good exercise."

Philip wasn't surprised. He had seen Eddie juggle with the same precision.

Philip's cell phone went off with a familiar tune. He felt a knot form in his throat as he looked at the caller ID before answering. "Hello—Ellen." A battalion of butterflies began warring for control of his insides. Sweat broke across his forehead. He wasn't ready for this.

"Phil, are you there?" Ellen's voice was soft and feminine.

Eddie, hearing Ellen's name, had missed a beat during his game and lost the ball as it bounced across the floor. He muttered

something Philip didn't understand and, on all fours, crawled after it. He looked so ridiculous, Philip fought to hold in his laughter.

"Phil, are you going to talk to me?" Ellen sounded insistent and concerned.

Philip turned his eyes away from Eddie's antics, cleared his throat and answered. "Yes." The word came out in a rasp, almost a whisper as Philip tried hard not to laugh.

Eddie was totally absorbed in his pursuit of the little red rubber ball and lay on his stomach, trying to fish it out from under a low carved China cabinet.

"Maybe I shouldn't have called," Ellen said.

Turning his back entirely to Eddie, Philip took a deep breath and stared at the wall. "No, no, it's okay. I'm sorry. I was just—distracted for a minute."

"I wanted to know how you're doing. How's Hong Kong? How's Eddie?" Ellen sounded relieved, but Philip thought he still detected a note of worry—or was it pity?

"I know, Ellen. Thanks. I'm fine. Really." He hoped she didn't hear the tremor in his voice, did not really want to have this conversation yet. He was far from fine, was confused, hurt, and lonely, feelings all too familiar. At least this time it wasn't a marriage falling apart. These feelings would pass, eventually, hopefully.

He frowned as a thought struck him. "How'd you know where I am?"

"I called Don's office," Ellen said. "I still had the number. He remembered me."

Philip considered it odd that Don would tell anyone where they were after all that had happened. How did Don even know it was Ellen calling? It could have been anyone using her name, as far-fetched as that might be. Logically, how could anyone know about Ellen's relationship with him?

"Philip?"

"Fine. Busy, as always." He paused. He hadn't told Ellen he was leaving Baytown. Only Tony knew, and his parents. "How'd you know I was in Hong Kong? Nobody knew."

"Tony knew," she said. "And no, he didn't tell me, but Nan did. She said it would do you good, visiting Eddie. I know where Eddie's home is. I hope you two are having fun."

She was trying to sound happy, but he could hear the hesitancy in her voice, as if she was close to tears. He was being brusque to her, without really meaning to. He felt distant, distracted, and unable to find words that needed to be said.

"Oh—sure. Don't worry. Hong Kong is beautiful. You'd love it. Really, I'm fine." He sounded like a babbling idiot.

He heard a soft intake of breath on the other end of the line. She was crying.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to upset you."

"No, I didn't realize it was supposed to be a secret—where you are."

"It's not a secret." He was irritated. "I just—I didn't mention it to anyone except Tony because it was a spur-of-the-moment thing. I wasn't trying to hide anything. Besides, Darla knows I'm on vacation, just not where."

He heard her snuffle and then discreetly blow her nose.

"I never thought about Darla," she said. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have called you. I mean—I'll call you later."

"Don't, Ellen, please, don't be upset. Look, we'll talk when I get home?"

"Oh, Philip! Don't you realize..." She didn't finish.

He heard another snuffle.

"I'm sorry, Phil. I'll call you later." The call disconnected.

He stared at his cell phone in his hand. He was baffled. Why had she called in the first place? Why was she upset? She had been the one to break off their relationship. Why was he feeling guilty? And what did she mean by "Don't you realize..."? Realize what?

He didn't know and trying to figure it out was giving him a headache.

Eddie had given up his game of jacks and was doing stomach crunches. The door buzzed and Philip went to answer it. He greeted Don as the older man entered the suite.

"Have a seat. Drink?"

"No, thank you." Don sank onto the couch. He watched Eddie for a few minutes, lost in his own world, concentrating on his workout. "Eddie, may I have your attention, please?"

Eddie grunted as he came off the floor in a sit up. "No. I'm not speaking with you."

"*Sai Lo.*" Don's tone was razor sharp. "*Nei gwoh lei ni do. Yi ga!*" ("Come here now.")

Eddie turned his back. "*Ngho m yiu do.*" ("I don't want to.")

"*Nei hai hoh pa,*" ("You are bad.") Don commanded.

Eddie whirled around. "*Mat ye a?*" ("What?")

"*Ngoh chau lai ne,*" ("I am ashamed of you.") Don said.

Eddie came to his feet, his fists clenched. Philip hadn't understood a word they'd been saying, but to defer any further fighting, he stood and issued a loud shrill whistle.

"Hey!" He waited until he had their attention. "Consideration, please, gentlemen."

Both men had the decency to look chagrined. "Sorry," they said in unison.

Don was the first to speak. "I think we should sit down and have a long talk—as adults?"

Eddie pouted as he flopped into a chair.

Philip's head was pounding. He rubbed his temples. He suddenly felt tired.

The doorbell buzzed. He looked to Don, who looked to Eddie who shrugged. They weren't expecting anyone. Philip went to the door and cautiously opened it. Something hit him squarely in the face. He heard the bridge of his nose crack as the blow knocked

him to the floor. He couldn't see for the pain but heard two gunshots, shouting, running, a door slam, then Eddie speaking.

"Phil, are you okay?"

Eddie's voice was far away, drowned out by the ringing in Philip's ears. He scrambled to his knees and felt the blood ooze from his wounded nose.

"No, no," Eddie said, pushing him down to his back. "Stay down."

Philip felt a cold wet cloth pressed to his face.

"Lie on your back," Don said.

Eddie maneuvered him around until the back of his neck was draped over Eddie's knee. "This will help stop the bleeding," Eddie said.

"What happened?" Philip mumbled through the cloth.

"Someone hit you," Don said. "Here's some ice, Eddie. I'll call for help."

Philip felt the wet cloth lift and be replaced by another cloth filled with crushed ice. The cold and pressure hurt. "I heard gunshots."

"They shot, but they missed."

Philip tried to sit up. "Who?"

Eddie held him by the shoulders. "No. Lie still. I don't know who."

"No, I mean, who did they shoot at, and was there more than one person?"

"There was only one person we could see," Don said, finishing his calls. "I'm afraid the shots were aimed at Eddie. Fortunately, he was already moving. The bullets are lodged in the far wall. The police should be here momentarily."

Don lifted the ice-filled cloth to examine Philip's nose, then gently replaced it. "I don't think your nose is broken. We'll have to have it taped. The bleeding has slowed but may start again if you try to stand. Your face will be bruised though."

"This is crazy," Philip said. He felt dizzy and his headache had gone beyond pounding. "How did anyone know where we were?" He remembered Ellen's call. "Don, did you get a call from Ellen?"

"I did," Don said. "Last night. It was her, if you're wondering. I verified information only she could know before I spoke to her." He looked pensive. "Did you two go anywhere after you left the filming today?"

Philip removed the cloth from his face and stared up at Eddie. He thought he and Eddie were thinking the same thing.

"They followed us," Philip said.

"Aaaggghhh!" Eddie shouted and threw his hands up in frustration.

The movement jiggled Philip's head, causing more pain. "Hey, do you mind holding still?" he said.

"Sorry," Eddie said.

"We forgot to watch our backs," Philip said. "That was stupid. There's no excuse for that. That's my fault."

"No, Philip," Eddie said. "I should have been vigilant as well. But I was too angry and you were watching me to make sure I didn't do—well, it doesn't matter now."

Philip disagreed. It did matter, a great deal. His inattention had been a serious lack on his part, one that had almost proved fatal.

Chapter Thirteen

Philip squirmed in his chair, his back aching from the fall he'd taken. His nose hurt—too tender to touch. Perversely, it itched beneath the bandage across it, but he didn't dare scratch.

He squinted at the surveillance monitors in the Surveillance room of the hotel. The cross cameras mounted at each end of the floor had a perfect view of the door to Eddie's suite. Philip, Eddie, Don, two detectives, the hotel concierge, owner, and camera agents watched the monitors showing opposing views.

The police had arrived within minutes of Don's call to them, this time accompanied by an Inspector Yiu, a slender man about Eddie's height and age with graying black hair, dark brown eyes behind thick black rimmed glasses, and a small mustache above his thin lips. Philip disliked the man immediately as Inspector Yiu had entered the suite with an air of self-importance and spoken to him, Eddie, and Don as if they were the cause of the trouble instead of the victims. Inspector Yiu had come accompanied by his Sergeant, Zahn, who was taller, younger, friendlier, and a good deal more helpful in arranging for the viewing of the security camera discs.

Ten minutes before the assault, Don could be seen leaving the elevator and going to the door of the suite. He pressed the doorbell and was let into the suite a second later. There was no one else in the hall.

The elevator at the opposite end of the hall opened. The nine men instantly became attentive as they watched what appeared to be a hotel maid wheel her cleaning cart into view and start her rounds. The men sighed in frustration, except Philip. He wasn't quick to dismiss the woman. He watched her closely and timed her movements. Two minutes on the floor, she reached Eddie's door. Instead of immediately pressing the buzzer to announce herself, she looked around as if to be certain she wasn't being observed, then pulled something from under a stack of

towels. She pressed the buzzer. Before the door opened, she raised a towel-draped arm, giving the men a clear view of a gun muzzle. When Philip opened the door, the woman swung her other hand holding a large flat tray.

Philip flinched as he remembered the feel of the tray slamming into his face. Two flashes showed the gun being fired, then the maid ran for the emergency exit doors. The cart remained along the wall, ignored by Eddie who ran into the hall then turned back to the suite. Soon after, the police and EMT's arrived. The video clearly showed Inspector Yiu shove his way into the suite past Don, who had answered the door. Philip glanced at the older man and noticed the Inspector didn't seem too interested in what they had just witnessed.

Philip let his gaze drift to the Sergeant who was busy taking notes. In his opinion, they had wasted precious time after their arrival in questioning him, Don, and Eddie about what had transpired, giving the maid, or fake maid, ample time to escape. After an hour of relentlessly going over the information numerous times, Inspector Yiu and Sergeant Zahn, led by the hotel manager, had escorted him, Don, and Eddie to the Surveillance room to view the discs, completely ignoring the maid's cart still parked against the wall of the corridor. Philip considered that a serious lack on the part of Inspector Yiu.

Eddie nudged his arm. Philip turned to him. Eddie looked at the video in real time showing the cart, then back to Philip. Eddie had noticed the error as well.

Inspector Yiu made a call on his cell phone while Sergeant Zahn asked the surveillance agents to run the footage again. The agents enlarged the picture and zeroed in on the face of the maid. Philip could see she was Asian, but her eyes were hidden by thick black framed glasses much like the ones the Inspector wore.

Eddie leaned in closer to the monitor and pointed to the woman on the screen.

"She's wearing makeup," he said. "Maids don't wear that much makeup, nor do most women, unless they are in front of the camera."

Philip knew Eddie was speaking from the position of a veteran director and actor.

"She's also wearing a wig," Eddie said.

He had Inspector Yiu's attention.

"How can you tell this?" Inspector Yiu asked sharply.

Eddie glared at him. "Observation."

Don quickly diffused the situation. "You must remember who Eddie is, Inspector. He's been in the film industry for many years. After so long, one begins to recognize certain things that are or aren't natural."

"I am well aware of who Mr. Tseung is," Inspector Yiu said. "I just find it interesting that he knows this information just by viewing a disc."

Philip clearly heard the implication and knew Eddie and Don must have also.

Eddie turned to face Inspector Yiu. He spoke firmly, evenly, sounding like a teacher instructing a dense student. "When you have worked as long as I have in film, you become acquainted with what is real and what is false. The woman is small in stature, so it is possible it is not a woman at all but a man made up to look like a woman, which could explain the excess of makeup and the wig."

Philip did his best not to grin, mostly due to the fact any movement of his face caused pain. He studied the enlarged still of the woman. Eddie was correct. Even he could tell the woman wore a black wig styled in a Dutch Boy. The hair didn't move naturally and had too much shine; not made of human hair, obviously.

"What do you think, Eddie," Philip asked. "Woman, or small man made up to look like a woman?"

"Woman," Eddie said. "Movements are too natural." He gave Philip a sly wink. "Besides, I can tell."

Philip decided not to pursue that any further.

"What now, Inspector?" Don asked.

"We take this evidence and your statements," the Inspector said, clearly displeased at Eddie's rebuke. "We will study them closely. Do not worry. We will find this woman, if she exists."

Eddie took a step toward the Inspector, but Philip blocked him with his arm. He understood Eddie's desire to throttle the Inspector. He had the same inclination, but there was no point.

"I'm sure you will," Don said, his voice edged with sarcasm. "If you're done with us, I need to get these two back to the suite. I'm sure Philip would like to rest."

He ushered Philip and Eddie from the Surveillance room to the elevators.

"That man is an idiot," Don said once the elevator door had enclosed them in privacy.

"He's got a chip on his shoulder," Philip said. "And he obviously doesn't care for celebrities."

"Or maybe just me," Eddie said.

Philip didn't disagree.

The phone was ringing when they reached the suite. Eddie reached the phone before Philip.

"Wei?"

"You monster," a female voice shouted at him. "What are you, a cat with nine lives?"

"What?" Eddie waved Philip over and held the phone so Philip could hear.

"I hate you," the woman wailed. "And I'm going to get you."

"Who...?" Before Eddie could finish his question, the line went dead. His hand shook as he placed the phone on its receptacle.

Don gently led him to the couch and the three men took their seats.

"A woman." Eddie sounded as if the idea surprised him. "She said she hates me and will get me."

Philip glanced at Don who was staring at Eddie.

"Well, we now know something. Your enemy seems to be a woman. All we have to do is find out who and why she's trying to kill you, if she's working alone or for someone." He reached for the phone and called the hotel front desk. "Is there any way to trace a call to its source?" He waited while the clerk checked. The answer was affirmative.

"Good. Eddie Tseung just received a threatening call to his suite. Can you find where...? Yes, I'll wait." He chewed his bottom lip and listened as the clerk called the concierge to the phone to explain the situation.

"Mr. Tseung?" The concierge sounded upset.

"No, this is Mr. Chandler," Philip said. "I'm Mr. Tseung's friend. As you can guess, he's upset about the call. Can you trace it?"

"One moment," the concierge said. "I must place you on hold."

The phone went silent except for a series of beeps. Less than a minute later, the concierge was back on the line.

"It appears the call originated at one of our lobby kiosks. There are cameras overseeing those kiosks, but there seems to be an outage of electricity in that particular area. The area is too dark to see who might have made that call. I have sent a workman to fix the problem, but I'm afraid it's too late."

Philip closed his eyes against his rising anger. He swallowed several times before he spoke. "You're sure nothing can be seen?"

The concierge sounded apologetic. "I'm sorry. Without proper lighting, that area is very dark. You might see a shadow of someone but would be unable to see any details. I will have our security check other cameras to see if they can tell who might have gone in that direction. Perhaps only one person? If more than one,

it would be difficult to know which was the person who made the call to Mr. Tseung's phone."

Philip thought for a second. "Fingerprints. You know which phone and the call came just a few minutes ago. Can the police check fingerprints?"

Again, the concierge sounded apologetic. "I can request it, however, those phones are public. There may be many prints on them."

Philip had to concede to that possibility. "Okay. Please contact the police and tell them of the call. If they choose to investigate, I'm sure we'll hear from them."

"Certainly. Please tell Mr. Tseung I am most sorry he has been troubled." The concierge hung up.

"Well?" Don asked after the call ended.

"Phone kiosk, with a mysterious outage in the lights, making the area too dark to see anyone. The concierge said he'd do his best to check it out but doesn't think there's much chance of seeing more than a shadow."

A roar of anger burst from Eddie as he came to his feet and started angrily pacing. "What I do? I don't know. I don't know why someone hate me. I can't think. It make no sense. A woman? Is crazy."

His arms flailed in gestures of fury as he spoke and he sent a vase accidentally flying across the room into the wall. It exploded into dust, causing him to jump in surprise and stare at the remains. "I hope that not expensive."

Philip shook his head and covered his smile with his hand as Don grabbed Eddie's arm and shoved him onto the couch. It was clear the older man was as upset as Eddie.

"Sit down!" Don took a deep breath and let out a long sigh. "Tomorrow, we move you again, and all of us take extra precautions. It may be that whoever called followed me to you. I haven't been vigilant enough."

"Not necessarily," Philip said. "We've been looking for a man, or a group of men. We never considered a woman might be behind this. She could have been right in front of us and we had no idea. That's on all of us." He paced to the window and looked out for a second, then turned. "But we know that it is a woman, so we watch everyone."

"The first thing to do is find a safe place for you," Don said.

"But where?" Eddie said. "I not..." He cleared his throat and took a calming breath. "I'm not going to Shandong."

"Good heavens, no," Don agreed. "I think the safest place for you is in your office."

"What?" Philip was surprised that Don would suggest such an obvious place.

"The room," Don said.

Eddie nodded. "Good idea."

Philip felt as if he was being left behind again. "Hold it. Wait, wait. What are you talking about?"

Eddie's face was lit up with excitement as he explained. "Behind my office, a secret room. Only I know how to get in, and Don."

If he'd been expecting Philip to be in agreement, he was disappointed. Philip raised his eyebrows and stared at him with disapproval.

"You're planning on turning yourself into a prisoner? How big is this room? Does it have everything you need? What about windows?"

Eddie's face fell. Clearly, he hadn't thought the idea completely through.

"It's a big room, small apartment size," he said. "No windows. It's meant for when I want privacy or need to rest. There's a tiny kitchenette, a bed, no phone. I have my cell phone if I need it."

"What about a bathroom?" Philip asked. "If you hide, you can't leave to go to the nearest facilities."

Eddie looked over at Don. "Suddenly I don't think this is a good idea. Being shut up in that room for more than an hour or two, or even a night, would drive me insane—and Philip, the room has—facilities. Like I said, small apartment." He shook his head and placed his hand on Don's arm. "No good. Try again."

Chapter Fourteen

A yacht owned by a business associate was the safest place Don could come up with on short notice. He held the suite at the Hilton in Eddie's name in hopes of throwing off anyone trying to find him. Don hoped the culprit would return to the hotel for another attempt so she could be apprehended.

Don drove Philip and Eddie to the secured yacht after midnight. They were greeted by the captain and first mate, neither of whom spoke English. They didn't speak Chinese in any form either. Don explained they were German, as was the owner of the yacht.

"Mr. Heitan is in Hong Kong on business," Don explained as he led the way to the upper decks. "He and I have known each other for many years. He is more than happy to help Eddie at this time. He's a great fan. You don't have to worry about discretion. Mr. Heitan understands the need for secrecy and his crew only speaks German. They do understand some English, but Mr. Heitan has already given them their orders. They know the situation and will make certain you are kept safe."

A purser met them and led them to their staterooms. He opened the door to the first, indicated they were to go inside, then showed them the adjoining door to the second stateroom.

That done, he gave them a curt nod and left them to their privacy.

"This is a small yacht," Don said. "Mr. Heitan uses it for business trips. His luxury yacht he keeps in Germany."

Philip looked the staterooms over. If this was a small yacht, he wondered what the luxury yacht must be like. The rooms were large, done in teak wood and brass. There were built-in shelves holding what looked to be valuable souvenirs from around the world, and books, some leather-bound piped in gold, in differing languages. A mini bar was set in one wall and the bed could have

held two people comfortably. The staterooms were joined by a marble gold lavatory. The linens in both staterooms were royal blue and gold.

"You'll be secure here," Don said. "I'll call first thing in the morning. For now, I suggest you both get some sleep."

"How long will we have to be here?" Eddie asked.

Eddie had been quiet on the drive to the yacht. Philip couldn't blame him for his introspection. A great deal had occurred in the last week and Philip suspected it was beginning to catch up to the action star. Eddie was used to movement, working, physical activity. Being confined, whether on a yacht or in a hidden room made no difference. Philip knew he'd have to keep a close eye on his friend to keep him from doing something he shouldn't, like leaving.

Eddie had confessed he hated the idea of hiding, but Don emphasized that he must be reasonable considering there had already been six attempts on his life. Don also reminded Eddie the would-be assassin wasn't concerned about collateral damage, indicated by the four people who had unfortunately been unlucky enough to be in the line of fire.

Philip was thankful that Eddie finally agreed, and he, Eddie, and Don bid each other goodnight.

An unseasonable storm moved into the coast early in the morning. High winds rocked the yacht, and Eddie spent most of his time in the lavatory throwing up or in his bed suffering an unsettled stomach. Even the seasickness pills Philip found in the lavatory cabinet didn't seem to help. Eddie no sooner got them down than they came right back up.

Philip felt sorry for his friend. He knew how that type of sickness felt, but not from being on the water. He preferred not to think about it.

Eddie's sickness made sleep impossible for Philip. Unable to sleep, he made his way to the upper decks. The rain poured from the sky in an almost solid curtain. High winds rocked the yacht,

making footing dangerous. Philip stood under a protective canopy and felt restless. The wild night matched his thoughts. He wanted to be in the storm, to let his emotions rage with the wind and torrent. Tears he'd kept dammed since Ellen had left mingled with the rain. His anger flashed with the lightning. He wanted the night to know his pain and fury. In the morning, he would be calm and no one would be the wiser.

His anger wasn't just at the dissolving of his relationship with Ellen. He railed against the person determined to kill Eddie. The fact that the person appeared to be a woman also made him angry with Eddie.

Eddie was known to have had more than one extramarital affair, many over the years, as a matter-of-fact. Philip didn't approve, especially since Eddie had a beautiful wife. But Eddie's philandering was none of Philip's business. He had a feeling that sort of behavior wasn't uncommon in Hong Kong, or even China. He didn't know, didn't want to know. It wasn't that uncommon anywhere, if he was to be truthful, but Eddie's past appeared to be catching up to him. This woman, whoever she was, hated him. Perhaps she was a crazed fan, or an obsessive stalker, a spurned lover, or a total stranger. There was no way of knowing until they caught up with her. She might have been hired to make the threats and have nothing at all to do with anything. There were too many variables. They had to find the woman before they understood. That was like looking for a needle in a haystack, and that made Philip angry. He didn't like fighting shadows.

The cold finally drove him back to his stateroom. He checked on Eddie, who was asleep at last. Philip showered, letting the hot water wash the cold out of his bones. He changed and lay down on his bed but couldn't quiet his mind.

Eddie was a kind, generous, talented, funny man. He worked hard to please his many fans, sometimes too much. Philip remembered Eddie had told him he hadn't always been that way. When he was a much younger man, he'd been self-centered,

rebellious, his fame having gone to his ego in a big way. He was handsome, athletic, and women were drawn to his thick black hair and dark brown eyes, the smile that brought a slight dimple to his right cheek. He'd come from a poverty background, abandoned by his parents, left to a strict, brutal regime of an opera school the same as many young boys with similar backgrounds. Eddie was left adrift to figure out which direction he wanted his life to go without the guidance of a family. He admitted there were few alternatives for badly educated, poor orphaned children. He chose hard work, using his talents, taught and innate, to find his way. It hadn't been easy. He'd suffered for his desire to be someone. Broken bones and near-death experiences were no strangers to him, but he was a survivor and he'd reached that star he'd aimed for. Somewhere along the way, he forgot to be thankful and had decided he could do whatever he wanted—until he met Jo and had a son, then nearly left her a widow when he almost died doing a dangerous stunt. That, he confessed, woke him up. It was time for him to grow up and face his many responsibilities.

A hard lesson had made Eddie into the man he'd become, and Philip was glad for that, in a way. Eddie still took too many chances while filming movies as far as Philip was concerned. But that was Eddie's craft. He had studied the advancing film industry and was taking more safety precautions that hadn't existed while he was growing up. He gave to charities, started more than one, built houses and schools, aided children with handicaps of many types, worked hard, but somewhere along the way, he'd made a mistake, one that was dangerous and could be fatal.

Philip wondered about the woman. How old was she? Could her obsession come from that time in Eddie's life? There were so many possibilities.

He rolled onto his side and stared across to Eddie's room. He could make out Eddie's sleeping form on top of the covers. Was it jealousy? Was it obsession? Or was it something more? Had Eddie inadvertently been responsible for causing the woman, or

someone in her family, to suffer physically or emotionally, or even mentally? The questions went around and around in Philip's mind, causing a fierce headache. He went to the lavatory to see about an aspirin and caught a glimpse of his visage in the mirror. He hadn't realized how bad he looked after his nose was nearly broken. Both eyes and the bridge of his nose were shiny ebony and deep purple. His nose was swollen beneath the bandage. The thought of what he must have looked like on the deck in the storm made him laugh. He was thankful no one saw him.

He found the aspirin and took four. He shifted his sore back and went to the mini bar for a bottle of juice. He heard Eddie leave his bed. A few seconds later came the sound of him being ill, and a minute after that, looking green and pale, he wandered into Philip's room.

"Still having problems?" Philip asked, handing Eddie a bottle of ginger ale. "Here. This will help settle your stomach."

Eddie dropped onto the edge of the bed and took a cautious sip of his drink. "I love boats, but I hate seasickness. No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to not get this way. I don't know."

He had calmed down quite a bit after his rest. Philip watched him for a minute then had an idea. He searched through the mini bar until he found a bottle of champagne. He popped the cork, filled a glass, and handed it to Eddie.

"Try it. It works better than ginger ale."

Eddie tentatively took a sip and waited. When nothing seemed to be coming back up, he took several more. He looked at Philip with surprise.

"It works," he said.

"It's a trick my dad told me about," Philip said. "I just remembered. He used to get seasick too when he was in the Navy. His buddies taught him that trick about drinking champagne."

Eddie was studying Philip. "Have you ever tried to drink alcohol of any kind?"

Philip laughed. "Once, and that was enough. I wasn't allowed to drink growing up. When I'd get sick with something, like the flu or a cold or even a sore throat, Mom gave me pills or a home remedy. I thought every Mom did that. She told me I was allergic to liquid medicine because of the alcohol in them, and told me never to drink any alcohol for the same reason. Even though my friends in school used to tease me about it, I respected my parents' wishes. When I left home, I really had no desire to drink. For me, that was normal. The first time I drank was at my wedding reception, the toast of champagne. One sip and I didn't know what hit me. In the hospital the doctor informed me what had happened. I finally fully understood why my parents raised me to be a 'teetotaler'.

"Lily did tell me later that I vomited down the front of her wedding dress. That, and spending my wedding night in the hospital should have been omens as to how things would turn out. Lily never said anything, but I'm pretty certain she resented me for that. I'm sure she felt as humiliated as I did." He sighed and shook off that feeling of the grief and the loss Lily's memory conjured. "It was just one of many things. Water under the bridge."

He shook his head and smiled. Eddie had a way of getting him to talk about things he kept to himself. Philip was certain it was because Eddie was so much older and a good listener. They'd come close to being killed more than once since they'd met, and that seemed to cement their friendship into something solid.

"Is it storming out still?" Eddie asked.

Philip was glad for the change of subject. "It's died down a bit. The wind, anyway. The rain is worse, I think."

Eddie's nod was nearly imperceptible. "What do you think of all that has happened?"

"We need to get our heads together and start figuring this thing out," Philip said. "I haven't done what Don brought me over here to do, wasn't even sure what that was until the bombing. He wanted me to guard you, like before, but you have bodyguards. It

could be that he didn't want to put any of them in harm's way. That doesn't exactly please me. I don't mind being your bodyguard, but I'm out of my element here. Everything is foreign to me, the city, the country, the police, and even the people. Following your lead isn't taking care that you aren't in any danger." He paced the floor, feeling inadequate. "I wanted to help so coming wasn't an issue, but am I helping do anything?"

"You are," Eddie said. "You're helping me by being here, talking to me, keeping me company. I don't feel like a prisoner, which I would if Don had his way." He thought about it for a minute. "Well, I do, but not . . ." He shrugged.

Philip had an idea he knew what Eddie was getting at. "Look, there are a lot of questions that need answers," he said. "The whole thing is giving me a colossal headache. I'm going to have to ask some hard questions, Eddie." He took a seat on a padded bar stool and studied his friend. "Are you willing to answer them?"

Eddie was quiet a long time, staring at his hands before he met Philip's gaze. "I will try."

That was good enough for Philip to start.

"How many 'girlfriends' have you had in the past? And when you parted, how many of them—disagreed?"

Eddie had the decency to look embarrassed. Philip understood. He'd warned Eddie the questions would be hard.

"All of them," Eddie said. "I think I know what you're getting at. You're thinking maybe one of them was more attached than the others?"

"That's part of it," Philip said. "It could be an obsessed fan or a stalker, but we have to consider that she, whoever she is, is someone you had an affair with sometime in your past."

Eddie stared at the floor. Philip could see he was thinking and whatever his thoughts were, they didn't please him.

He sighed. "I have had many affairs. You know that. I'm not proud of them. As I get older, I become less proud of the fact I have been..." He paused. "This is hard for me."

He looked up and Philip thought he could see a deep pain in Eddie's eyes.

"I am not a good man in that respect. It troubles me now, especially when I realize that my son has grown into a man. I don't want him to be like me in that way."

Philip understood this, too, because he knew the relationship between Eddie and his son was strained in the best of times. Eddie had been an absentee father most of his son's life.

"I don't know, Philip. Is it possible?"

"If we only knew more about which woman, who she is," Philip said, "that could be the key to everything. You're going to have to search deep, think hard, and see if you can remember anything that might help. It won't be easy."

"I know," Eddie said. "But you're right. She is someone. I must know who, somehow, deep inside. I will try to remember. Right now, I can't think."

"Let's sleep on it," Philip said. "Both of us need rest. We've not had much in the last week. A few days on this yacht might help us relax and get our feet under us. We'll get to the bottom of this somehow, I promise."

As Eddie returned to his own room and after he'd turned out his light, Philip stretched out on his own bed. He switched off his light, put his hands behind his head, and stared at the ceiling. He would get to the bottom of this, hopefully in one piece.

Chapter Fifteen

Philip conveyed their theory to Don. Agreeing it was feasible, Don assured Eddie he would begin a background search on all the women Eddie had been with in the past.

"I will need you to make a list of all those you personally remember, Eddie," Don said. "I will check the lists against each other when you are finished so we can remove all duplicates. I know this will not be a pleasant task for you. I will call when I have the information."

He left, leaving Eddie to his task.

Philip had to fight against a grin as he watched Eddie squirm. He'd had a lot of girlfriends over the years, before and after his marriage. One affair nearly cost him his marriage and his family. That remembering his past liaisons would disturb him wasn't surprising.

Philip poked Eddie on the shoulder. "What?"

"Huh? Oh, nothing."

"Come on, Dai Goh, give."

A grin turned the corners of Eddie's mouth. "Big brother," he muttered, shaking his head. "Sometimes it's hard for me to remember I am 10 years older than you." He sighed. "I was thinking about Jewel."

"The Jewel?" Philip knew the name all too well of the woman who nearly cost Eddie everything.

Eddie's grin turned into more of an embarrassed grimace. "Yes, that one. I know we must put her on our list."

"Do you know her whereabouts?" Philip asked.

Eddie's grimace deepened. "I always know where she is, and not always because I want to."

Philip turned a laugh into a cough. The situation hadn't been and wasn't funny. "She makes certain of it?"

“The child support is very important to her,” Eddie said. “Well, same as child support in America. I told her I would do it, but I don't know....” He let the words trail off.

Philip knew what he meant. The subject of paternity for the daughter Jewel claimed was Eddie's had never been settled. Eddie had volunteered to take the DNA test, but Jewel had refused. On the chance the little girl was his, Eddie agreed to support the child until she was twenty-one.

Philip always felt there was more to Jewel's story than she was making public. She had been in a relationship with another man at the time she and Eddie had their brief affair. There was every possibility the child wasn't Eddie's, and her refusing to allow the test strengthened Philip's suspicions. Jewel's other lover wasn't famous or as wealthy as Eddie.

He shook his head at the futility. He had seen pictures of the little girl. She looked like her mother, so it was hard to know if she was Eddie's without the DNA test.

Ellen's face came into his mind. He shook off the memory. Unfortunately, not fast enough for the pain not to show.

“What?” Eddie asked.

“Nothing.”

“Come on, Sai Lo, give!”

Eddie was mocking him. He stuck his tongue out at him.

“Okay, Ellen,” he said. “I try not to think about her either, but...”

“It's hard,” Eddie sympathized.

Eddie's phone went off and he wrestled it out of his pocket. His frown immediately concerned Philip.

“Eddie, what...?”

Eddie help up his hand as he listened. “Good morning. Yes—no. How are you?” He glanced at Philip and smiled. “I was worried about you...Yes, Philip is here...I can't tell you that... You are okay? ...Be careful ...Yes, I do. You know I do...Bai bai.” He disconnected the call.

"Sorry, I had to make sure she was okay," he said.

"She?" Philip didn't think it was a good idea for Eddie to be making any phone calls or answering any.

Eddie's grin was full of mischief. "Jo."

Philip nodded, relieved. "Jo" was Eddie's pet name for his wife, Chao-Xing.

The phone went off again, causing Eddie to jump. He shrugged his shoulders, obviously not expecting another call.

"Wei? Yes, I have it ready." He disconnected. "Don. He has what he needs and is on his way here. I guess I had better get busy."

Thirty minutes later, the three men sat in the galley comparing lists. Philip was surprised to find fourteen women on Eddie's list that weren't on Don's. The information appeared to surprise Don as well.

"Most of those names I knew before I met you," Eddie said to Don. "The others I have kept secret from everyone, until now. They didn't last but a short time." His face had acquired a touch of pink as he read through the names. "I didn't realize there were this many." He looked at Philip and Don. "I feel shamed."

"As you should," Don said. "But what's done is done. We need to concentrate on our current problem and put all regrets aside." He turned to Philip. "Asian investigators will have better chances of finding the Asian women. Some of these women are Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese." He frowned at Eddie, his disapproval evident. "A few of these women are European, and a couple are American. I recognize the names. However, I don't think it wise for you and Eddie to be globe hopping at this time trying to locate them."

"Neither do I," Philip said. "I can have my assistant, Darla, check out the American women."

"I know some investigators in London and Paris," Don said. "They can research the European aspect. I know I hired you to investigate the incidents that have been occurring, but I think I like

it better to have you watching over Eddie. His team is very protective, but they have much to do and can't always be with him. New eyes see differently."

"Have they asked where Eddie is?"

Don rolled his eyes. "Oh yes. My phone does not stop. They are going ahead with filming." He held up his hand to stop Eddie from interrupting. "Your scenes will be filmed later. Right now, there is plenty to do that doesn't require your presence. I know you want to be there anyway, but you'll have to endure this time." He gave Eddie's hand a paternal pat. "It won't be long. I know this..." he held up the list, "will be a great help."

He stood and started to leave, pausing at the door. "I am starting with Jewel." Again, he had to stop Eddie's protest. "She has been calling the office persistently for several days. I don't know what she wants because, as you know, I refuse to speak with her. However, I do want to know where she is and what she has been up to."

Philip walked Don to the launch. The older man looked worried.

"This entire matter has grown out of hand," Don said. "Perhaps I should have left it to the authorities and not involved you. I had no idea."

"I'm glad you called," Philip said. "I would have seen on the news and probably have come anyway."

"Eddie is already restless," Don said. "Watch him closely. Don't let him escape you."

"Don't worry. He won't get far if he does. I'll make certain of that."

Don smiled and touched his arm. "Don't be too sure. Eddie knows Hong Kong. You don't. If he gets out of your sight, finding him will be much harder than you think." He stepped into the launch. "If he should get away from you, use all resources available to you to locate him."

“You mean the Team members,” Philip said. “I hope it never comes to that, because I get the distinct feeling they aren't all that pleased to have me here.”

Don nodded. “Unfortunately, that is my fault. I am the one who requested you to come. They know Eddie better than anyone. They would know where he might go. Like it or not, they are not in charge. If needed, I will remind them.”

Chapter Sixteen

Eddie had fixed a lunch of sandwiches and iced tea.

"I was hungry," he said. "And I know you like your tea cold."

Philip sat down at the table and picked up a sandwich. "At home, sometimes, but hot tea is fine. You don't have to go to any trouble on my account." He bit into his sandwich and tasted the tang of sweet and sour just before the heat hit his palate. He took a big gulp of his tea. "What is this? No, don't tell me. I don't want to know."

Eddie laughed. "Don't worry. It's turkey. The sauce is a special gourmet mix. I just added a little Chinese mustard."

Philip had to clear his throat a couple of times before he could speak. His eyes were watering as he drank more of his tea. "What do you think about what Don said?"

Eddie shrugged. "We wait and see. I hate waiting, but I cannot think only of myself. I feel caged and I don't like it." He grinned. "At least my stomach has settled."

His phone rang. He frowned at it. Philip answered.

"Yeah?"

"I know where you are, lizard." The caller was female. "You can't hide from me."

Her voice was deepened, raspy, almost a harsh whisper in what seemed to Philip to be either an attempt to disguise it or an attempt to sound menacing.

Philip was in no mood to play games and had no intention of letting this person get away with her intimidation. "Try and find me, lady."

There was hesitation on the other end of the line. He'd caught her off guard. She was expecting Eddie to answer.

"Who are you?" Her question was sharp and demanding.

Philip felt satisfaction as she forgot to lower her voice. She'd spoken normally and he would know the voice again.

"That's what I was about to ask you, darlin', 'cos I think you have the wrong number."

There was a long pause. He could hear her breathing.

"This—this is—I know his number." Her words were shaky.

Philip heard her take a deep breath. When she spoke again, she was back in control.

"You tell him for me, pig. I'm coming for him."

"Lady, you even try, and I'll put you away. Trust me." He disconnected the call before she could say anything more.

Philip had placed the call on speaker so Eddie could hear what was said. "Did you recognize that voice?"

Eddie shook his head and looked completely confused. "No, it wasn't ---uhm, real---like she trying to sound funny." He waved his hands as if erasing his words. "No. No, that not what I trying to say."

"Like she's trying to disguise her voice?" Philip asked.

"Yes, that. I don't recognize her voice, don't understand how she know where I am."

"Calm down." Philip held up the phone. "She doesn't know where you are. She only knows your cell phone number, which is a mystery to begin with. She suspects you have your phone with you, but she has no idea where you are."

As he assured Eddie of this, he didn't feel one hundred percent convinced himself. Just how did this woman have Eddie's cell number which was private?

"Unless this person has access to high tech equipment or high security information, tracking your phone would be impossible."

"Unless she is good at computer," Eddie said. "What they called them?"

"Hackers. I don't think so. But she may know someone, have an accomplice." Philip ran a hand through his hair. He was tired.

"Maybe she follow, or have someone follow," Eddie suggested.

Philip let his annoyance slip. "Are you trying to call trouble down on your head?"

Eddie's face turned red at the rebuke. "No."

"Then try to think positive. We won't rule out any possibility, but if she knows anything it's not because of your phone."

Eddie picked up the cell phone and looked at it a long minute, then snapped the back off. "Maybe she's tracking us."

Philip snatched the phone away and put the back in place. "People don't bug phones like that anymore. They can use GPS to track a phone." He pulled up the menu, found the settings, and disconnected Eddie's GPS signal. "This is shutting the barn door after the horse has run off, but if she was by chance using the GPS to track you, she can't now." He handed the phone back to Eddie.

Eddie stood and went up on deck. Philip followed. They stood by the rail looking out at the city. Philip noticed Eddie's knuckles were clenched tight.

"Are you trying to strangle the yacht or are you seasick again?"

Eddie laughed and relaxed his fingers. "A little queasy. But I watch the horizon. I be okay."

He was tired and upset. Philip could tell by his speech pattern.

Eddie slapped the rail so hard Philip winced. He knew that had to hurt.

"I want to be filming," Eddie said. "I can't stan' this. I have much to do."

The longing to be back at work was visible in Eddie's eyes. Philip could empathize.

He felt just as frustrated, didn't like waiting or being uncertain, or not knowing what exactly was going on and why.

Eddie suddenly whirled and ran, vaulting over the side of the yacht. He would have made his escape if Philip hadn't been watching closely, expecting him to do something rash. He grabbed Eddie by the wrist and was nearly pulled over the side with him, hearing a thump and an agonized "aagghh!" as Eddie swung by his arm into the outer hull. Philip braced his knees and held on.

"Let me go!" Eddie's voice was strained from tension and pain as he dangled from Phillip's grasp.

"When I get you back on deck." Philip's teeth were clenched as he pulled against Eddie's weight.

"You—pull my arm—off," Eddie yelled, struggling to loose his arm from Philip's determined iron grip.

"If—I—have—to." Philip threw all his strength into one mighty heave, yanking Eddie over the rail like a freshly landed eel. Both men ended in a heap on the deck.

"Oomph!" Eddie hit the deck chest first, the wind knocked out of him.

Knowing the fight wasn't out of Eddie yet, Philip scrambled to his knees. Eddie rolled onto his back and shoved against the deck with his shoulders, landed on his feet, and tried to dodge Philip who tackled him around the knees. He went onto his side and kicked. Philip rolled out of the way. The kick missed. Philip grabbed an ankle and held on as Eddie tried to crawl out of reach. He kicked again and this time, Philip twisted hard. Eddie yelped.

"Quit kicking me or so help me, I'll put you in a wheelchair. I promised Don I'd keep you here and I will even if I have to hog tie you to do it."

Eddie quit struggling and lay still, panting.

Winded, Philip kept hold of the ankle. "Are you going to be quiet?"

Eddie was also breathing hard from the exertion. "Yes."

Cautiously, Philip let go but stayed ready to grab Eddie again. Between gulps of air, he asked, "Would you please tell me— what that was all about?"

Eddie remained on his back staring up at the sky. "I don't know. I jus'—want out of here."

Philip sat up, drew his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around them. "Okay. We'll have the captain take us to the other side of Hong Kong. We'll leave the yacht and go underground. We won't tell anyone where, not even Don. We'll call him to let him know we're okay. You grew up in this city. I'm sure you know of places even Don would never think of."

Eddie sat up and stared at him. Philip shrugged. "It's the best I can do, buddy."

He saw a light come into Eddie's eyes as a grin spread across his face.

"I know where," Eddie announced. "No one would look there."

Philip climbed to his feet and held out a hand to help Eddie up.

"Let's go then."

Chapter Seventeen

Philip followed Eddie through a place he would never have expected to exist. The dusty, narrow streets were lined with gray, weathered, tumbling buildings, shops, vendor booths, and homes. Shoeless, and sometimes pantless children ran in and out among the leaning market stalls. Dogs, cats, and other street animals scurried along with them. Shadowed pale, thin faces of the phantoms living in a world untouched by the sun brought flashbacks to Philip of the dark alleys and abandoned warehouses where he had dwelt in limbo for five long terrible years he wished he could erase from his memory.

After leaving the yacht, Eddie led Philip through a labyrinth of alleys and side streets until they reached this strange place where time seemed to have stopped. Eddie's first stop was at a Mission store tucked in a corner of the docks. There, he and Philip had traded their good clothes for the worn and faded second-hand clothing.

"We will blend in now," Eddie said.

Philip smiled at the threadbare baggy black pants Eddie had chosen for himself. He had replaced his dress shirt with an old, worn, dingy white t-shirt, and his good shoes for a pair of cloth slippers.

"Well, you certainly do," Philip said. "You look like most of the men here." He tugged at his own faded blue t-shirt that was a bit too tight around his neck. The denim jeans he'd chosen were old, torn at the knees, and dangerously thin in the rear. His shoes were also cloth slippers.

Eddie stopped at a food vendor close to the Mission shop.

"The food will be plain, but hot and filling," he said.

The vendor was a tiny bent old man whose face was hidden beneath a straw hat. He kept his head lowered as his spidery fingers quickly filled their order of rice and buns. Philip noticed the

strange man glance surreptitiously at Eddie, then duck his gaze again as soon as he saw Philip watching. He handed Eddie the cartons of food and accepted payment that disappeared into his hand like a magician doing a coin trick.

"That was weird," Philip said as he and Eddie turned from the vendor. "He acted like he knew you."

Eddie shook his head. "No. These people are not trusting. And that wasn't a 'he'."

"She?" Philip was astonished. He glanced over his shoulder for another look, but the vendor had mysteriously vanished. Philip stopped and stared at the space where the stall had been. "It's gone."

Eddie turned for a look. "It's late. The old woman was probably in a hurry to get home."

Eddie continued down the dusty street, head down, avoiding eye contact with the cramped crowd of people until he reached a dilapidated old clapboard building with a narrow wooden staircase struggling to stay in one piece. Cautiously, Philip followed Eddie up the stairs to an aged gray wooden door with rusted hinges and a rusted lock. Eddie took a key from his wallet and turned the lock, which Philip was surprised to see opened with little trouble. He stepped through the door into a large, empty, bare room. The air was stale and damp, with the distinct smell of long disuse. The warped, dust covered wooden floor creaked ominously as Philip crossed to the single small window facing the street.

"Welcome to my home," Eddie said as he closed and locked the door.

Philip turned. "Home?"

Eddie's expression was melancholy. He looked as exhausted as Philip felt.

"My first home of my own. Ba ba buy it when I'm seventeen and had to leave school. I live here for long time, no furniture except what I can make. I sold it for food. I keep this place for a reminder to be grateful I had a home when others didn't."

He joined Philip at the window. "I keep it to remind me where I come from."

Philip nodded. The room was cold and damp. Thoughts of a frightened, confused teenage boy, alone, uneducated, not knowing where his life was headed, afraid of where it would take him caused chills to run through Philip's veins. He studied Eddie's face, lined with evidence of the life he had fought and struggled to live. As in Eddie, there was anger, fear, pain, grief, strength, courage, determination, and overwhelming loneliness in the room.

Eddie crossed to the middle of the room and sank cross-legged on the floor. Philip joined him.

"It will be cold tonight," Eddie said. "Tomorrow, we'll go find blankets and more food. Bathroom, down the stairs, turn right, into what looks like a shed. No water here. Tomorrow we'll get what we need."

The shadows grew as the light outside faded. The two men sat in silence and ate their simple meal. The food tasted strange to Philip, but Eddie didn't seem to notice.

Eddie was right. The air was growing colder. Without blankets, the clothes they wore weren't going to keep them very warm. Philip was beginning to think this wasn't such a good idea. It wouldn't help if they both came down with colds.

"Time for us to get some sleep," Eddie said. He curled onto his side, using his shirt as a pillow and closed his eyes.

Philip studied his friend. "Are you okay? You look pale."

"Tired," Eddie said. "Too much going on." His words faded into silence.

Philip did his best to ignore the growing need to visit the shed. He felt slightly nauseated. His stomach grumbled and roiled, rejecting the food he'd eaten. He waited as long as he dared.

Unable to wait any longer, he carefully made his way to the door and down the rickety stairs to the unlit street. He peered into the dark until he could make out the dilapidated shed that visibly leaned to the right. The more he stared at it, the less inclined he felt

to go inside, afraid that the slightest movement might bring the shed down on him. An alley barely wide enough for him to move through and pitch black inside ran between Eddie's building and the equally dilapidated building next to it. He could go into the alley and relieve himself, but that had as much attraction as going into the shed.

Making a decision, he made his way to the shed, and saying a short prayer that it would stay upright, he pulled open the flimsy cracked, flaking, splintered door. There was no light inside, no light outside. With the door open, he could barely make out the facilities which consisted of two deep black holes cut into the ground. Closing the door would leave him completely sightless, so he took his bearings, let the door close. When he reemerged a few minutes later, he heaved a sigh of relief that nothing had been lurking in the darkness beneath him while he took care of his business. Someone had kindly left a magazine handy. Philip desperately wished for a place to wash his hands. Looking around the clutter in the street, he noticed a small wooden basin near the door to the shed. A white rag dangled from a nail in the wall. He moved to the basin, relieved to find water, and perched on the edge of the basin, a small piece of soap. The rag must be used as a towel.

After washing his hands, he straightened and felt a wave of dizziness. He grabbed the side of the shed to steady himself and took a deep breath. The unpleasant order of human waste nearly overpowered him, and he turned quickly to heave his supper into a dark corner. When he turned around, he thought he caught a glimpse of a shadow duck around the corner of the second building, but it could have been his imagination.

He walked unsteadily through the alley, wincing at a growing headache. He climbed the rickety stairs, his feet feeling as if they were weighted. Something from his meal definitely didn't agree with him.

Back in the room, he found Eddie breathing evenly, sound asleep. Philip watched him, amazed and impressed that the older

man could step so easily back into his beginnings, and that the food hadn't seemed to affect him. Or had it? Eddie had looked pale earlier. Maybe his constitution was stronger and he would fight off the ill effects better. Sleep was the best cure.

Philip stretched out on his back, felt the bite of the rough wood of the floor dig into his back. Using his hands to pillow his head, he stared at the beams crisscrossing the low ceiling. His eyes had become used to the dark, and in the shadows above he could make out feathery cobwebs floating in the currents of cold air.

The dull ache developing behind his eyes continued to grow steadily. He felt his eyes drifting closed. The hard floor didn't help the pain. The room seemed to tilt and spin slightly. He was exhausted. He needed sleep, still he fought against it, not really certain why, until his body overpowered his mind.

"Philip. Philip, can you hear me?"

Philip looked at the bay, at the restless waves, the snow falling around him. He looked down at his hands, turned blue with cold. He couldn't feel them, couldn't feel anything as the icy wind bore into his soul. With effort, he turned. Behind him, the old warehouse stood stark and abandoned. Everything was gone, his home, his life—or had it all been an illusion? Had he imagined, in that one terrible night standing on the edge of the pier staring into the bay that his life had changed? Had he taken that final step and only imagined what his life could have been, only to return to the reality of that night? Or was this the illusion?

A wrenching pain in the pit of his stomach took away his breath. He clutched at his abdomen. The pounding in his temples threatened to split his head open. He was cold—so cold.

"Philip. Philip, can you hear me?"

He moaned and fought his way through the chaos. In the distance, he could see a bright light, or maybe he felt the heat from it, he wasn't sure. What was happening? He sat up, opening his eyes. He wasn't on the pier. He was in a metal bed in a brightly lit

room. The air smelled faintly antiseptic. He looked wildly around, until his gaze fell on an Asian man wearing a white coat.

There was a name tag on the coat, and a stethoscope around the man's neck. A doctor?

"Where—where am I?" Philip asked.

The doctor, whose name tag read "Albert Ng", placed a gentle hand on Philip's arm.

"You'll be fine, young man. You had us worried. You've been very ill."

Philip stared at the doctor, who appeared to be barely older than him. "What's going on? Where am I? How did I get here?" He turned his head slowly. He and the doctor weren't the only ones in the room.

Don stood next to the bed, his face haggard and lined with worry. An older gentleman with thick white hair and wearing a Greek fisherman's cap stood at the foot of the bed. Philip recognized Eddie's elderly father who had taken the name of Edward, after the pirate Edward Teach, otherwise known as Blackbeard. Eddie had told Philip once Mr. Tseung chose this name due to his love of old pirate movies. Next to him stood a younger man who looked for all the world like Eddie at a much younger age. Philip remembered Eddie called the boy "Jai", which meant "son", but didn't know if that was his real name or just what Eddie called him.

"What's going on?" he asked again, a feeling of foreboding in his gut.

"That's what we have been wondering," Don said. "When the police found you, we..."

"Found me?" Philip asked, snapping his head around to stare at Don. "What—what do you mean?" The last thing he remembered was being with Eddie at the old apartment, Eddie curled up on the floor asleep, and he—he had felt sick, dizzy, and had fallen, he thought, asleep.

"They found you one night wandering through a backstreet, sick with a high fever and delirious," Don said.

"No." Philip shook his head. "No, that's not right."

"We feared SARS," Doctor Ng said. "Fortunately, that turned out not to be so. You have been thoroughly tested and we found no illness. It has had us quite baffled."

Philip only half heard. He was thinking about being at the apartment, about feeling unwell, about... "Eddie! Where is Eddie? Is he alright? Was he sick, too?" He threw the stiff white sheet covering him to one side and tried to leave the bed.

The doctor grabbed him by the shoulders and settled him back. "You are still too weak to leave your bed. You need rest."

Philip pushed Doctor Ng's hands away.

"Where is he?" He turned to Don. "Tell me."

"That, my boy, is what we were hoping you could tell us," Don said.

Chapter Eighteen

"What?" Philip had no idea what had happened or how he'd come to be in a hospital. Tell them? Tell them what?

"Do you remember where you and Eddie went, after you left the yacht?" Don asked.

Philip stole a glance at the older and younger Tseung. Their silence made him nervous.

"Eddie was restless. He wanted to get away from the isolation of the yacht. We asked the captain to take us to the other side of Hong Kong where we spent last night in Eddie's old apartment."

"Last night?" Don sounded skeptical.

"Right." Philip answered cautiously. He had a sinking feeling and was almost afraid of what Don would say next.

"My dear boy," Don said. "As the doctor told you, you have been very ill. The Police found you only a week ago. You and Eddie have been missing for a month."

Philip clutched at the sheet and shook his head. He felt confused and more than a little frightened. "No. That's not possible. We left the yacht last night. You knew we were there, on the yacht."

"I called to check on you," Don said. "The captain told me the two of you had left the yacht. He had no idea where you were going as Eddie hadn't told him. I waited for a call. When none came within the next two days, I began to worry, what with all the other incidents that had happened. The captain told me where he dropped you and Eddie. I checked the area, including the old apartment. No one remembered seeing you. I called everyone I could think of, but no one had heard from either of you. After three days, I contacted the police. Eddie would not go so long without letting someone know he was safe."

Philip searched his memory, trying to find some explanation. They had been seen, but maybe those who lived in that part of the city were reticent about talking with authorities.

"We scoured all of Hong Kong for you," Don said. "It was just chance you were found wandering through a crowded street late at night. You stumbled into the street and fell in front of a taxi. He called the police who thought, at first, that you were drunk. You were incoherent and burning up with fever. They brought you to the hospital."

"Your fever was dangerously high," Doctor Ng said. "The authorities were sure you had SARS and quarantined you until all the tests were completed and came back negative. We tested you for other serious diseases as well. We had to make sure."

"The police backtracked your footsteps," Don said. "Eddie was nowhere to be found. All of Asia has been highly concerned and is searching. The world is holding its breath for news."

Philip listened with growing disbelief. A month? It couldn't be! The whole story was preposterous. He and Eddie had gone to the old apartment to get some sleep and make plans for where they should go and what they should do. How had he become so ill and separated from Eddie? Had someone found them? They couldn't have, not that fast.

His gaze fell on Edward's craggy face. The old man said nothing, his eyes never leaving Philip, as if trying to probe deep into Philip's psyche.

Philip's stomach twisted into knots, churning bile into his throat. "Can I have some water?"

Dr. Ng took the plastic pitcher of water on the stand next to the bed and filled a small cup, then handed it to his patient.

The water did nothing to quench the burning. The situation was a nightmare that didn't seem to end. Philip knew they had all trusted him and he had failed.

"I think Mr. Chandler should rest," Doctor Ng said. "The shock has been too much for him."

Don agreed. "I'll return tomorrow. Perhaps Philip will remember something now that he's awake." He started for the door and spoke to the older man. "Coming?"

Jai glanced at his grandfather, who hadn't moved.

"Go."

The younger man hesitated then nodded and left the room with Don, leaving Philip to face Eddie's father alone. As with Jai, he'd never met the man, but Eddie had told him a lot about him.

"My son," Edward Tseung said, his voice subdued and emotionless, "spoke much about you. He considers you a close and loyal friend. He has many friends but few who he considers this way. He believed in you when you protected him and my grandson. He highly regards you. I also believe in you. Wherever he is, you will find him and bring him safely home to us."

It wasn't a question, more of a command. He left the room abruptly, leaving Philip reeling from his words. Edward's words repeated themselves over and over in his mind.

"You will find him."

Find him? How could he find him when he didn't even know where or how he'd lost him?

Chapter Nineteen

Philip paced the bedroom of the hotel suite Don arranged for him after his release from the hospital.

The uproar over Eddie's disappearance had gained momentum when the media discovered his supposed 'bodyguard' had turned up without him. Every news source from all over the world clamored for an interview or information. Now it was Philip who needed guarding.

Don had turned off all phones except his own private cell phone, screening his calls closely, speaking only to Eddie's family or team members.

The members of Eddie's formidable Team had made it clear they were angry and blamed him for Eddie's disappearance. They refused to help guard him despite Don's assurance the disappearance wasn't Philip's fault.

Try as he might, in the two weeks since his release from the hospital, Philip couldn't remember anything beyond falling asleep in the old apartment. It drove him to distraction, knowing in that black void lay the key to where Eddie might be.

The outer doorbell chimed. Philip went to his bedroom door and opened it just enough to hear the voices. One of the voices he recognized as Don. The visitor was a woman.

"Have you heard anything?" The woman sounded distressed.

"I'm afraid not, Jo," Don said. "Please sit."

Philip heard footsteps cross the couch in the center of the room. The visitor was Jo, Eddie's wife, the last person he wanted to face.

"I can't believe this is happening," she said. "No word, nothing. The police have decided it's not a kidnapping, or we would have heard from the kidnappers by now." There was a pause. "Has he said anything?"

Philip knew she meant him. He sighed heavily and leaned his forehead against the cool grain of the door.

"Philip knows nothing," Don said. "His memory has not returned. Believe me, he is as worried as anyone."

"Is he?" Jo didn't sound convinced. "Or is he saying that hoping we will believe him?"

"Jo, I believe him," Don said. "He was in bad shape when he was found. The fever was so high, he's lucky he remembers anything at all."

The doorbell chimed again. Philip straightened to listen. This time he heard a male voice, one that sounded vaguely familiar.

"Mr. Tsang, Mrs. Tseung."

Philip strained to hear the voice more clearly.

"Inspector Yiu." Don sounded surprised.

Philip remembered the name of the Inspector to whom he, Eddie, and Don had earlier spoken after the fire and the bombing. The man was short, thin, and, in Philip's opinion, weasel-like in appearance; long sharp nose which he had a peculiar habit of twitching as if scenting something out, and small dark piercing eyes that had been far from friendly any time they'd had to speak with him. As a matter-of-fact, Inspector Yiu seemed to always treat Eddie as if the incidents had been his fault instead of treating him as the victim.

"I am now in charge of this investigation," Inspector Yiu said. "I must speak with young Mr. Chandler. I take it he is still here with you?"

Philip shifted his position in order to have a better view of the men. Don looked puzzled, and a little suspicious. The Inspector stared at him coldly, without any show of emotion. That couldn't be good.

"Yes," Don said, answering the question. "Mr. Chandler is here. He is resting, per his doctor's orders, still somewhat unsteady from his recent illness."

"You will call him out now," Inspector Yiu said.

Don looked taken aback. "You have news?"

What Philip could only call a sneer crossed the Inspector's thin lips.

"I am afraid I have." He reached into a paper bag that he was carrying and pulled what looked to be cloth from it. He held it out for Don and Jo to see. "Do either of you recognize this?"

Jo's face went white and she swayed unsteadily. Don placed a protective arm around her.

From where he stood, Philip couldn't see clearly what it was the Inspector held.

"Jo, what is it?" Don asked.

Her voice was small, almost a whisper as she answered. "Eddie's favorite shirt. I bought it for him years ago and he wore it often because he liked the color."

Don turned to the Inspector. "I don't understand. Where did you get it?"

The look on the Inspector's face was triumphant as he stuffed the shirt back into what must have been an evidence bag.

"It was found this morning washed up on the beach. It was covering the torso of a man."

"Torso?" Don asked.

"Yes, the headless, legless, armless torso of an Asian male."

Jo wailed as her knees gave way. Don lowered her gently to the floor, his face as ashen and horrified as hers.

"Eddie?"

"We aren't certain," Inspector Yiu said. "But the area it was found is near where Mr. Tseung and Mr. Chandler were last seen. The torso is the right build, and it is wearing Mr. Tseung's clothing."

Philip felt his own knees go weak. He grasped the wall to stay on his feet. His stomach roiled and he covered his mouth to prevent himself from retching. This was wrong. This was all wrong. It couldn't be Eddie. It wasn't possible.

“Our lab is performing DNA testing now,” Inspector Yiu was saying. “It will be a few days before we know for certain if the remains are indeed those of Mr. Tseung. I must speak with Mr. Chandler. He was the last person known to have seen Mr. Tseung alive.”

“He doesn't remember anything,” Don said.

“So he says,” Inspector Yiu said. “I have been checking into your young friend's background. It appears he has been through much in the past seven years, and before that, he was the son-in-law to a powerful man sent to prison for criminal activities, sent by none other than Mr. Chandler. This same father-in-law was later murdered and the only person present was Mr. Chandler.”

“I know about that,” Don said, sounding testy. “The man of whom you speak was a criminal, as you said. It was Philip's testimony, which he gave at great loss to himself, that put his father-in-law in prison, where the man belonged. The subsequent murder following Philip's father-in-law's release was proven beyond a doubt to be the work of his own daughter.”

“Please,” Inspector Yiu said. “I have recently learned that Mr. Chandler suffered some type of emotional upheaval in his life that he has refused to speak to anyone about. The changes in his behavior have been noted by all his friends and family and they have expressed their concern for his welfare. There is a possibility, due to this upheaval, that Mr. Chandler has suffered a breakdown of some type. His behavior to date while he has been in Hong Kong seems to bear witness to this. We have to wonder if he knows more about the fire and bombing that he has indicated.”

“What are you saying?” Jo asked.

Philip wanted to ask the same thing. He wanted to confront the Inspector, but at the moment, decided that wouldn't be in his best interest.

“It is possible that Mr. Chandler is responsible for your husband's disappearance,” the Inspector said. “And should this

torso turn out to be that of Eddie Tseung, it may be that Mr. Chandler is responsible for his murder.”

Philip backed away from the door in disbelief, unable to assimilate the Inspector's words. This man had twisted everything, including Philip's frame of mind and the reason for coming to Hong Kong.

No. No this wasn't possible. It couldn't be happening again. Everything was too convenient, his friendship with Eddie was too convenient. Whoever the real culprit was had taken that friendship to shift the suspicion to him and make him look like a monster.

Flashes of memory burned in his mind of a frigid winter night, rain, and lightning, and the dead body of his former father-in-law lying in a pool of blood and brain matter.

He turned to the sliding glass doors leading from his twelfth story bedroom onto a small balcony. He went out and looked down. Each room on every floor had a balcony. He estimated a twelve foot drop between each. If he was careful, he might be able to make it all the way to the ground.

He could hear Don arguing with Inspector Yiu. There wasn't much time before the Inspector would insist on talking to him. He had a feeling once the Inspector had him there would be no way to get away from him. He had to do something now if he was to find out what really happened to Eddie.

Chapter Twenty

Philip wasn't the acrobat that Eddie was, but the escape was his only option. He grabbed his jacket, lowered himself full length from the bars of the balcony railing, closed his eyes, and taking a deep breath for a second, let go. He landed with a soft thump on the next balcony, his knees knocking from fright.

Halfway down the side of the building, Philip heard the shout of surprise from above. The Inspector had discovered him gone. Praying anyone looking down wouldn't see him in the dark, he forced himself to keep going until he landed on all fours on the soft ground of the hotel yard.

Philip took a moment to calm his breathing then slipped into the shadows of the thick hedges surrounding the building. Hidden from sight, he heard running footsteps and saw the hurrying figures of the Inspector and his men as they left the hotel. They raced to their cars, Inspector Yiu shouting orders. The Inspector expected Philip to run instead of staying put. That made things easier.

Philip leaned wearily against the wall behind the bushes where he had taken refuge. If he kept to the shadows and dark places, the chances of not being seen were greater. The only thing he could think to do and knew he had to do, was to find Eddie. He refused to believe that the partial body found on the beach was Eddie, couldn't have been because Eddie wasn't wearing his own clothes at the old apartment. He and Eddie had exchanged their clothes at the thrift shop on the dock.

Slowly pushing away from the wall, Philip slid into the night in the direction of Old Hong Kong.

He eased carefully along the dark hall to the apartment door. Using a thin wire, he picked up off the street, he jimmied the lock until he heard it click. Cautiously, he pushed the door just

enough to slip his slim body through. He waited until his eyes adjusted to the darkness.

The room was as he'd last seen it. He crossed to where he and Eddie had slept, hoping for something to trigger his memory.

"What happened here?" he asked himself out loud.

"What did you do to him?"

Philip whirled around surprised by the voice behind him.

"What did you do to Dad?" Jai stepped out of the shadows, his almond-shaped eyes filled with anger. Dressed entirely in black, he'd been invisible in the dark of the apartment.

Philip shook off his surprise, trying to find words to convince Jai of his innocence.

"You killed him!" Jai lunged toward him.

Philip blocked the attack, snagging Jai's arm and twisting it behind his back. He pressed his face close to Jai's ear. "No—I—didn't!"

Jai struggled, using what skills he possessed to try and break Philip's hold, but he wasn't a fighter. He was stronger than he looked. Philip tightened his grip.

"If you stop struggling and listen, I'll let go."

"I'll kill you," Jai said. His anguish was audible.

"I—didn't—kill—your—father." Philip fought to hold him. "I promise you, I didn't."

Jai stopped squirming. "How do you know? You don't remember, or so you claim."

"I don't remember," Philip said. "But I know I didn't kill him. And I'm almost sure that body isn't his."

Jai relaxed. "Why?"

"Because I know something the police don't," Philip said. Cautiously he released his hold on Jai.

Jai turned to face him, rubbing his shoulder, his eyes guarded.

"Eddie wasn't wearing that shirt," Philip said. "When we left that yacht to come here, Eddie thought it best to remain

inconspicuous. We went to the Mission store and exchanged the clothes we were wearing. The last time I saw Eddie, he was wearing old clothes from the Mission store."

"How do I know you're not lying?" Jai asked.

Philip felt as if someone had pulled a plug and drained all his energy. He desperately wanted to sit down.

"You don't, but it's the truth."

He saw the fight go out of Jai. The younger man slumped to the floor and buried his face in his hands. His shoulders visibly quaked from his silent sobs. Philip sank down next to him.

"I don't understand," Jai said, his voice muffled. "What's happening? Where's my dad?"

Jai's grief tore into Philip's heart. He remembered sitting on the Baytown dock that fateful winter night, crying the same words, lost and alone, ready to die. If Captain Anthony Ferrone hadn't found him when he did, he doubted he would have made it through that night.

"I wish—I thought—coming here would jog something loose," Philip said.

Jai lifted his tear streaked face.

"It didn't work," Philip said. "It's just not here." He looked into Jai's eyes. "Help me. I can't give up. I have to remember."

Chapter Twenty-One

"Prove to me you're telling the truth," Jai said.

Philip felt total defeat. "I can't prove that to you."

"If what you say is true, then some of the clothes you say you exchanged will still be at the Mission store won't they?" Jai asked.

Philip hadn't considered that. "Maybe. We can see."

"Then we'll go," Jai said. "If the clothes are there, then I'll know you're telling the truth."

It wasn't much, but it was more than nothing.

The sound of hurrying feet and voices made them pause. Philip recognized one of the voices.

"Police. They can't find me here." He looked around the small apartment. "There's nowhere to hide."

Jai point to a wide beam that crossed the ceiling. "There's space above wide enough for someone to lay, as long as you don't move."

Philip glanced at the door, nodded, and let Jai give him a hand up to the beam. He stretched his full length along the beam and lay still.

The door rattled. Jai opened it, surprising Inspector Yiu who had been attempting to pick the lock. The Inspector stumbled slightly. Philip bit his lip to keep from laughing.

"Young Tseung, what are you doing here?" Inspector Yiu asked.

Jai stared at the Inspector. "I might ask you the same thing? I have a right to be here. It is my father's property and the last place he was seen. I came to see if I could find a clue to where he is."

The Inspector looked annoyed. "It is our job to find the truth."

"And mine to sit and do nothing," Jai said, "is that it?"

Philip could hear the belligerence in Jai's question.

"You are too full of grief and anger," Inspector Yiu said sternly. "I can't allow you to interfere in the investigation. You must go home to your mother. She needs you."

Philip buried his face against the wood of the beam. Yiu was an idiot. Jai wasn't a child to be ordered home. If Yiu wished cooperation, he would have to treat the young man as an adult.

"She needs my dad," Jai said. "I need my dad, and I won't stop looking until I find him."

Inspector Yiu's expression turned wary. "You know what has been discovered?"

"The body with my dad's shirt? Yeah, I know," Jai said.

Philip caught his breath. He prayed Jai wouldn't tell the Inspector about the change of clothes. The Inspector would want to know how he knew, and any clothing left at the Mission store might conveniently disappear if the Inspector found it first.

"You don't believe the body is your father?" Inspector Yiu asked.

"Would you?" Jai asked.

"Your mother identified the shirt as belonging to your father," Inspector Yiu said.

"That doesn't mean it's him," Jai said. "Dad's things are always disappearing, taken by fans, or misplaced by him. He could have left the shirt at the set or in his car. There is no proof he was wearing it."

"The Captain of the yacht said Mr. Tseung was wearing that shirt," Inspector Yiu said.

"My father has more than one red shirt," Jai said. "There is no clear evidence that the body is Dad. Until there is, I intend to keep looking."

Philip felt a sense of pride for Jai. The young man was standing up for himself. His arguments were valid and logical. Inspector Yiu didn't seem to be able to argue. The tone of his voice became more agreeable.

"We are still waiting on the DNA test," Inspector Yiu said. "I hope you are right, young Jai. Until we do know, please return to your mother."

Philip knew Jai had little choice than to leave the apartment, but he could see Jai didn't want to. They both knew if the police searched, they might discover Philip's hiding place. Philip had a deep feeling that if that happened, Inspector Yiu, convinced Philip was a murderer, would stop searching for the real killer and place the blame solely on Philip. He didn't think it would matter if DNA proved the torso wasn't Eddie.

Philip held his breath. Any slight move might reveal his hiding place to the men using their flashlights to search the apartment below him. From his vantage place, he was able to see everything they saw. The apartment was completely empty. Philip saw something the Inspector didn't notice. There was no dust anywhere. When he and Eddie had arrived, the room was covered in dust. Sometime after, someone had thoroughly cleaned the apartment, probably to eliminate any evidence or footprints.

After what seemed an eternity, Inspector Yiu ordered his men out. As Philip watched them leave, he saw the Inspector pause at the door for a last look around. For a second, his eyes traveled toward the ceiling. Philip thought he saw speculation on the Inspector's face and feared the man would call for his men to return, but after a long moment, the Inspector seemed to change his mind. He left and Philip let out a breath of relief, leaning his head against the cold rough wood of the beam, only to jerk his head up at the sound of the door softly opening.

"Philip?" Jai said.

Philip forced his breathing back to normal as he slid from the beam and dropped to the floor with a dull thud.

"The police have gone," Jai said. "All but the Inspector. He concealed himself across the street in the alley. It seems he is unconvinced you aren't here somewhere."

Philip nodded. "Just before he left, I think he suspected my hiding place. I think he considered calling his men. He must have thought he could catch me off guard if he simply left."

Jai smiled. "He might have if not for me. I went around the corner and ducked into the shadows. There is another way out."

"He may have men stationed there," Philip said.

"Maybe, if he knows about it," Jai said. "I doubt that he does. Either way, you can't stay here."

Knowing that to be true, Philip followed Jai into the hall. When they reached the stairs, Jai motioned for Philip to wait and went ahead. He peered through a door then waved for Philip to come. They stepped into a dark alley and hurried through to a narrow street behind dilapidated ancient wooden buildings to another narrow street leading to the docks. They reached the Mission store just as the sun appeared on the horizon.

They waited in the doorway of the dingy store until the owner arrived. Philip recognized him as the same small, lean British Missionary with thinning brown hair, twinkling blue eyes, and a kind smile who had waited on him and Eddie.

"I'm not used to such early customers," the Missionary said as he unlocked the shop door. "I'm Frank Keeling." He held out his hand for Jai to shake. "Now, how can I help you?"

Jai showed him Eddie's picture. "Do you know this man? Have you ever seen him?"

Frank Keeling studied the photo. "Ah yes. He's very famous." His expression turned sad. "And I know of his disappearance. So tragic, and strange. Are you related? You look like him."

"He's my father," Jai said. "Have you seen him here in the store?"

The man's smile brightened. "Yes. Not long ago. He bought some clothes and donated the ones he was wearing. I thought it odd, but he said he needed the clothing for a movie." He chuckled. "I always thought movie companies had costume departments."

He seemed to notice Philip for the first time.

"You were with him," he said.

"Yes," Philip said. A wave of relief swept over him that the man recognized him.

"Do you still have any of the clothes they exchanged?" Jai asked.

The man led them to a rack and retrieved several articles of clothing which he handed to Jai. There was no question to whom they'd belonged. They were expensive and well made. Philip recognized his shirt and jeans. Eddie's jacket bore his logo.

Jai knew his father's clothes as well. He handed them back to the Missionary.

"Thank you," he said, glancing at Philip.

Philip saw no more doubt on Jai's face. He said a silent prayer of thanks that some of the clothes were still available and that the kind Missionary had a good memory.

Frank Keeling pushed the jacket and jeans back into Jai's hands. "You keep them. They are your father's. I think it best."

"No, please," Jai said. "Keep them here, all of them, but don't sell them. We may need them later as evidence when we find Dad."

Frank seemed to understand. "I will box them and place them in a safe place. When you're ready, I will see that you have them."

Jai nodded and turned to leave. Feeling on surer ground, Philip followed him into the street.

"What now?"

Jai spoke without taking his gaze from the street. "We have to get you out of here, out of Hong Kong."

"How?" Philip asked. "By now, Yiu has every airport, train station, dock, every way out covered. The authorities will have my picture posted everywhere."

Jai turned to him. "Then what?"

“We do what we have to do,” Philip said. “We search until we find Eddie.”

He placed both hands on Jai's shoulders. “Thanks, Jai. For believing me.”

“I don't know that I do,” Jai said. “But I don't know that I don't. You were telling the truth about the clothes. Dad wasn't wearing his shirt, that's obvious. And he loses things all the time, like I told Mr. Keeling. I just want to know the truth. That's all I care about.” Philip knew he'd have to accept that for now, but he had a feeling that Jai did believe him and would help him find the truth.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Eddie was cold, colder than he ever remembered being. Weird dreams played through his mind. Floating images swirled around him, drifting in and out of his vision. There were voices, but he couldn't make out what they were saying.

He was shivering, felt sick to his stomach. He took seasick pills. He remembered taking them. Maybe he took too many. He'd done that once before by accident. But why would that affect him on dry land? Maybe coming to the apartment was a bad idea. Maybe he was ill. He had to wake Philip and tell him they had to find a warmer, safer place.

He forced his eyes open. The world swam in dizzying circles, causing the sickness in his stomach to increase. He closed his eyes against the nausea until it passed then carefully opened them.

Images danced all around him. He watched until he realized he was staring at bare walls with images projected onto them. They were images of him, and in every one he was naked or semi-nude. He realized that he was seeing every scene in every movie he had appeared in without clothing. The images were playing and replaying themselves over and over again.

He pushed to a sitting position and was suddenly aware why he was freezing. Like the images on the walls, he too was completely unclothed. The walls around him were white and the floor on which he sat was padded in pale blue. He crawled to the walls and touched them. He jerked his hands back. The walls were padded. He backed away, terrified, and scanned the room. There seemed to be no door, or if there was, it wasn't visible, perhaps hidden by the images.

Why those images? What did they mean? Where was he? How did he get here? Why was he here? Questions whirled around and around, like the images on the wall. His head throbbed, his

eyes tormented by the constant playing of the images. There was no sound, only the figures, only the scenes of him running through a marketplace, taking a shower, standing behind a car door, circling a morgue table, taking a bath, running through the streets of Hong Kong, hundreds of scenes, in all of them he was naked.

He forced himself to his feet, stumbled to the wall, and felt along it. There had to be a door.

He found it, hidden by still photographs, and backed away for a closer look. Hundreds of pictures of him nude and in near states of undress covered this wall. Some of the pictures were taken for publicity. Some of them were of him caught off guard. Some were of him unaware, private pictures taken at intimate moments.

His stomach rebelled and he threw up. A laugh filled the air around him.

“What's the matter?” The voice was female. “Can't stand the sight of yourself? You've always been so proud of that body.” The laugh again, wicked and maniacal. “Well, too bad, *Dai Goh*. Because *that* is what you are—all you are. Look close. You'll see. It's there, the answer to your questions.” The tone became ugly. “And when you see it, you'll understand why I hate you.” The laugh. “And why you're never leaving this place, ever. You love that body so much, live with it. Oh, and if it gets a little cold, don't worry. It won't last long. Eventually you won't feel a thing.”

The laugh filled the air, echoing so loud it drove him to his knees. He covered his ears, trying to drown it out as it grew louder and louder until it was all he could hear. He crumpled into a ball and hugged his knees to his chest, the concussion of sound pounding into his head until he thought he'd start screaming.

Abruptly all sound ceased, leaving him in devastating silence.

Raymond tapped his fingers impatiently as the Customs Agent checked his passport and ID. The flight to Hong Kong had

been long and his nerves were jangled from the tension of the past few days.

News of the manhunt for Philip had reached the States. All outlets, it was reported, were covered. The authorities assured the world there was no escape for the American fugitive who they made sound like a monster. Raymond knew none of the stories dredged up by the media sources were true. Philip's life had fallen into chaos and he'd lost everything, his home, his wife, his practice, his license, everything he'd worked hard for, in one moment of valiant decision. In the end, he had nearly lost his life. If not for the man standing next to Raymond, Philip would have died on the dock that one winter night. If not for Eddie Tseung, Raymond would never have known what had become of his son. Eddie's phone call a year before this fateful trip had reunited the Chandlers with their son after a long separation during which he and his wife Agatha hadn't known if their son was dead or alive.

Anthony Ferrone nodded to Raymond that they were ready to go. The customs agent smiled politely and waved them on. They hurried through the terminal to the outside curb where Tony flagged a taxi and gave the driver the address of the hotel where he'd been told Philip had been taken.

Tony went over in his mind the events leading to him and Raymond coming to Hong Kong, starting with the news of Eddie Tseung's disappearance a month before. It had been internationally reported that Eddie and his American friend, Philip Chandler, had vanished after several attempts on Eddie's life. It had been first believed the two men had gone underground to wait for the police to find the would-be killer. Then came the news Philip had been found wandering the streets of Hong Kong burning with a high fever. He'd been quarantined, feared to be a victim of the SARS virus, a viral respiratory disease believed to have started with cave dwelling Horseshoe Bats in the Yunnan Province. The virus spread

throughout China and Hong Kong between 2002 and 2003 and resulted in 774 deaths.

When the news reached Raymond's ears, he'd immediately called Tony and demanded to know why Philip was in Hong Kong in the first place. Tony had to admit that it was at his prompting.

After Philip's last case, something had gone wrong and he had withdrawn, refusing to talk to anyone. His assistant, Darla, had noticed the change as soon as he returned from the small Arkansas town where his last client's birth parents had been found. The case seemed simple, a case of an adoptee wanting to know more about her birth parents. Philip had completed the case successfully, told his client both birth parents were deceased. No one knew, and Philip wouldn't say what about that trip had disturbed him so deeply.

Darla had reported to Tony that Philip plunged into his work, not sleeping or eating, taking any case, no matter what, that came to his office. Then came the phone call from Hong Kong from Don Tsang, inviting Philip to visit Eddie. Tony was quick to urge Philip to go. He reasoned with Philip that since he and the actor were good friends, time away from Baytown might be good for him.

What Tony hadn't known at the time was the night before Philip was due to leave, Ellen, the woman in his life, had gone to him and told him she had found another man. Only after the news of Philip's and Eddie's disappearance did Ellen confess to Tony what she'd done. She told him she'd spoken with Philip on the phone after he'd reached Hong Kong and that he'd sounded strange to her. That was when Tony had called Raymond.

The taxi pulled in front of the hotel. They paid the driver and went inside. While Raymond checked them in, Tony called Philip's suite. The phone was answered by Don Tsang.

"I think you'd better come straight to the suite," Don said after Tony identified himself and told him where he was calling from. "We must talk."

Tony didn't like the sound of that. He and Raymond sent their bags to their rooms and did as Don suggested. Eddie's manager met them at the door of the suite and invited them to have a seat. They were joined by a petite woman that Don introduced as Jo Tseung.

"We have just received distressing news," Don said. "This afternoon a police Inspector name Yiu informed us a—dismembered torso wearing a shirt that Jo has identified as belonging to Eddie washed up along the coast. DNA tests are being run now against hair from Eddie's hair brush and saliva from his toothbrush. I made sure the police had these things in the beginning in case. . ."

Tony sat forward. "In case what? You thought Eddie might be killed from the start."

Don looked uncomfortable. "No, but Inspector Yiu said it was better to be prepared. Now they believe this body to be—Eddie's."

"But they aren't sure?" Tony asked.

Don shook his head. "Inspector Yiu says the tests may take some time."

"Where's my son?" Raymond asked. "We were told Philip was here in this suite. Is he alright?"

Again, Don shook his head. "He was here, until the police came. I think, perhaps, Philip feared they were going to detain him. He escaped."

"Escaped?" Tony asked.

"Detain him?" Raymond asked. "Why would he think that?"

"The Inspector said he wanted to question Philip about Eddie's disappearance," Don said. "You see, Philip and Eddie were together when—they—we lost contact with them. Both men were missing for some time. When Philip was found, he was alone. He was the last person to see Eddie..."

Tony began to see the picture and it made him angry.

“And the police think Philip did something to Eddie, is that it?” Tony asked. “Then they find part of a body and assume it's Eddie, even though there's no proof yet, and assume Philip killed him. Do I have this right?”

He looked from Don to Jo. Don's expression was filled with guilt. Jo sat in silence, her eyes never leaving Tony's face. He could see the effort she was exerting not to show her emotions.

“Is he right?” Raymond asked, a tight edge to his question.

“It seems to be what the Inspector is thinking,” Don said carefully.

Raymond came to his feet. “My son is not a killer. If he was separated from Eddie, someone separated them. And if Eddie has been killed, someone else killed him and pinned it on Philip.”

“Until the DNA test on the body is completed, we do not know what is true.” Don's expression had filled with anger of his own.

“We do know.” The men turned toward the door as Edward Tseung entered the suite. “I am Edward Tseung, Eddie's father.” He faced Raymond. “This matter is very hard on us, all of us. My son held, holds Philip in high regard. They became good friends while Eddie was in Washington. I know my son. His life makes friendship difficult. Eddie would not have let him get close if he was not a good man. I believe Philip is innocent.” He aimed a dark glance at Don. “Even if there are those who do not.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

"I never said I didn't," Don protested. "I do support Philip. I trust him. If I did not, I would never have called him."

Tony turned to him and asked sharply, "Called him?"

Don returned to his seat in the chair by the coffee table. "Yes, I called him to ask him to visit Eddie. Surely you knew this."

"I knew it," Tony said, "But you mean something else, don't you? Just what did you say to him when you called him?"

Don began to fidget. Tony, Raymond, and Edward took their own seats.

"I asked him to come—to help Eddie." Don said. "To find out who was causing the problems he'd been having on the set of his new movie."

"You mean you hired him to investigate," Raymond said.

Don picked up a cup of tea he'd been drinking, then set it back down. He was clearly nervous. "I—hired him, as a Private Investigator, to help Eddie."

Tony fought to control his rising anger. "You lured him here. You didn't invite him. Did Eddie know about this?"

Don shook his head.

"Philip knew what you were wanting?" Edward asked. He looked as angry as Tony felt.

"Of course," Don said. "I explained everything to him over the phone. I told him it would be best if Eddie thought he'd come only to visit. That way, whoever was creating the problem wouldn't be suspicious of Philip's presence and Eddie wouldn't be trying to protect him instead of the other way around."

"What type of problems?" Raymond asked.

Jo answered. "Little things at first, late night phone calls from someone who hung up as soon as Eddie answered. Items missing from the set, vandalism to the old car Eddie was using in

the movie." She paused. "And then the cat, a stray that the crew had adopted. She drank some tea meant for Eddie...and died."

"The attacks grew progressively dangerous," Edward said. "A fire, a bombing, and then Eddie and Philip vanished."

"I called the police," Don said. "Eddie said he and Philip were only going into seclusion until the police found whoever was behind all this. That's when they disappeared. Eddie was to call me to let me know they were alright and safe. When he failed to do so, I alerted the authorities."

"Philip surfaced after a long month," Jo said. "He was suffering from pneumonia and hypothermia. He was dressed in rags and without shoes—and alone."

"He can't tell us what happened," Don said. "He said he remembers nothing."

"His fever was extremely high," Jo said. "The doctor said it isn't unusual for memory to be affected by such a high fever." She shot Don a glance that made Tony wince.

"There is too much we don't know," Don said. "All we are certain of is that Philip was with Eddie and then alone. And now, this body..." He shrugged. "The Inspector—the evidence—how are we to know? Why did Philip run if he truly doesn't know what happened?"

Raymond jumped to his feet again to face Don down. "Maybe because of thinking like this Inspector and you. Obviously, you don't believe Philip, despite what you said. Well, I know my son. He's not a killer, and he has no reason to hurt Eddie."

"If he is mentally unstable..." Don said.

"Who said he was?" Tony asked. He wanted to applaud Raymond for speaking out. He leaned forward and glared at Don. "Of the two of them, Eddie is far more dangerous, believe me. He's had to be. He's a fighter, a life survivor. Philip is a survivor, but not that kind. He will fight, but only if threatened or if someone he cares about is threatened. And he certainly doesn't have the skills that Eddie possesses."

"You cannot be sure." Don was defensive.

"Oh yes I can," Tony said. "We're talking about a man who risked everything he had to do what he felt was the right thing. Instead of avenging himself against the man responsible for him losing everything, Philip walked away and was nearly killed by his ex-wife, the daughter of that man. During her trial, she committed suicide in the courtroom and died in Philip's arms. There's no way Philip would ever harm Eddie, for any reason. He put his life on the line for him once and was willing to do so again by coming here. Can you honestly believe Philip would let anything happen to Eddie, let alone cause it?"

Jo placed a gentle hand on Tony's arm. Her eyes were filled with tears.

"It is not only Eddie and Philip missing now. I do not know where my son is."

Before Tony could answer, Edward spoke up.

"Jai has gone. But not in the same way. He called me earlier and told me he was going to look for his father. I could not get him to tell me where he was or where he was going to look. He said he will call again." He turned to Tony. "Jai is young, but I believe he will be alright. He knows the city."

"Do you think there's any chance he could be with Philip?" Raymond asked.

"I cannot say," Edward said. "If not, it is possible they will meet. Jai is angry and hurt, but I believe he will listen to reason. He is that much like his mother. If he and Philip come together, or are together, they will work together and protect each other. Of that, I am certain."

The doorbell chimed. Don went immediately to answer. The visitor that Tony took to be Inspector Yiu brushed Don aside as he entered.

"I know where Chandler is hiding," Inspector Yiu said without preamble. "Young Jai is now in complicity with him. This

is a serious matter. If Jai does not turn the fugitive in, he will be guilty of aiding and abetting a murderer."

Raymond stepped in front of the Inspector. Tony tensed, ready to intervene.

"You have evidence to back up that accusation?" Raymond asked. "Or are you still assuming?"

"And you are?" Inspector Yiu's expression was ugly.

"I am Philip's father," Raymond said. "And I very much take offense to your calling my son a murderer."

Don stepped in. "Do we know about the identity of the body?"

Keeping his eyes on Raymond, the Inspector shook his head. "It will be another twenty-four hours, but I am certain of the finding."

Tony grabbed Raymond by the arm to hold him from striking the Inspector. Behind him, he heard Jo gasp as she collapsed into tears. The Inspector had a lot to learn about compassion and decorum. No decent policeman, no matter what country he was in, would make such an assumptive statement in front of a grieving family.

"You have no evidence," Tony said. "You're making an assumption not based on anything but your own prejudice. You're a disgrace."

His criticism didn't seem to affect Yiu.

"We shall soon know," Inspector Yiu said. "If the body is Tseung, and I do believe it is, Chandler will spend the rest of his life in a Hong Kong prison and that, my friend, would be worse than death."

Chapter Twenty-Four

Eddie wandered the padded room in seemingly never-ending circles. He was no longer able to see clearly. The images constantly playing on the walls blurred into indistinguishable whirls of colors in his mind. He could no longer think rationally. The silence and lack of external sensory diversion tortured him. His conscious self had shut down. Exhaustion threatened to drive him to his knees, but he forced himself to keep moving, braced against the wall, his hands firmly pressed against the solidness to reassure him there was reality.

He had gone beyond cold. His senses disconnected. Like a mouse in a maze, his path was instinctive. Somewhere in that wall was an escape. He had to keep moving, had to keep feeling his way to find the exit he knew had to be there.

His abductor had remained silent since the first time she'd spoken to him. He knew there was a sound system in the room and the projections were coming from somewhere, but the light was so bright, he couldn't see anything but the images playing over and over.

Stumbling, he fell to all fours and remained motionless for several minutes, breathing hard from the shock of the abrupt cessation of movement. For a second, his mind awoke. With a primal scream, he surged to his feet and ran into the padded wall. He bounced off and fell to his back, but the pain stimulated his mind into conscious thinking.

He lay staring at the photographs. *"Your answer lies among them."* Her words taunted him. Scrambling to his feet he drew closer to study them. He yanked off the publicity stills and ripped them to shreds. He did the same with the "off guard" photos. That left only the intimate pictures. When and where and how had they been taken, and by whom?

His eyes fell on one photo buried in the center of the rest. He wrested it from the wall.

He looked to be about thirty years old in the picture. He recognized the scenery high in the mountains of China where one of his earliest movies had been filmed. The movie had died a miserable death when the production company ran out of money. He was glad because he hadn't liked the story line but had no choice but to star in it because he was still under contract at the time.

The photo he held showed him with a young girl lying in a secluded grotto. In the background, a waterfall cascaded into a large pool and the sun shone on the large flat rock bathing their hard bronzed bodies in gold light. The angle of the photo was very clear. The girl lay on her back, her hair fanned around her in an ebony halo. What they were doing was blatantly visible. He leaned over her, his arms braced to hold his weight and the angle of the camera showed their connection.

Eddie grimaced in disgust. For the life of him, he didn't remember the tryst or the girl, only the setting. There had been no girl in the movie not even an extra. She didn't look familiar.

He searched among the rest of the photos and found six more of him and a girl in intimate situations. He didn't recognize any of them and something about the photos seemed off, but he didn't know what. It was the last photo that stunned him.

In each photo, the girl had been Asian, but the girl in the last photo was definitely not. The photo displayed an ugly scene with the girl pinned beneath his body, her wrists held to the floor of what appeared to be a hotel room. It was clear by her expression she was not a willing participant. Her anguish, guilt, and pain showed clearly in her tearful expression as her eyes looked into his face, seeming to plead with him.

Eddie's hand began to shake as he stared at the photo. How could these photos exist? They weren't real. He knew he'd never been with this girl or any of the others. He had been many things in

his past; conceited, self-centered, cocky, even promiscuous, but never, never an animal like that. He'd never forced himself on any woman. He couldn't. He wouldn't dare. He threw the photo away from him. His gut twisted, and he doubled over, sick to his stomach, burying his face in his arms, fighting against the screams that threatened to burst from his chest.

Pictures don't lie, yet these six pictures were a lie. He had no memory of any of the incidents. He recognized some of the backgrounds, but was certain he'd never met any girl in any of them. There had to be an explanation. What was it that tugged at the edges of his mind? The pictures were sick, and there was something about them that felt "wrong".

Whoever had brought him to this room had specifically chosen with what to torture him. She had used the worst weapon against him, one he couldn't fight...his past. Self-loathing filled him as he curled into a fetal position. Why?

Turning from her monitor, she smiled in satisfaction. He had found the bait and the photos had produced the hoped for results. It wouldn't be long now. Laughing to herself, she went to her own room and went peacefully to sleep.

Moonlight bathed the warehouse in soft blue light that filtered through broken sky lights overhead. Hidden by the dark shadows of the corner where they sat concealed, knees drawn to his chest, arms locked around them, Jai looked at his sleeping companion. Philip was exhausted by the time they found their way along the docks after asking questions all day. The old warehouse sat behind several others and contained sacks of rice stacked to the ceiling. He and Philip had climbed onto the highest stack where Philip had collapsed as soon as they reached their hiding place. He lay curled on his side, huddled against the chill of the night. Jai knew Philip was as cold as he. The temperature had dropped during the night, unusually colder than normal.

Their search had gained them nothing. Most of the people to whom they'd spoken had heard of Eddie's disappearance, but none had seen anything of him. Many of them offered Jai condolences when they learned who he was. They encouraged his quest to find his father. Jai began to realize how much his usually humble father impacted the lives of even the lowliest people. He had gone from nothing, a nobody, to a superstar by sheer determination and perseverance. In a way, his life gave hope. It was fast becoming evident to Jai that Eddie Tseung was considered a national treasure. His loss filled the people with grief, and several threats were made against the American who, as far as some were concerned, was guilty of murder. The threats, made in various languages, Jai kept to himself. He made it a point not to let anyone know Philip was that American. The people would have seized him and ripped him to shreds.

While Philip slept, Jai thought over his and Eddie's rocky relationship. There were times when Jai wondered why his father had bothered to marry his mother. He had always heard that the marriage was only a matter of doing the honorable thing and even that was mostly due to the disapproval of Papa and Mama Tseung towards Eddie for getting Jo pregnant in the first place. Jo had repeatedly told Jai that wasn't true. Yes, she had been pregnant at the time, and if not for that, things might have transpired differently, but Eddie had loved her in his own way. She considered him a seed in the wind, restless and searching for his place in the scheme of the world. She explained that Eddie had a difficult time loving the way most people considered normal because he had never known that love himself.

And, she told Jai, she loved Eddie, in her fashion, first admired him as a sweet, confused, handsome, and talented young man, then as the father of her child. She knew from the beginning he wouldn't be physically part of the family. He did care and was there whenever he was called upon or needed, most of the time.

Jai had to admit that as a provider, his father did well. He had everything he needed when he needed it—everything that is except his father's presence. The Eddie he saw more often than not was demanding, unreasonable, impatient, intolerant, and completely unpredictable. But then there had been moments when Jai was smaller when he found himself suddenly caught up in his father's strong arms, held close to be given a gentle kiss on his forehead before being released. There was never any explanation or reason for those moments, and Jai never told anyone of feeling the warm tears running from his father's eyes down his neck. Eddie would hold him as if afraid to let go, never saying a word, except rarely a whispered assurance that he was proud of him. Jai kept those treasured moments locked in his memory.

Philip moaned and stirred, then opened his eyes and sat up. He shifted his gaze to Jai and smiled when his stomach growled loudly.

"You wouldn't happen to know what time it is?" he asked, rubbing his hand over the stubble of his face.

Jai looked at his watch. "About 3 a.m. I'm hungry too."

"We have to eat," Philip said. "How are we going to manage that?"

"I can find food," Jai said. "You wait here."

"Jai, you don't have to worry about me. Your dad taught me enough Cantonese and Mandarin that I understood most of the threats aimed at me yesterday. I don't think it's a good idea for us to get separated. We go together."

Jai hesitated for a long minute. He didn't like the idea of Philip being in the open, especially since he'd recently been sick with pneumonia, but he also didn't like the idea of leaving him by himself with no protection. Too much could happen. At the moment, there was safety in numbers, even if the number was two. "Okay."

Shivering, they both stood and stretched before carefully climbing down from their perch. They cautiously checked the docks to make sure they were empty, then eased into the night.

Night life in Hong Kong is usually subdued, but seldom quiet. Jai noticed right away the unusual silence. The wind was picking up. Jai was surprised to find driving needles of freezing rain falling into his exposed face and hands. The slapping of waves against the pylons of the pier made him nervous. He glanced at Philip whose shoulders were slightly hunched. Neither his jacket nor the denim jeans and sweatshirt that Philip wore was enough to keep them both warm. Their foray for food would have to be quick and brief.

Jai placed a hand on Philip's arm. "Maybe you had better stay. It's warmer in the warehouse, at least more than out here in the wind. This weather isn't normal. It isn't usually this cold."

Before Philip could answer, they heard the creak of boards. They listened as footsteps grew close, but it was too dark to see who was coming. The footsteps halted, there was a splash, and the footsteps faded into the night. Not sure what to do, the men stood still until, after a few minutes, they heard a faint panicked mewling coming from the water. They ran to the edge of the pier. Philip pointed at a cloth sack just as it slipped under the waves. Before Jai could stop him, he dove in and grabbed the sack before it sank too far beneath the surface.

Jai held his breath. He knew the water was frigid, and if Philip was in too long, he'd never make it back. Philip did return, swimming quickly to the pier to hand the sack to Jai. With effort, he struggled out of the water with Jai's help. He was violently shivering as he fought to untie the knot on the neck of the sack. Jai took it from him and pushed him into the shelter of one of the buildings behind them out of the wind.

As soon as the sack was open, Philip reached inside and extracted three wet frightened kittens. Jai took them from him and put them inside his jacket. His hand on Philip's arm, he started

back to the warehouse. He had to get Philip and the kittens out of the weather.

"Wait." Philip dug his hand into the bag and extracted a fourth kitten.

"It's not breathing," Philip said. Gently and carefully, he began CPR on the tiny creature. After a few minutes, its paws twitched, its head moved, and two wide blue eyes peered up at its rescuer. The kitten emitted a tiny squeak then sneezed. "It's okay. It's okay. I've got you."

Jai grasped Philip's arm and pulled him along. The search for food would have to wait.

"Back to the warehouse," he said. "You and these kittens will freeze to death out here. I'll go get food. You stay where it's warmer. We can't leave them unattended."

Philip nodded, his teeth audibly chattering as he followed Jai back to their shelter. As Philip returned to their perch on top of the rice stacks, Jai went in search of something to use as blankets. A brief foray into an abandoned boathouse turned up a ragged dusty canvas sail that smelled of mold, salt, and urine probably from rats. He carried the sail to the warehouse. It wasn't a blanket, but it would serve the purpose for now.

"Get out of those wet clothes," he said. "Wrap yourself in the sail. I'll find you something dry to wear. Keep the kittens close to you. They should be alright until I get back."

Philip began shedding his soaked clothes. "W-we c-c-can't s-stay here. It's n-n-not s-safe."

"We'll be okay for now," Jai said. "I'll find us another place, but you can't go into the cold. You'd never survive."

He was relieved when Philip gave him no argument. "I'll be back soon."

He slipped off the perch and out of the warehouse, having no idea where he would go, but determined to find somewhere and something that would help.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Philip tossed his wet clothes to one side and wrapped himself and the kittens deep into the sail. He hoped that Jai would find something, but at this hour, he had no idea where the younger man would find food, let alone dry clothing. It was ironic that both he and Jai were not without means and yet neither of them had what they needed to be comfortable. He amended that. Jai didn't have to stay where he was. He could go home where he could be warm and dry and out of danger. Philip didn't dare attempt to return to the hotel, or anywhere else without Jai's help. His ID, passport, credit cards, and money were in his wallet, which was still at the hotel unless the police had confiscated them. Everything else, his clothes, luggage, and so on, he hoped was in the hotel room or that Don had taken them somewhere. There wasn't anything he valued all that much, but he didn't relish the idea of losing what he had with him.

The kitten he had resuscitated curled into the curve of his stomach and began purring loudly. The other three soon joined it. The furry little bodies, though wet, felt warm against his skin.

He smiled at the irony of him hiding from the police and yet, without thinking twice, had jumped into the freezing water to save four kittens. What in the world were he and Jai going to do with them? They wouldn't survive without their mother.

When he'd heard the terrified mews coming from the water, he hadn't stopped to think about how cold the water might be but had just reacted. It wasn't the wisest decision, but he wasn't sorry. He wished bad things for whoever the cruel person was who'd thrown the helpless babies in. He hated all cruelty, especially against anything helpless. Five years spent starving on the streets had introduced him to all types of cruelty men could do to each other. He'd seen homeless men beaten for no reason by so-called upright citizens who were either drunk or high or just out to hurt someone. He'd had to defend himself more than once. And thanks

to his late ex-father-in-law, he'd suffered humiliation, harassment, the loss of everything he owned, ostracized by people he'd consider friends, all because he'd chosen to do the right thing.

He shifted in the sail. The stiff, scratchy feel of the rough material brought a flash of memory that sat him up straight. He concentrated and caught the memory before it got away from him, the memory of being bound, his entire body wrapped tightly in something black. He couldn't move, had felt himself lifted and thrown, landing with an abrupt splash in cold, dark water. It had jolted him into primal survival consciousness. He'd struggled, fought to free himself as the water saturated the heavy material holding him. He'd swallowed water, tasted the salt, tried to breathe. Somehow, miraculously, he'd twisted and fought until he freed his body before it was too late. Coughing and regurgitating foul burning sea water, he'd surfaced only a few feet from a sandy shore. He'd crawled onto the beach where he'd lain for hours, too weak and cold to move.

Someone had tried to drown him, but who and why, and when?

A noise from outside the warehouse alerted him.

"It's okay. It's me." Jai appeared at the door and slipped inside.

Philip could see he was holding two cups and a sack. He handed one cup to Philip.

"Tea. Drink it. It'll warm you."

Gratefully, Philip sipped the steaming liquid, letting the heat course through him.

Jai handed the sack to him. "There are clothes in there. I think some of them are yours."

"What do you mean?" Philip reached into the sack and pulled out a long-sleeved shirt, a jacket, and slacks. Jai was right, these were his slacks. "Where'd you get these?"

"The Mission store. The owner will open it if someone needs something, even at night. He only lives a few streets away."

Jai pulled out a smaller sack. Philip immediately caught the scent of spices. Jai handed him a meat filled bun which he took dubiously.

"You can always get food in Hong Kong," Jai said. "There are vendors everywhere, and they never close. This is spiced chicken mixed with peppers and onions." He handed Philip a bottle of water. "You'll need that."

Philip took a tentative bite of his bun. Jai hadn't exaggerated. The spices were strong and hot. He swallowed with a little difficulty, then took a swig of water. A second later, he felt his insides begin to warm up.

He cleared his throat. "You weren't kidding. This stuff will definitely stoke the inner furnace." He coughed, took a deep breath, and bit off another piece. When he could speak again, he looked down at the furry mound in the center of the nest he'd made for them in the sail. "What about them? They're too small to eat solid food, let alone this stuff."

Jai pulled a small carton of milk and a paper bowl from his jacket pocket. He poured some of the milk into the bowl and placed it next to the kittens who wasted no time in drinking.

"They're old enough to eat on their own," he said. "We can take them to the house Ba ba is building for my grandfather. There's a mama cat there. I've seen her. Her babies are about this age. Maybe she'll adopt these. Ba ba likes having the cats around. They keep the rodents down."

"How'd you do all of this?" Philip asked. He finished his food, dressed, and was beginning to feel human. Jai had even provided a pair of sneakers that were a little tight but wearable.

"Unlike you, I have money with me," Jai said. "And I have my identification. I'm not hiding from anyone, so I can move freely. I checked. The police search has cleared from this area, for now anyway. If we leave now, we can get a taxi and go someplace warmer, and safer."

"This is going to sound strange, but what happened to the kittens jogged my memory about part of what happened to me," Philip said. He told Jai what he'd remembered.

"Wow. That's incredible," Jai said. "Do you remember where you were prior to that?"

"No. But maybe having this will trigger other things, jar loose my memory and tell me what happened to Eddie."

Jai picked up two of the kittens and stuffed them into his pocket as he stood. "Let's get out of here while we can."

Philip picked up the other two kittens and put them in the pocket of the coat Jai had provided. He was beginning to feel warm for the first time in days. "Where?"

Jai smiled slyly. "After we take the kittens to the new house, we'll go to a place no one will think to look."

Chapter Twenty-Six

Edward and Raymond accompanied Don to his office. Each one was handed a stack of files on the women Eddie knew or had known in his career. Edward was dismayed to see how many there were. He always knew his son was a flirt and suspected some affairs, but the paperwork he held surprised and displeased him. Worse still, the other stacks were as thick as the one he held.

For the most part, the women had married or moved away. Some had their own careers. Many who had been contacted admitted their fondness for Eddie but their relationships had been brief and inconsequential. In some cases, the women had seduced Eddie, which in Edward's mind didn't excuse the fact he had been with them. Some of the women, fans, had thrown themselves at him just to be able to say they had slept with Eddie Tseung. A few, Eddie had felt very close to and they had taken advantage of those feeling. Some, however, were pursued by Eddie. To Edward, those women appeared to be convenient for his son. That was inexcusable. When Eddie was found, he and his father would have a very serious talk, and after Eddie, Edward would also have a long talk with his daughter-in-law.

That thought caught Edward short: 'when he was found.' Yes, he decided, when, because he would not give up the belief that his son was alive and would be found. Although, when found, Eddie might wish he was still missing after his father got through with him.

At lunchtime, Don called a halt to their search and ordered food. Raymond took the opportunity to contact Tony who was doing some private detecting of his own. It was agreed by Don and Eddie's Team that Eddie would wish the movie to go forward despite his absence, so it was there Tony went.

The scene with the car was re-filmed for the beginning of the movie. Eddie's double, Ti Chan, filled in the far shots that would have been Eddie's. The rest of the story was rewritten to include Eddie's character less, more of an invisible presence, remembered through flashbacks as the supporting characters attempted to solve the leading character's murder and come to grips with his death. The story had changed from another action movie to a poignant touching drama honoring a man who was grieved in reality with as much devotion and love. Tony knew the changes spoke aloud their silent sentiments. Eddie would love it.

Tony watched the filming and spoke to some members of the crew. He listened to their anger and anguish without attempting to argue for Philip's sake. Until he had more information, there wasn't much he could say in Philip's defense. To gain that information, he had to reassure those to whom he spoke that he was there on Eddie's behalf. He'd been asking questions discreetly, but it wasn't long before Eddie's Team approached him with determined and belligerent strides.

"What you want, hanging roun' here?" Tran demanded.

Tony held up his hands to show he wanted no trouble. "Just to ask a few questions. I'm trying to find out what happened."

"You are not police," Yau said, taking a threatening step toward him.

Luk pulled him back.

To Tony, Luk seemed to be the most rational of the group, so it was to him he spoke.

"I am," he said. "If you remember right, I'm a Captain of Homicide in the States. I have no official authority over here, true. If you don't want to talk to me, you don't have to. But I do know how to get answers. If you don't talk, fine. I'll find someone who will. Someone knows something. I intend to find that someone." He glanced at the other men. "I know you want to solve this as much as anyone."

He paused and waited, hoping they would consider his reasoning worth listening to.

"You a frien' to that killer," Yau accused.

Tony let his temper slip enough to get his point across. "Philip is my friend, but he's no killer. I know him better than any of you know each other. It's never dawned on any of you to look beyond the obvious. Philip was near death himself when he was found. He didn't do that to himself. Where was he? How did he become so ill? Try and see what makes sense, not look at what doesn't. You have to use your head, not your emotions."

"Why did he run?" Tran asked.

Tony turned a harsh eye on him. "What would you do? Think about it. You wake up not knowing where you are, how you got there, or that you'd even been anywhere but with someone who is now missing. You're ill, and it's been a month since you last knew anything for certain. Then the police show up wanting to arrest you for murder of a friend. You know you didn't do it, but you can't prove you didn't, especially if the police take you into custody. You're in an unfamiliar country with unfamiliar laws and no one to help you. Your only chance is to avoid arrest and find out what happened yourself, so you can prove your innocence. So, again, what would you do in Philip's place?"

Before Tran could argue, Tony continued. "How would you react if not only the law but the entire Asian continent, not to mention the world, was out to lynch you for something you know you didn't do?"

He waited. None of the men said anything but seemed to be considering his argument. Satisfied he had their attention, Tony said, "We know there's a woman involved. We know because she contacted Eddie before he disappeared and made threats. Do any of you have any idea what woman might be vindictive enough to want to harm Eddie?"

The men glanced at each other, looking uncomfortable.

"That woul' be difficult," Tran said. "Eddie had lots of girlfriends...ahem...unfortunately."

"He's not a...uhmm...hmp," Yau stammered unable to find the right words.

"He's a personable man," Luk said, throwing a glance of annoyance at Yau. "Funny, a flirt, and women flock to him. Sometime they mistake his flirting for something else. He's never sure how to back away. He don't like hurt feelings."

The look Tony gave him made Luk blush.

"Not sure how to back away?" Tony shook his head at the foolishness of that remark. "Come on, gentlemen, Eddie's a grown man. All he has to say is 'no' just like any of us. He likes the attention and adoration, otherwise these affairs wouldn't happen."

"That's past anyway," Brad, who had been standing slightly away from the rest, spoke up. "The Mrs. keeps a close eye on him. She doesn't mind him flirting. He can't help that. He just has to keep his privates in the barracks, if you catch my drift. Eddie does that by concentrating on work. He's always glad to see Mum when she visits."

Tony didn't know how to answer that and didn't think it entirely based on reality. The Team would close their eyes when it was convenient. He knew Eddie's reputation. He also knew about the fiasco that brought the reputation to a screeching halt, or at least to a more discreet level. What he needed was in Eddie's past, not in the present.

"Do me a favor," he said. "Watch the early rushes closely. Keep your eyes out for any woman who doesn't belong. She won't be in the crowd. She'll be with the crew, at close range. If you see anyone, try to get a still photo and let Don and me know. I think we're running out of time, gentlemen."

"What do you mean?" Luk asked.

"That body wasn't Eddie," Tony said. "I talked to the lab myself, and believe me, that took some finagling. To be a good cop, you have to be a convincing actor. They don't know I'm not with

HKPD. The DNA test came back two days ago. For some reason, Inspector Yiu opted to keep that tidbit of information to himself, probably because it means he has two cases, not one. The torso wasn't an Asian man, as has been reported. He was younger than Eddie, heavier and shorter through the torso. There were also no corresponding scars or breaks that matched. The police are also keeping that to themselves, and I'd love to know why."

"It wasn't him," Tran said.

"Just some poor bloke that got ahold of Eddie's clothes?" Brad asked.

"Likely as not, the cases are unrelated," Tony said. "Or this person knew something and whoever is behind the kidnapping of Eddie wanted to keep the man quiet. We do know that Eddie exchanged the clothes he was wearing for clothes from a thrift shop at the dock."

"Yeah," Brad said. "I'm glad the body isn't Eddie, but why keep that a secret? I mean, the whole of the Asian world is grieving and angry. They all think it's Eddie, so why is Yiu sitting on it?"

"That is a good question," Tony said. "One I want to know the answer to myself. Either it's good police work, Yiu is holding back information hoping someone will slip, or he has his own agenda, and it's not a good one."

"Dirty copper!"

Tony laughed wryly. Brad was showing his British roots.

"We'll watch the rushes right now," Luk said. "We'll let you know what we find. I feel better knowing there's still a chance for Dai Goh."

Tony felt a huge relief release inside his stomach. "We'll find him. That's a promise."

"What about Philip?" Brad asked. "We have to help him somehow."

"He'll probably find Eddie first," Tony said. "Hopefully without getting himself killed in the process. Phil is no killer, but if someone threatens him or Eddie, that could change. Help him,

don't hinder him. Eddie needs all of us working together if we're going to save both of them."

Chapter Twenty-Seven

He felt her standing over him. He knew she watched him when she thought he was sleeping. She didn't know that he seldom slept, and wouldn't open his eyes when he knew she was present. He couldn't hide his nakedness from her, but he wouldn't let her see what he could cover, little though it was. Her eyes were like tiny creatures crawling over his skin. He hated her presence. He knew she hated him. He knew why. She was the woman in the hotel room photo, but he didn't know her, had never seen her before, of that he was certain.

He couldn't help but remember all the women he'd been with. Their faces had become phantoms swirling around him. How many of them were just brief encounters to satisfy an itch—no, a lust. He had to be honest with himself. Even his wife Jo wasn't meant to be forever.

He felt like a fool. Jo had given herself to him and then given up her own career and life to raise a child that wasn't meant to be. But Jai was, and Eddie deluded himself into believing that he had been a good father. But he knew he hadn't. He'd been his own father, never there when he was needed, never there to watch his son grow, to share in his accomplishments, to share in his life, left behind his child and his wife to pursue his own selfish life.

The thoughts wound through his brain like a cancerous worm. He was having to face himself, to move aside the curtain of self-deception he'd erected to convince himself he was a good person. The truth made him sick, in heart and in mind. Those photos attached to the walls, the images swirling around him, told stories he had pretended didn't exist. But not all those pictures were truth. He'd been many things, done things he regretted, but never had he taken anything from a woman without her consent. He couldn't have. He knew he had a reputation, pretended it didn't

exist, but he couldn't hide from it. There were scandals, but he'd ignored them. He believed himself to be in a position above them.

Stupid, stupid man!

He wished she would leave. She stood so close to him, he could feel the heat of her skin. He tried to shield his mind from the visions behind his eyes. Jai, Jo, Mama, Ba ba, and moments in his life that included all of them, special moments, rare moments, being contaminated by this woman. What did she want from him? Why wouldn't she tell him? What had happened? How had he come there? Where was Philip?

Philip. Where was Philip? She couldn't have taken him from Philip without a fight. What had she done to Philip?

He shivered. He was cold.

He heard the receding soft swish of her footsteps. She was gone at last. He breathed a sigh of relief and uncoiled his body to relieve his aching muscles. He opened his eyes and looked up to the white bare ceiling. The images were gone. She'd turned them off. The only picture that remained on one wall was the only one he hadn't destroyed, the one he knew was a lie.

In the time he'd been confined, however long that had been, he thought he'd figured out where he was. The walls and floor were padded. There were no windows. There was nothing but silence. He was in a mental hospital. There was no other explanation, but where, and how?

He had the feeling he was the only one there. It was nothing he could see or hear, just a feeling. Where was there an abandoned mental institution he could have been spirited to so easily? The woman wasn't very big. She couldn't have moved him without help, and moving him far, she would have been noticed. He reasoned the institution must be close to Hong Kong, but he couldn't be certain. He might not even be in Hong Kong, or in China.

He uncurled his body and sat on his knees. He knew there were cameras watching him. He'd finally searched them out,

painted white, among the images. The images were gone, and the cameras were visible as irregular bumps in the corners and ceiling. There was nothing he could do about her watching behind them. He crawled to the wall and used it to brace his body so he could rise to his feet. He was weak, barely kept his feet under him.

The woman fed him, rice only, twice a day, and gave him a small bucket for his private needs that she changed twice daily. He hated being so visible, so vulnerable, but nature wouldn't be denied. A basin of water, towel, and washcloth was all he had for bathing. The woman came when he slept, or pretended to. He was tired. He had no energy or strength to fight her. He suspected she put something in the rice. The times he hadn't eaten, he'd felt stronger, more alert, but the constant barrage of the images drove him to near madness. So he ate the rice. Sleep was preferable to the torture.

He coughed. It tore at his insides. He walked the room, using the wall as support. He had to keep moving, to get what exercise he could. If there was a way, a chance, he could free himself, he had to be physically able to do it. Every day, it became harder to keep going.

"Have you remembered?" Her voice echoed through the room, startling him.

"Who are you?" He meant to shout, but his voice came out only in a weak rasp.

"Your wicked past." She laughed. *"It's come back to haunt you, to claim you. And you can't even remember why."*

"What did I do?" He hated the plea that crept into his words. *"Tell me. I will..."*

"What?" Her laugh was vicious and ugly. *"Try and fix it? Make it up to me? No, this is a better way. We all have to pay for our sins. You're paying for yours now."*

He stumbled to the other side of the room and slammed his body into the padding where he'd discovered a door was hidden. *"Let me go!"*

There was no answer. He pounded his fists into the padding, tore at it, but the padding was too thick and cushioned the blows. Slowly he sank to the floor. What sins? Had he truly done something to deserve this?

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Philip stroked the soft head of the kitten as he waited for Jai to return. Eddie's secret tunnel turned out to be a godsend for him and Jai. The tunnel was situated beneath one of Eddie's private homes, didn't go anywhere, and served no particular purpose. Eddie had once said he'd always wanted a tunnel just for the sake of having one and had built this particular tunnel for fun. Eddie would never have had any idea that his tunnel would someday serve a purpose.

Philip shook his head. So much imagination. So much life. *Where was he?*

Jai had brought Phillip to the tunnel several nights before. The house under which it was built was too visible. The authorities knew where it was, but didn't know its secret. Even if they patrolled the area near the house, they wouldn't find the hiding place.

During the night, Jai made use of the hidden entrance and confiscated blankets, food, and water from the house. The tunnel was comfortable, warm, and dry. Philip was glad for the time to rest and get his brain working properly. Sighing, he lifted the kitten so he could look into its tiny face.

"What can you tell me, Sing? Do you have an answer hidden in there somewhere?"

The kittens were still with them. As soon as safely possible, Jai would take them to his grandfather's new home. Until then, the warmth of them and their constant purring was somehow comforting. He looked into Sing's dark blue eyes. Sing purred loudly and tapped him on the nose with a tiny velvet paw.

A noise alerted Philip. A moment later, Jai appeared carrying a small bag of food.

"I thought the kittens might be hungry," Jai said, opening a can of cat food. "I think they're old enough to eat solid food."

He dumped the contents of the can onto the ground. The kittens devoured it, growling and hissing and slapping each other as each one tried to get more than its share.

"I brought us some food as well." Jai handed a carton of hot noodles and shrimp to Philip.

Philip ate with the same gusto as the kittens. He glanced over to his companion to find Jai studying him.

"So what now?" Jai asked.

Philip shook his head. "I don't know. I just don't know where to start looking. If only we..."

He stopped and frowned. "Food," he said softly. He looked down at the kittens. "We had food the night we went to the apartment. Eddie bought us something to eat, a small bag of some kind of spicy rice and rolls. They tasted strange to me, but I'm not used to Asian food. We were hungry."

"Where did he get them?" Jai asked.

"From a street vendor," Philip said. "A street vendor..."

"Who followed you from the docks?"

"Had to have." Philip concentrated, trying to remember exactly what Eddie had said when he brought the food. "The vendor had been close by."

"But there aren't any food vendors on that street," Jai said. "Especially at night. You would have had to go further to find one."

Philip shook his head. "Eddie said he was surprised to find the vendor but was glad because we were both so hungry."

"It was the stalker," Jai said. "You were never hidden."

"But how?" Philip couldn't believe they had been so easily found. "No one knew where we were going..." The truth hit him hard. "No one, except the captain of the yacht." He sat back and thought hard. "He knew where we disembarked. He might have watched where we went, seen us go into the Mission shop..."

"And out, dressed in the other clothes," Jai said. "We need to check on this guy, find out who he is."

Philip nodded, still in thought. "Don should know. He was the one who took us to the yacht, said it belonged to a friend of his."

"But we can't ask Don," Jai said.

"No. We'll have to find the yacht and talk to the captain ourselves."

The kittens, finished with their dinner, curled contented together. Sing separated from the others and was soon purring on Philip's lap.

"This is getting weirder by the minute," Philip said.

"Stop! There. Right there." Ti pointed excitedly at the screen. "See. Just behind Tia."

Tran and Yau ran the film back several frames and watched where Ti had indicated.

The five men had been watching the rushes for hours, looking at every face, watching every movement. They were tired and cross-eyed. Brad had gone home to rest. Ti had spelled him. More awake, he spied the woman almost immediately.

As they watched, a small woman carrying something that might have been script changes, moved among the crew behind the cameras. She appeared in nearly every frame. Normally, they wouldn't have noticed her, but there were no Caucasian women on the film crew.

Tran enlarged a frame when she inadvertently looked directly into the camera. Her oval face and round eyes showed this woman was definitely not Asian. Her long blond hair hung to her waist in a tight braid. Tran froze the frame.

"Print that," Yau said.

Tran printed the still, a full, perfect color photo. "Gentlemen, our culprit. I'm willing to bet on it."

"But who is she?" Yau asked. "I don't remember every having seen her before. What could she possibly have against Eddie?"

Ti sighed. "She's a stranger. I know Eddie has gone with a lot of women, but we've seen them, most of us. This one is no one I know."

"And she's not Asian," Luk said. "Eddie has gone with many women, some Asian, some not, but only one or two of them were Caucasian, and they were co-stars in his movies." He shook his head. "This one is not one of them."

"She's definitely never been a co-star," Yau said. "She looks too—plain."

"We have to find out who she is," Tran said. "And we have to find her. Once we have one of those answers, the rest will come."

Edward paced the apartment in nervous agitation. He knew for certain his son was not dead. Tony had reported what he'd discovered to him, Raymond, and Don. Don immediately started making phone calls concerning Inspector Yiu, angry that the man had withheld this information from them. The search for Philip hadn't been retracted. He was still wanted for the murder of Eddie Tseung. Eddie wasn't dead. The evidence in his favor had been secreted by the police, or by Inspector Yiu. The four men wanted to know why.

Edward glanced over to where Raymond stood staring out of the window, another tortured and anguished father fearing for his son. It was as if Inspector Yiu had deliberately left Philip as a scapegoat for the murder of a stranger, allowing the uproar to resound across nations. Millions of Eddie's fans demanded to know if the body was him, believing the lies the police had fed the media, that Eddie was murdered by his American friend. Edward didn't want to think what would happen if Philip was seen by someone in the public. He would be mobbed, torn to pieces—innocent.

Inspector Yiu knew the truth yet didn't release the news to quiet the outcry. Why not?

Jo joined them, returned from a brief visit to her house in hope Jai had left a message as to his whereabouts. It had been days since any of them had heard from him. She shook her head to Edward's unasked question.

"Nothing," she said. "Where is he?"

Her worry showed on her worn features. In the weeks since Eddie's disappearance, she seemed to age several years. Lines Edward had never noticed seemed to deepen around her eyes and mouth. She had visibly lost weight, not eating more than a bite or two of food.

"I want to talk to you," Edward said sharply.

His tone startled her. It startled Raymond who looked away from the window to where Jo sat.

"In the other room," Edward said, pointing to the bedroom.

Jo stared at him. He waited, expecting an argument, but she said nothing, rose, and followed him. He closed the door behind her and threw the list of names on the bed.

"Were you aware of these?"

Jo picked up the list and read. Sighing deeply, she let it drop back to the bed.

"Yes."

She sank onto the comforter and let her hands rest limply in her lap. Edward could see the weariness in her face and guessed she wasn't ready to have this conversation.

"And you said nothing," he said.

She looked up at him. "Such as what? Eddie and I had an agreement. You know that. I am his wife for Jai's sake. As long as his promiscuity remained quiet, I would say nothing. Only when it affected our lives did I speak up."

Edward felt a guilty twinge. He had assumed, hoped, that the agreement between his son and daughter-in-law when Jai was first born would change and they would become a real family. He'd

known of the affairs but had pretended they didn't exist, that his son was an honorable man. The fault wasn't all Eddie's or Jo's.

"Do you love Shu-Dai-Chong at all? Have you ever loved him?" His question was quiet, full of concern, and he feared what she would tell him.

She seemed stunned. "Yes, as I would love a close and dear friend. But the love of husband and wife we have never shared. I care about him. I worry over him. I'm afraid for him. But I have never had any hold on him, not even Jai. Nor has he had any over me for the same reason. He never expected me to live without love. I have been discreet in my relationships. They were few, but there have been others beside him."

She kept her eyes on his face. He could see defiance in her gaze.

"Surely, Ba Ba, you aren't that naive to believe I've lived all this time without men in my life. You have no right to judge me or Eddie without judging yourself. We both know that. You've not always been alone, even when Mama was alive."

Edward gritted his teeth. He wanted to deny her accusation, but he couldn't. He was disappointed, but in her or in himself, he couldn't be sure. He paced the floor.

"What I have done, I have done," he said. "That was between me and my wife. You're right, I can't judge the two of you without judging myself, but this isn't about me. It's about you and Eddie and Jai. Things must change, Chao-Xing. You and Shu-Dai-Chong must decide. You must be together or separate—completely separate. If together, you must curb his wandering and yours. It is up to you to put a stop to it once and for all. This whole matter is the working of a misguided woman. Whatever he did or didn't do, he must be declared publicly unavailable by you, no matter what."

He moved to stare out of the window. "That agreement should never have been made between you. It is not you I blame, or him. Those who controlled his career are at fault. It was they who demanded the agreement be made, that forced my son to deny his

wife and son, forced him to live alone, to not know family or love, all because of the obsessiveness of his fans.”

He whirled around, his anger inflamed at the memory.

“No! Curse Don for that. Eddie is not a trained dog. He is not a slave. He belongs to no one. He is a man and should live as a man, free to love whomever he chooses and spend his life with that person. This chain will be broken and you are the first link. Decide. Be his wife or let him go.”

He stormed out of the bedroom, leaving his stunned daughter-in-law sitting on the bed.

Jo couldn't move, stunned into place by her father-in-law's passionate anger. She'd never seen him so defensive on behalf of his son. Edward had never appeared to concern himself in his son's life. He'd kept silent when he and his wife had been told Jo was pregnant, had kept his thoughts to himself when they had married quietly in front of a Justice of the Peace in Los Angeles, California. He had kept his thoughts about Eddie's affairs and the way Eddie behaved publicly, about everything. He had stepped in to help with Jai as he grew, stepped in where Eddie should have been. He had stayed silent, and Eddie had gone forward, agreeing to do whatever he was instructed to do by those in charge of his career.

Jo rose and went to the window. She stared at her reflection.

They had all stayed silent, Ba ba Edward, Mama Tseung, she, and Eddie, never voicing their thoughts or feelings to any of the matters they should have made first priority. She was guilty, as guilty as Eddie, as guilty as Edward. It took Eddie's disappearance, the prospect that he might be dead, to break the dam of feelings Edward had held ocean deep in respect for his son's right to make his own decisions. That freedom of choice was no longer Eddie's. And when Eddie's freedom was compromised, Edward had decided to step in. He would remain silent no longer.

She felt warm tears on her cheeks. Would she also defend that freedom? She was frightened for Eddie, wherever he might be.

She was frightened he might be hurt or sick, that whoever had him might harm him or worse. How much did she love him? Her anguish had been more for Jai, not Eddie. Jai, who loved his father despite the distance between them. Jai, who had been ignored by his father except in rare moments when Eddie had made an effort, out of guilt perhaps, to try and be a father. But he didn't know how. Deep down, maybe, he had wanted to be, but living without his own father had left him devoid of the skills he needed, and his life, demanding, pulling him all over the world for his movies, left him unable to commit to anyone.

Ba ba was right. It was her fault. She'd agreed to the terms dictated by Eddie's managers as much as he had. She'd given up her own career so she could be "*a good mother to her son.*"

They had both been caught in a trap and hadn't tried to escape, all for "honor".

She turned from the window. She felt sick. How much did she love Eddie? The question screamed at her. She dropped onto the bed and buried her face against the pillows, weeping for both Eddie and Jai, for herself.

"Forgive me, Eddie," she whispered. "Please, forgive me."

Chapter Twenty-Nine

The yacht lay anchored placidly in the bay of Hong Kong. From his vantage point on the dock, Philip studied the decks. There had been no movement all day that he could tell.

At his side, Jai measured the distance between them and their objective. Occasionally he looked skyward, checking the position of the sun.

"Can you swim that?" he asked.

Philip gave him a wry smile. "I can. The question is can you?"

Jai frowned at him. Philip laughed. In the days the two had been together, he'd grown fond of the younger man. Jai was a lot like his father in many ways. Philip felt almost like a big brother to him. He was, in age, directly in the middle of both Tseungs.

"I'm a swimmer," he said. "That's how I keep in shape."

Jai grinned. "Oh. Well, I think I can keep up. I swim a lot. California, y'know. Dad has a pool at all the houses, and there is, of course, the ocean." He looked out to the yacht. "He likes to swim."

Philip detected a touch of sadness in Jai's voice.

"But he doesn't like the water," Jai said with a laugh. "He gets seasick."

Philip was all too aware of that fact. He placed a reassuring hand on Jai's shoulder.

"We'll find him. Don't give up. I know there's an answer out there." He nodded at the yacht. "We just have to find it."

Jai took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Well, you better not drown. I don't want to have to raise that cat."

Philip snickered. Jai was as attached to the kittens as he was. The kittens were safely ensconced with a mother cat at Jai's grandfather's new house. He reported to Philip that the mother cat, who had four babies of her own, was happy to take on four more without any fuss.

He glanced at the sky. It was nearly sunset. They would wait until dark before making their swim. They had to stay concealed due to the presence of police who seemed to be everywhere. Philip told himself it was the fact he was on the run that there seemed to be more patrols than normal. He knew all the exits from Hong Kong were sealed. He was wanted and easily recognized from having his picture plastered on billboards, in the media, everywhere. Having Jai along made him worry. If they were caught, he would make the authorities think Jai was forced to help him. That is, until the truth came out, if it did.

He chewed on his bottom lip as he considered his dilemma. What had been learned so far? Were the authorities even searching for alternate answers? He wished he knew.

The sun slid below the horizon. Shadows blanketed the docks. Sliding from their hiding place, he and Jai crept to the end of the pier and soundlessly dropped into the cold black water.

They swam to the yacht, making as little noise as possible. As they drew closer, Philip was suddenly engulfed with a gnawing feeling that something wasn't right. He told himself it was the memory of the water but knew deep down that wasn't it. He was almost tempted to tell Jai to go back, but before he could make up his mind, they were at the ladder and Jai was climbing.

Philip cautiously followed. Squatting on the deck so they wouldn't be visible, they waited and listened. Philip could hear nothing but the slap of water against the yacht. His skin pricked as tension in his body screamed at him. He put out his hand to stop Jai who started to move. When Jai turned to him, Philip shook his head in warning. He suddenly realized what was bothering him. There was no sign of life, no lights, no sounds, nothing.

"No lights," he whispered.

Jai scanned the yacht. Philip motioned for him to follow and moved across the deck in a crouch. He shivered, chilled from the swim, but the cold he felt went deeper than that. Something was wrong.

They reached the door leading to the Captain's cabin. Philip froze. A distinct smell reached his nostrils.

"What's that?" Jai asked.

"Stay here," Philip said.

"But..."

"I said stay."

Satisfied that Jai got his message, Philip swallowed hard, opened the door, and slipped inside. The smell hit him like a hammer. He put his hand over his nose and fought the rising bile. He took a minute to get control then stood and turned on the light. The sight nearly sent him from the room. He'd never encountered anything like it. Blood was everywhere. It saturated everything in the room, and on the bed lay the dismembered remains of the yacht's captain. The only thing missing was his torso. His arms, legs, and head lay decomposing on the bed.

"Philip?" Jai's voice reached him from the other side of the door.

"Stay where you are," Philip commanded.

He turned to flip off the light and found Jai standing horror-stricken behind him.

"Oh my...!" Jai covered his mouth and ran from the room.

Philip heard him being sick over the side. He flicked the lights off, raking off his prints with the hem of his damp shirt, and backed out, closing the door firmly behind him, wiping the door handle. He knew who had been found wearing Eddie's shirt, and he had a pretty good idea why.

On deck, he put his arm around Jai's shoulders.

"I don't—I don't believe—what I—what I just saw," Jai said.

"The answer to one of the riddles," Philip said.

Jai turned to him looking confused and sick.

"The torso found washed up on the beach in Eddie's shirt," Philip said.

"I don't get it," Jai said.

"I do. We were drugged. That much is evident. But how did a woman get us away from that apartment? She needed help. She had help. Who else knew we were there?"

"The Captain," Jai said.

Philip nodded. "I was thrown into the water, remember? How? I would have been too heavy for a woman to lift."

"The Captain? He was in on it all along?"

"He helped whoever this woman is to kidnap both of us," Phillip said. "They took us out on the yacht and I was wrapped in canvas, tied, and thrown overboard to get rid of me. That left only one person who knew the truth. Whatever they did with Eddie afterwards, the woman killed her only witness and used part of his body to throw the authorities off a scent that might lead to her."

"I wonder what his relationship to her was," Jai said.

"I don't know," Philip said. "I hope it was worth being slaughtered for. Let's get out of here."

A searchlight abruptly blinded them. They threw up their arms to shield their eyes. Philip heard the approach of a harbor patrol boat.

"You, on deck, raise your hands where we can see them. Do not move."

Philip hesitated then grabbed Jai by the arm. Together they turned, raced to the far side of the yacht, and dove into the bay.

Chapter Thirty

"Baby. Baby, wake up. Come on now. Time to wake up."

Eddie could hear the cooing voice through the haze in his subconscious. He moaned, his head rolling as he fought his way to wakefulness.

"That's it," the voice, her voice, urged gently. "Wake up. Come on."

Breathing hard, he blinked open his eyes. He knew they were open. He could feel the cool air on his pupils, but everything was black. He tried to raise his hand to his face and was stopped a few inches from his side by something that clinked and rattled.

"That's it."

A sweet perfume invaded his nostrils, strong and sickening after days, maybe weeks or longer, of no sensation of smell other than of his own body and the antiseptic room where he'd been imprisoned. Beneath his head and body, there was softness, and he was warmer. He shifted his body and felt the gentle pressure of sheets and a blanket. He was in a metal bed. It had to be metal because the restraints on his arms had clinked against it.

"It's okay now." The woman, who had previously treated him with violence and hate, spoke sweetly.

He felt the weight of her body on the edge of the bed. Her fingers brushed his hair from his damp forehead. He flinched at her touch.

"I know it was hard," she said. "It's always hard to face our punishment. But it's over now. You've done your time for your sins. Now it's time to start healing, to be forgiven and start over."

Her fingers drifted down his cheek to his lips. He cringed at her touch but couldn't avoid it. He had no idea what she was talking about, what sins, but he knew for certain she was insane, completely, irrevocably insane, and dangerous.

He felt her shift on the bed and detected the smell of food.

"I know you're weak right now," she said. "But that too will change."

The food smell was stronger and the heat from steam touched his face.

"It's only broth," she said.

He felt the brush of a spoon against his lips.

"Come now," she said, "Eat. You need to eat to gain your strength."

Halfway afraid of what the broth might contain, Eddie parted his lips and let the warm liquid slide through. It was made from some sort of meat, chicken, beef, or something else. He wasn't sure. Whatever the ingredients, the broth warmed his insides and he felt some strength return.

She carefully spoon-fed him until he heard the spoon scrape the bottom of the bowl. He could tell by the sound that the bowl was some type of ceramic. The metal bed, the ceramic bowl, he knew he must still be in the mental hospital, but how was she moving him? He knew he was no longer in the padded room because of the smells.

"There," she said. "All gone. Feel better?" She spoke to him as if to a sick child.

She caressed his hair, smoothing it back from his forehead.

"I know this was hard for you." She sounded sad, regretful. "Facing the truth of your awful past had to be painful, but it was necessary for you to reach the other side and repent. You're forgiven. I forgive you."

He listened to her, memorizing her voice that was medium in tone, not high or low. Her words, once menacing and angry, were filled with syrupy sweetness that was equally terrifying. She was forgiving him for something he hadn't done. He had come to the conclusion that because he had never seen this woman before, the photographs, all of the photographs, had been manipulated. The incident had never happened, except perhaps in her mind.

She tucked the blanket under his chin and around his shoulders, like she was putting a child to bed. "No more cold. I want you warm and strong and free."

Her lips touched his forehead. He forced himself not to flinch.

Her weight lifted from the bed. Her footsteps receded and he heard a door swish open and shut like the sound a hospital door makes. He tried to move, again hearing the metal against metal of the chains holding him to the bed. This woman, whoever she was, might want him strong and conscious, but she wasn't going to give him the chance to be free.

It was still dark. No light had reached his eyes, yet the woman seemed to have no trouble feeding him. His eyes must have adjusted by now, but he saw nothing, not even shadows. He clenched his eyes shut, then slowly reopened them. He felt no blindfold. Unlike the padded room, this one couldn't be completely devoid of light, or could it? Even so, some light would penetrate. A thought struck him with the force of a sledgehammer. After all he'd been through, was this the final torture? Was he blind?

He strained his ears, desperately trying to hear any other noise, movement, voices, the general hubbub of a busy hospital. He heard only a soft hum of what might be a generator. This place, hospital, or whatever it was, he had long since decided, was abandoned, a forgotten place and he its only prisoner.

Chapter Thirty-One

Philip and Jai shivered in the depths of the tunnel through the night. They had narrowly escaped capture by the harbor patrol and neither of them wanted to think what happened after they jumped ship. Philip was certain the harbor patrol had found the captain's remains. There was no way of knowing if anyone would put two and two together and come up with the torso that had washed ashore wearing Eddie's shirt. If they did, then everyone would finally know that the body wasn't Eddie. Philip prayed someone would be intelligent enough to figure it out. He also prayed that he and Jai hadn't been recognized. The glare of the spotlight might have hidden their faces. What he wondered was how the harbor patrol knew there was someone on board the yacht. The light from the captain's cabin couldn't have been seen outside. Were he and Jai being followed? If so, the tunnel might not remain a safe place much longer. Anyone prowling through the house might accidentally happen on the entrance no matter how well it was camouflaged.

"We have to call somebody," he said.

Jai, huddled with his knees drawn to his chest in an effort to stay warm, looked over at him.

"Are you crazy?"

"Maybe," Philip said. "But we have to know what's happening. We're stumbling in the dark and we need a direction. If we only knew where everything stood, we might be able to find the right path."

Jai unfolded his long legs and pushed himself to his feet. "Okay. Wait here. I'll be right back."

Before Philip could protest, the younger man disappeared into the darkness. Philip sat in the silence, cursing beneath his breath because of Jai's impulsiveness and trying to count how long he was gone. After what seemed like hours, but was in fact less

than thirty minutes by Philip's calculations, Jai returned carrying two blankets, some dry clothes, two bottles of water, and a cell phone.

"Where?" Philip asked.

"In the new house," Jai said. "One of the bedrooms is finished and Ba ba has some things stored in it. He handed one of the blankets and a change of clothes to Philip.

"I could have taken some things from this house," Jai said, "Blankets, food, water, but they would be missed. Grandfather hasn't moved into his house yet, so no one will notice a few things are gone. I hope the clothes fit. They are some of Ba ba's old clothes from some movie or other."

"You mean, what's in that house is part of his collection?" Philip asked.

Jai shrugged. "He can deal with their loss. He has so much stuff, he probably won't even know they're missing."

Philip pulled on the clothes. Jai, dressed in a common black pants and a white t-shirt, white socks and black slippers. The pants were a little too big, but not much. He'd handed Philip a pair of faded blue jeans, a black tank top, and blue denim jacket, white socks and a pair of worn high top sneakers. Philip instantly recognized the outfit from one of Eddie's earlier movies.

Dressed warm and dry, he pulled the blanket around him and tossed one of the bottles of water to Jai, who easily caught it. He dropped to the ground and pulled his blanket over his shoulders.

"Okay, who do we call?" Jai asked after taking a long drink from his water bottle.

"Your mother?" Philip suggested. "She's probably beyond frantic with worry by now. You need to let her know you're okay. Call her."

After a moment's hesitation, Jai punched in the number and waited. After a long pause, he spoke.

"Mama, it's me." He listened, holding the phone from his ear, then answered her. "I'm okay...Yes...No, I'm with Philip...I know he didn't do it...That's why I called. We need to know what's going on." He was quiet for several moments, nodding occasionally at something Jo was telling him. "Okay," he said when she was done. "I'll keep in touch, I promise...No, I won't tell you that, but we're safe." There was another long pause. "I love you, too, Mama." His voice cracked with the last sentiment.

Philip had a feeling that Jo must be crying.

After disconnecting the call, Jai turned to report what she had said. "Mama says they know the torso isn't Ba ba, that Inspector Yiu has known all along but hasn't given out that information. She doesn't know why. She says someone named 'Tony' is here. That's how they found out.

Philip was surprised. "Tony? From the States?"

"She says he's a detective," Jai said.

"Captain of Homicide," Philip said. "Anthony Ferrone. He's a friend of mine. But what's he doing here?"

"Mama said he and your dad arrived a couple of..."

"Dad? My dad is here, with Tony?" This was news Philip never expected. He didn't know if he was glad or not.

"Mama said Tony has been investigating on his own. He found out about the torso belonging to someone else." Jai's face paled a little. "We now know who. Anyway, he's working with the Team to watch the rushes to see if they spot anyone who shouldn't be there."

"And?" Philip hoped they'd found something.

"Tran told them last night they saw a woman, a Caucasian woman, in all the frames. She was with the crew, but she didn't belong to the crew. All the women on the crew are Asian."

"Caucasian," Philip said. "American?"

"Maybe," Jai said. "Could be European."

Philip agreed. The woman could be from anywhere in the world. But who was she? Was she the right woman? And if so, how

had she managed to accomplish everything? She'd had the captain's help, Philip was sure of that, and had killed him to keep him quiet. Using the man's body as a decoy spoke of more than kidnapping and murder. It spoke of madness. If Eddie was still alive and at her mercy, Philip didn't want to think of what he might be suffering.

"Tran enlarged the frame and printed a still," Jai said. "They're going to distribute copies to everyone they can think of, including the police and the media. Somebody must know who she is. And, Mama said, Grandfather, your father, Tony, and the Team are going to make sure the public knows the truth about the body, since Inspector Yiu won't."

Philip wasn't sure if that was a good idea. It would clear him, but Yiu might be sitting on the information for a legitimate reason. Still, he would like to come out of hiding. It would make finding Eddie easier if he wasn't busy constantly looking over his shoulder.

"Mama says the harbor patrol contacted Don last night since it was his friend who owns the yacht and lent it to Dad. Don's friend is in Switzerland. He said the captain was a new man. The old one had taken a new position the month before. The owner doesn't know much about this one except his name, which was Bing Hai. He was German, strangely, and had good credentials and references."

"That probably isn't his real name unless his father or mother was Chinese. Are they doing a background check on him?"

Jai shrugged. "Unless the police do, I don't think Tran or anyone on the Team has the contacts or access to those types of records.

"But a good Private Detective would," Philip said. "If I could get to a computer, I might be able to find out something."

"Well." Jai strung the word out. "I know where there is one, but getting to it might be tricky."

Philip had to laugh inwardly. This child was full of surprises. "If it will get us what we need, it's worth a shot. Where do we stand?"

"On more solid ground, Mama said," Jai said. "The news is more in your favor. The harbor patrol let them know the man on the yacht had been dead for a long time. It was highly unlikely you were the killer since at the time of his death, you were in the hospital with pneumonia. Your story is taking a firmer stand. The harbor patrol is relatively sure you're a victim. They intend to tell the police that. With the Team making sure the media and the public knows, you should be cleared." He paused. "It would help if we could find Dad. Mama said she thinks he's still alive, but she's worried it might not be for much longer if we don't find him soon."

He chewed on his bottom lip, his dark brown eyes full of his own fear and worry.

"I think she's right, and I'm scared."

Chapter Thirty-Two

While Jai distracted the security guards, Philip slipped into the emergency exit doors in the back of Eddie's headquarters. He told himself he didn't want to know how the younger Tseung had learned to bypass the alarms. He was beginning to think Jai should become a burglar instead of an actor, though he was glad he wasn't.

He waited under the stairs where Jai had instructed him and a few minutes later, the younger man joined him. Jai was a little winded, and his eyes gleamed with mischief. The resemblance to Eddie at that moment was palpable and made Philip's heart ache for his friend.

"Okay, how?" Philip demanded, unable to curb his curiosity.

"How what?" Jai led the way up the emergency stairs.

They spoke quietly so their voices wouldn't carry in the empty stairwell.

"How did you learn to break in here?" Philip asked.

"Oh that." Jai, in the lead, laughed. "Dad taught me."

Somehow that didn't surprise Philip. He wondered how many people were aware of Eddie's ability to break into the offices. He was full of orneriness. He probably had a hundred secret talents no one knew about.

On the fourth floor landing, Jai eased open the fire door and entered the empty corridor. It was after hours and on a weekend, so the chance of someone working was slim. On cat's feet, Jai led the way through the cubicles to another door at the far end of the corridor. Philip caught sight of Eddie's brass nameplate, his name written in English and Chinese. They went into the private office and over to Eddie's cluttered desk. Like everything in his life, the desk was busy with papers, books, pictures, magazines, mail, opened and non-opened, and anything that might spark creative ideas in his ever-active mind.

Jai slid some things to one side and pushed a button under a drawer. A section of the back wall revolved open, revealing a hidden room.

"Come on," Jai said and led the way inside.

Philip followed, impressed by Eddie's inventiveness.

Jai closed the wall before turning on the light. The room was the size of a comfortable one room apartment, containing a single bed, a couch, a small desk, and, Philip was glad to see, a computer.

With deft fingers, Jai powered the computer on and looked to Philip expectantly. Philip gave him instructions to an international data base that took them to restricted sites for law enforcement agencies. At that point, Philip took over, using some of his secret skills to traverse the data from Interpol.

"How'd you learn that?" Jai asked, looking over his shoulder.

"None of your business, Sai Lo," Philip said, using his elbow to gently move Jai away where he couldn't see what he was doing. "The less you know about this, the better."

He entered the name he was seeking into the date base and the results were, amazingly, immediate.

"Kwon Bing Hai; Captain Chinese Imperial Navy; Lost at sea, June 18, 1984."

He stared at the information with surprise. "Lost at sea? I don't get it." He typed further instructions and a brief profile came onto the screen, including a photograph.

Jai, who had moved back to stand behind him, said, "That's not him."

Philip remembered the severed head on the yacht, and although it had been hard to tell what the man looked like after the length of time he'd been there, Jai was right. And Philip had seen the captain while he was still alive. He wasn't the man in the photograph.

"No. The article says, *'Bing Hai was an only son, decorated for his service in battle and the Navy in general. Lost at sea when the ship*

inadvertently struck a floating mine off the coast of China. The mine was left over from World War Two, they think. The accident prompted a complete sweep of those waters, but no more mines were found.' The mine was probably planted, meant to stop a specific ship during the war. Changes in tides and currents probably caused it to drift from where it was originally. One of those weird accidents."

"That doesn't explain our Bing Hai," Jai said.

Philip considered the possibilities. It might be the wrong man, but there were no more records for anyone else by that name. He tried other databases and classified sites but discovered nothing. Sitting back, he scratched his chin, the bristles reminding him he needed a shave. For that matter, a hot bath, a toothbrush, and a warm bed would be more than appreciated.

Jai tapped his shoulder and nodded to a full-length mirror. "There's a bathroom behind that mirror. Dad keeps spares of everything. We might as well use it while we're here."

Feeling no closer to an answer, Philip gladly ceased his search for the time being.

"You go ahead," he said. "I'll check a few more things."

Jai disappeared behind the mirror and Philip pulled another site up. He'd especially not wanted Jai to see the Chinese classified military information. How he'd entered it, he'd never say, just as he'd never say how he accessed the same information on the United States, Great Britain, and Russian military.

He found what he was looking for then searched until he found the information for the ship on which Bing Hai had sailed. He pulled up the photographs of the crew roster and discovered the face he'd been looking for. "*Hans Soo Lowe, son of a German father, Heinrich Lowe, and Chinese mother, Soon Mai Lowe; Navigator and only survivor of the sinking of the Naval ship Xing-Hua in 1984. Court-martialed, sentenced to life in prison for negligence and dereliction to duty.*" Hans Lowe was accused of being the cause of the collision with the mine.

Philip brought up records of the prison, managing to bypass the security and hack into the inmate files. *"Hans Lowe escaped maximum Chinese imprisonment, February 2003. Thought to have found transport to Hong Kong. Wanted by the Chinese government. Still at large."*

"Not anymore," Philip muttered.

The hot shower felt good, as did the shave and being able to brush his teeth. Jai hadn't been exaggerating when he said Eddie had an ample supply of disposable razors, toothbrushes, combs, and spare underclothing still in packages. Fortunately, he and Philip were the same size.

Jai had retrieved clean clothes from a hidden closet in the room, jeans, sweatshirts, socks, and sneakers. He placed the clothes they had been wearing neatly in a clothes hamper that, he assured Philip, was emptied every week. Those clothes would be washed and put away and no one would think anything about where they came from.

Philip showed Jai the information he had uncovered while Jai was in the shower.

"How did Hans Lowe become Bing Hai?" Jai asked.

"He probably somehow acquired Bing Hai's information and took that identity after escaping prison. There was no one to question the credentials and they got him to Hong Kong, though why he remained in Hong Kong is a mystery."

"Same reason you did, maybe," Jai said. "He couldn't get out. The authorities would be watching at the borders and would check the credentials that would come back as belonging to a dead man. And in his picture, it's hard to tell he's part Chinese unless you look really close."

"That makes sense," Philip said. "And gaining a position on a yacht owned by a German millionaire must have offered some protection. But the yacht doesn't remain in Hong Kong. Lowe has certainly been in and out of the country a dozen times."

“Who's going to question a German citizen, a rich one at that, about the crew on his yacht?” Jai asked.

Philip laughed. “Good point. Now, next question, how did he get mixed up with our mystery woman and why? Love affair, blackmail—too many scenarios.” He rubbed the back of his neck. He was tired.

His stomach growled and Jai's responded. They both laughed.

“Wait,” Jai said. “Be right back.” He went into the office and returned a few minutes later with sandwiches and soft drinks. “They have a kitchen. Everyone is always hungry at different times.”

“You seem to know your way around here pretty well,” Philip said, accepting a sandwich and drink.

“Dad kept me out of the public eye, but I spent more time with him than people think. Usually during summer vacation. I would come over for a week or two. Of course, most of the time he was away on location, so I would be wherever he was.”

“Yet the way the media portrays your relationship, he hardly pays you any attention,” Philip said.

Jai shrugged again. “Most people, me included, don't think a couple of weeks a year is exactly spending a lot of time with me. I guess I should be grateful for what he gives me. He could ignore me altogether.”

Philip searched Jai's face. Beneath the calm expression, he thought he detected sadness, maybe resignation.

“Your dad isn't a bad man. He loves you, I think. He made that obvious when I first met him. If it wasn't true, he wouldn't have guarded you so closely over the years. I think his biggest fear was that he might somehow lose you. It may have seemed he was neglecting you by working all the time, but that's Eddie. He doesn't know any other way.”

“Yeah, I know,” Jai said. “Now I'm older I can understand better, but when I was little, I just missed him, y'know? All the

other kids and their dads were always doing things together. I was jealous. But *they* thought it was great that *my* dad was Eddie Tseung, a hero, a star. I guess no one is ever satisfied to be who they are. The grass is always greener, y'know."

Philip did know. How long had he tried to deny who he really was? What had it cost him in the end to accept the truth? He shook off the thought.

He yawned. "Sorry. I don't know where to find our answer. Without knowing who that woman is..." He considered what they'd learned so far, which wasn't much.

"Is there anything on Hans Lowe other than that bit we found?" Jai asked. "I mean, personal stuff?"

Philip turned to the computer and typed. A site finally came up and he put the name in the search engine. "*Hans Lowe, fugitive, wanted by the Chinese government, last seen in Hong Kong April 2003 working as dock hand. No known associates.*" He threw up his hands. "Well, that's helpful. Nothing we didn't already know. Whoever this woman is, he must have met her somewhere along the way."

"Wait." Jai leaned close to the screen and moved the mouse lower. "*Sister, Song Lowe, nurse Kowloon Mental Asylum, deceased.*"

Philip typed Kowloon Mental Asylum and hit enter. "*Kowloon Mental Asylum closed January 1997 after government ends funding.*"

"It's a headline," Jai said. "Is there more?"

Philip searched another page. "*The Kowloon Mental Asylum, an experimental government hospital opened by the British Health Care System in 1971, closed its doors after funding by the British government ended with the reunification of Hong Kong to China. All patients within the hospital were transferred to hospitals throughout the British Empire before the formal closing. All personnel were allowed to relocate or remain at other medical facilities.*"

"I'm still confused," Jai said. "All we know is that his sister was a nurse there and that she died."

Philip was running the information through his brain. An idea was beginning to form that made sense to him. "A hideout. An abandoned asylum—a perfect hiding place for a fugitive."

Jai sat straight in his chair. "Do you think he might have been hiding there?"

"It makes sense," Philip said. "The authorities would never think to look at a place like that. At least it's a place to begin. What it has to do with the woman, I don't know, but if she was with him, she might still be hiding there."

"With Dad," Jai said. "She could be hiding Dad there."

Philip nodded. That was what he was thinking. He had a funny feeling they were right. Something in the back of his mind toyed with his memory, a sensation of cold metal and the smell of antiseptic.

"We'll go," he said, "Tomorrow we'll find this place and go." He glanced around him. "I don't know how we're going to get out of here in the morning. It'll be Monday and there will be people here."

Jai's mischievous grin reappeared. "Don't worry about that. We'll get out and no one will see us. No one comes into Dad's office except him and his assistant. When Dad's not here, the office stays shut. There's a way out that doesn't go through the offices."

That didn't surprise Philip after all the secret places he'd seen so far. Evidently, Eddie liked to sneak out and be by himself at times. That was understandable, but it must drive his employees to distraction when he suddenly disappears. Philip didn't want to think about what those employees were currently going through, not knowing where Eddie was or if he was ever coming back.

"We're safe for now," Jai said, standing and stretching, "and we need to sleep. Plus, we still need the computer. We can access a news site in the morning and see if there's any progress on the investigation by the police."

Philip shut down the computer. He was bone tired and he didn't think his brain could take in any more information right

now. "You take the bed," he said. "I'll be okay on the couch." He went to the crushed leather couch and stretched out on the thick soft cushions. Eddie liked to be comfortable. He gave him that.

Jai sat down on the bed and stared at him for a long minute as if he had something to say.

"What?"

"You're quite an amazing man," Jai said. "You have a good head on your shoulders. I'm sorry I misjudged you at first. Dad spoke of you often when he finished *Twisting Dagger*. And I remember our brief conversation on the phone during that time. He trusted you. I should have too."

"You did exactly what you should have done, Jai. You're smart and inventive, like Eddie. You have good instincts. You didn't know me and you were scared. Always trust your feelings, though. You'll do okay, no matter what you decide to do in your life."

There was no answer. Philip looked over at the bed. Jai was curled on his side, soundly asleep. Philip got up and turned off the light. As he lay back down, he thought about how much the son resembled the father. He would have a long talk with Eddie when this was all over. And he would talk with him. He refused to give up the hope that Eddie was alive. Silently he promised his friend, no matter how long it took, he would find him and bring him home.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Jo disconnected the call with Jai and felt a huge relief course through her. He was alive and safe. She hadn't been happy that he refused to tell her his location, but she understood. She didn't know how she felt about him being with Philip Chandler, but as long as they were safe, she would trust Jai's judgment. She knew him better than anyone. Despite his lack of a father figure and the strictness of his grandfather, Jai had a level head and good instincts. That much he'd inherited from his father. He was intelligent and resourceful. If he was helping Philip, the American was in good hands. Jai knew Hong Kong and all his father's secret places.

The past few nights since her talk with Edward had been difficult. She had spent the time since alone, thinking about what Edward had said to her. Her decision in the end hadn't been an easy one. There was much involved, many people, but she knew in her heart there was only one decision she could make.

She hugged her arms around her body and moved to her window. She wouldn't tell anyone about Jai's call, not yet. She would give him time and let him know when it was safe to tell others.

Staring into the star-filled sky, she remembered the night she and Eddie had gone "to the wrong bed" as Eddie put it. They had been teasing each other, playing like children, wrestling, tickling, and then suddenly things had turned serious. She had been on her back. He'd been leaning over her, brushing her hair from her face, and she'd seen the longing in his eyes; longing, not hunger, not desire, but longing, a need for someone to hold him, care about him. At that moment, she'd felt only compassion for him, the lost child. His kiss had been clumsy, but she hadn't resisted.

She thought of the night she told him she was pregnant. He'd been terrified, afraid of what she thought of him. She ended

up consoling him, assuring him it would be alright, even though she was just as confused, scared, and not sure what to do. She'd told him she wouldn't hold him to anything. The pregnancy was as much her fault as his. But she had wanted him to know.

Eddie had spent a week thinking about what to do. He had been afraid to tell Don or any of the people he worked for. The revelation had put his entire career in jeopardy. Finally, he'd returned and told her they had to tell his parents. Edward had decided the matter for them. They would marry and the child would have a legitimate father and mother. Eddie hadn't argued.

Don had found out somehow and insisted on the agreement that, in public, to preserve his image and his following of fans, Eddie's marriage would remain hidden. They would live apart. She would move to California and raise their child out of the public eye. Eddie would continue his career.

The night Jiang was born, Eddie, called from filming in Switzerland, flew to Los Angeles to be with her. Edward and Eddie's mother, Lei, were already there. When Eddie arrived at the hospital, he'd been drunk, scared to death. She'd been nervous, elated, frightened, but certain of what she intended to do. She'd done it. She'd left her life as an actress and singer and raised her son alone for the most part. Being who she was, the wife of Eddie Tseung, benefited her and Jai financially and socially. Emotionally, and personally, she would have done as well as a widow. They would never divorce. Eddie insisted, and they both agreed, that the marriage was an unbreakable contract. He'd given his word, and he wouldn't go back on it.

There were many times over the years that she resented, even hated Eddie, especially when Jai reached a milestone or an achievement and his father wasn't there to share in it. Her anger and resentment had been strongest when she would see the longing and loneliness in Jai's eyes as he watched other fathers and their children. Those times, she'd strongly considered filing for

divorce, but Eddie would never agree, so she stayed and did her best to ignore his playboy ways.

It took a near death experience to finally settle Eddie down. There were still affairs, and he made many mistakes, but he'd learned he wasn't invincible. He had made an effort to be a father to Jai. When Jai wasn't in school, he spent summers and holidays with Eddie, or when Eddie was in Hong Kong for any length of time, Jai visited him. As a child, Jai had been enamored with his father, the hero action movie star loved by everyone. When Jai reached adolescence, his interest faded some. Jai was no longer a child. He knew what his relationship with his father was, had always been, and accepted it. Eddie was who he was. Jai was who he was. Their views and opinions often clashed, sometimes loudly. But Jai loved his father, and, Jo felt, in his own way, Eddie loved his son.

Sighing, she moved from the window and sank onto her couch. She'd placed a cold tumbler of water on the coffee table and took a drink from it. As she sat the tumbler on a coaster on the table, she leaned into the cushions and closed her eyes.

Edward was right. Eddie was not a trained dog or a slave, although there were many years it seemed as if his life was completely in the control of his backers and managers. The agreement that he should always appear single had been the biggest mistake he and she had ever made. It had been irrational. No other star in the world lived by such a strict compromise. Both of them, and Jai, had suffered because of it. Eddie was a grown man. He no longer answered to anyone but himself. Their marriage was no longer a secret, nor was the fact that Eddie had a son. The facts didn't seem to mean as much to his fans, who were also older. Most of them had grown up with him in his movie career. Jo liked to think that those fans, the loyal ones, understood that people marry and start families, even mega-stars like Eddie. Even so, nothing really changed when his family life became common knowledge. The night he disappeared, everything became different

for her. Her and Eddie's life had to change. Once he was found, and she would never give up praying and hoping he would be found, alive and safe, their life together would be different. She was the first link in that chain. She knew what she had to do, must do, and she would do it.

"Eddie, you should see the sunshine." The woman's words were cheerful as she entered his room.

He heard the swish of the door open and close.

"You wouldn't believe how beautiful it is, warm and bright."

He heard her footsteps as she crossed to him and sat on the edge of the bed. She smelled like fresh air.

"I have a treat for you."

Eddie caught a whiff of something spicy held under his nose.

"I know how much you like spring rolls," she said. "So, I bought you a whole basket full."

He felt a doughy mass pressed gently to his lips. The roll was still hot. He opened his mouth and took a tentative bite. He was more alert. Whatever she'd been giving him had worn off. If she was still drugging him, he hadn't detected it. He was growing stronger. That was to his advantage. If he could regain his strength, he might break free and overpower her. He had to keep trying.

The woman never spoke of what she'd done to him, how she'd tortured him. When she did speak, she babbled about life as if they were the best of friends and what it would be like when they were finally together. She was insane. He knew it and wanted to ask her what she'd done to Philip, but that might set her off. The result might be he'd end up again in the padded room and the torture would start all over.

He finished the roll. It had tasted fine, but he had trouble swallowing it. It sat heavy on his stomach.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

She sounded merely curious, but he detected an edge to her voice.

"You want to leave, don't you?" Her words were flat, but not angry.

He said nothing. He didn't know what to say, afraid anything he might say would be the wrong thing. He felt her leave the bed and heard her pacing.

"You want to leave me, don't you?" An edge had crept into the outer fringes of her question.

He heard her approach him, felt her nearness.

"You can leave," she said. "You have the key. I have the lock. All you have to do is use your key and unlock the door. That's all you have to do."

He had no idea what she meant and had a sick feeling he didn't want to.

She sat down on the bed. He felt her lean over him and felt her warm breath on his face. When she spoke, her words were breathy and seductive.

"Use your key, Eddie. Unlock the door. Free yourself." Her hand traced a path from his neck to his chest, then drifted to his stomach to the edge of the blankets covering his waist. "Use your key," she whispered.

Understanding flared in his brain. His *key*. Her *lock*. He struggled against the chains. The spring roll threatened to abandon him. "No! Never! You're insane."

He felt her leave the bed and heard her laughter that faded as she left the room. Even if it meant returning to the torture, he would never allow her to touch him.

Chapter Thirty-Four

"Her name is Elizabeth Greenstreet," Tran said, handing Don, Tony, Edward, and Raymond copies of the still enlargement he had made.

"It took a while," Luk said. "But we finally traced her through personnel."

The men sat in the suite, called together by Don after he was informed Tran had news. The members of the Team, with the exception of Luk and Brad, spoke through Don, who translated what they were saying for the Americans. Tran and Yau found they could report faster in Cantonese. Since Eddie's men understood English, Don answered in English.

"We believe this is the one," Tran said. "She is on nearly every frame since filming began four months ago."

"No one noticed her because everyone is too busy when we're shooting," Brad said. "None of us know everyone on site. We did some backtracking."

"We checked all the film since day one," Yau said.

"And the surveillance cameras that were at some of the sites," Luk interjected. "She is seen close to Eddie on more than one occasion."

"And close to his car," Brad added.

"But that's all circumstantial," Don said. "Just because she's close to him and on the set means nothing."

"No, but we've never seen her before. Only members of the filming crew or the Team are allowed on the set. She doesn't belong. She's not Chinese. We have no members who aren't Asian." Tran said.

"No females anyway," Brad corrected him.

"How did you come up with her name?" Tony asked.

"We checked with all the crew members," Brad said. "To see if anyone knew her, which they didn't. But one of the assistants remembered seeing her in the offices some time ago."

"So we checked," Luk said. "People in personnel remembered her. They said she sent a resume several years ago but was rejected because she said she lived in America."

"She's American then?" Raymond asked.

Tran shook his head. "She went to California and applied at our offices there but was rejected again."

"For what reason?" Don asked. "Did anyone know?"

"No experience," Tran said. "They did a background check. She was a fan who wanted to be part of the Team. They said they get those all the time and reject them."

"She came here to Hong Kong several years ago," Luk said. "She tried to get a job in the office, but because she wasn't from Hong Kong, personnel turned her away again. They said she kept calling, asking for a job, but each time they told her they didn't need her."

"If she isn't American," Raymond asked, "What nationality is she? Did you find that out?"

The men shook their heads.

"But we did find out something else," Brad said. "You remember when we thought Eddie was being stalked in 1995?"

Don nodded. "Yes, but nothing ever came of it."

"It was her," Brad said. "This isn't something that just started. She's been chasing Eddie for years. Her trying to get a job happened before 1997."

"How do you know?" Don asked.

Edward and Raymond were leaning forward attentive.

"Tony," Luk said.

The men turned in surprise to face Tony.

"How?" Raymond asked.

"I worked for Los Angeles Police Department before I came to Baytown, remember," Tony said. "I still have contacts there."

They were able to get a handle on this Elizabeth Greenstreet while she was in California. She had quite a few complaints lodged against her by Eddie's offices there and a restraining order. I also contacted a friend who is a Private Investigator. He was able to find the information concerning her stalking Eddie."

"The time Eddie's apartment was broken into and some of his clothes were stolen?" Tran said. "Her again. And personnel said she kept making appointments to see him. They didn't take her seriously. She would go for years and not contact them, then she was back. They thought she was a fanatic but nothing to worry about."

Don leaned back in his chair and heaved a sigh of irritation. "Nothing to worry about. They should have alerted me and Eddie and called in the authorities. This could have all been avoided. Who in personnel gave you this information? I will have a talk with them, and they won't like what I have to say."

"I don't think it was any one person," Brad said. "You'd probably have to speak to their supervisor and check any records they have. From what we were told, they just considered her a nuisance."

"Since 1995?" Jo came out of the bedroom to join them. She'd obviously been listening. "She kept turning up since then and they never considered she might be unstable or dangerous?"

Tony vacated his chair so she could sit with them at the table. "You want some coffee?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you," she said.

Tony retrieved a cup and saucer and the coffee carafe from the kitchenette. He filled her cup and made an offer to the others. They had been without much sleep for days. Coffee was the only way they'd kept going. Everyone but Edward accepted another cup.

"Personnel said Administration and Management had told them not to worry about another lovesick female fan," Tran said.

"But Administration said they knew nothing about it, and you are Management."

"Personnel isn't going to admit the truth," Tony said. "No one wants to because that would make them seem partially responsible for what happened."

"They are responsible," Raymond said, slamming the table with his fist. "Because of their negligence and non-action, Eddie is missing. A man is dead. My son is missing and in trouble. If this woman is the reason, and it appears she is, then they are responsible."

"I agree," Don said. "And I intend to have whoever is responsible for failing to do what every person in Eddie's employ is trained to do from day one. Eddie's safety is our number one priority. Whether we think there is a legitimate threat or not, all of us are to make certain any incident or person acting strange is immediately reported to me, to Eddie, and to Security."

"What about the woman?" Raymond asked. "Has she been on the set lately? Has anyone seen her since all this began?"

"Not since Eddie disappeared," Luk said.

"We did find out a little more, or rather, Tony did," Brad said. "In 1996, there was a woman from Britain making public statements that she was Eddie's wife."

Tony took up the report from him. "According to several newspapers and media outlets, both here and internationally, at that time, this woman allegedly had documents proving that she and he were secretly married in Los Angeles in 1996. Before the articles were published, however, someone had the intelligence to check her story, which of course proved false. Her 'documents' were forged. The press knew how Eddie felt about things like that and what he would probably do if they dared publish such a lie. Even the tattletale media didn't take the story."

"But then the incident in 1997 happened," Tran said. "Two of the newspapers did print that story, but there was so much backlash, they pulled the story in record time."

“Fortunately for Eddie,” Don said. He couldn't believe all this had taken place right under his nose without him being aware of any of it.

“It was then the authorities decided to investigate Elizabeth Greenstreet,” Tony said. “She was arrested and placed in a mental hospital for observation.”

“They told the authorities at last then?” Edward spoke for the first time.

Luk answered. “It was only to be for a few days while the doctors evaluated her. She was going to be returned to London, where she was from, but something went wrong and she was admitted to the hospital.”

“Which hospital?” Edward asked.

“Kowloon Mental Hospital,” Tran said.

“But that hospital closed years ago,” Jo said. “After the Unification took place, it closed and all the patients were moved. I remember it was on all the news.”

“We checked with government records,” Tran said. “All patients not Asian were transferred to British Territories.”

“Elizabeth Greenstreet was reported to have been transferred to Scotland,” Brad said.

“How did you get all this information?” Raymond asked. “I would've thought whoever was at fault would have hidden it so deep, it would take dynamite to dig it out.”

“If anyone can ferret out information having to do with Eddie,” Don said, “it's his Team. They make it their business to know and have contacts in all departments.”

“And when Eddie's life is in danger,” Brad said, “we make it our business to know.”

Tony and Raymond looked impressed at the Team's efficiency.

“You guys are your own Interpol,” Raymond said.

"They ought to work for the government," Tony said. "They've worked long and hard, and quickly, to get what they have so far."

"Which is a great deal," Raymond said.

"It would have been sooner if we had been thinking," Tran said. "Sometimes it's good to know many people. Eddie is known all over the world. He has many contacts for his interests."

"When Eddie travels, it's almost like a dignitary coming and going," Don said. "His many charities and entrepreneur endeavors give him a higher status than that of simply an actor. Even so, I'm amazed at what Tran, Luk, and Yau have uncovered."

"So the woman went to Scotland?" Jo asked. "Then what?"

"Someone in the U.S., probably family, intervened," Brad said. "She was released and sent to Los Angeles in 2000."

"But she didn't live there, wasn't from there," Raymond said. "Why would she be sent someplace other than England?"

"According to my Private Investigator," Tony said, "Elizabeth Greenstreet was put into counseling by someone who said he was a family member. For the next two years, she had a job in an office, until last year when she left without giving notice. She was reported missing after she didn't show up for work and couldn't be reached at her apartment."

"And she somehow managed to get over here again," Don said. "Eddie not being aware of any of this was a mistake. He would have been on his guard, all of us would have."

"There were too many calculated accidents," Edward said. "A woman wouldn't be able to stage some of them, especially the kidnapping, alone. She had to have help."

"The Captain of the yacht," Tony said. "It's the only thing that makes sense."

Tran handed Edward a packet of papers. Edward scanned them and his worry seemed to deepen.

"Pyrotechnics," he said, handing the papers to Tony.

Tony skimmed through the papers then dropped them on the table. "Where did you get this?"

"A friend in the States," Tran said. "He discovered the woman had enrolled in college when she was younger. She was studying to be in the movie business and her specialty was pyrotechnics. She wanted to work for one of the biggest special effects organizations over there. Our friend contacted them and that is their reply."

Jo picked up the papers and read aloud. "*Elizabeth Greenstreet, considered unstable and not a good candidate to work as an employee despite her considerable knowledge, ability, and expertise in the area of special effects and pyrotechnic effects.*"

"They knew," Raymond said, his anger palpable. "They knew that woman was mentally unstable. Why wasn't she investigated more thoroughly? Instead people dismissed her. I can't believe the incompetence, and now—now it may cost all of us dearly."

Jo's face drained of color at his words. Don placed his hand over hers in an effort to reassure her. He didn't know what to do. The people at the table were all suffering, especially the two fathers.

"She's a killer," Tony said. "We know that, but her connection to the Captain is confusing."

"We haven't been able to find out anything about the murdered man," Brad said. "Inspector Yiu has made it clear that if any of his men say anything to us, they will be in serious trouble."

"I don't understand him," Jo said. "Why is he being so secretive? It's almost as if he doesn't want to help us find the truth."

"It's too late anyway," Don said. "Jo and I alerted the media that the body was not Eddie."

"But there still isn't anything to prove Philip didn't have anything to do with it," Tony said.

"We have to find this woman," Raymond said adamantly. "We have to make it safe for Philip to come in. Have you found anything to tell you where she might be?"

Before Tran could reply, the buzzer on the door sounded. Don went to answer and was surprised to find Inspector Yiu standing there. The Inspector shouldered past Don and moved directly to where Jo sat. Edward moved to stand protectively behind her.

"We have just received word that the private office of Eddie Tseung was infiltrated sometime last night," Inspector Yiu said without preamble. "It is believed that your son, Jiang, spent the night there, and that he was not alone. Your son is with Philip Chandler and you are aware of this. When was the last time you spoke with your son, Mrs. Tseung?"

All the men were on their feet ready to come to her defense if needed. Jo rose from her chair and faced the Inspector, her back rigid with defiance. When she spoke, her words were filled with ice.

"I may or may not know where my son is," she said. "Whether I do or do not is none of your business. If Jiang spent the night at his father's office, he's committed no crime. He has permission to do so whenever he wishes."

Inspector Yiu narrowed his eyes at her. "Mrs. Tseung, do you not understand the implications of your son abetting a fugitive?"

Raymond started forward. Edward caught him by the arm and shook his head.

"If my son was abetting a fugitive," Jo said, "Then I would not condone such an act. 'If' he was." Her gaze was steady on Inspector Yiu's face. "Jai is a grown man. He has many friends and his own life. He can do whatever he wants without checking in with me."

Inspector's Yiu's face had turned red, and his eyes were angry. "If he is caught with Chandler, he will be charged. I will see to it."

"If Philip Chandler is caught and charged with anything, Inspector, I would suggest you get ready for the fight of your life." Tony stood next to Jo and was at least a head taller than the Inspector. "I will see to it you are hung out to dry."

Inspector Yiu turned his anger to him. "What are you implying?"

"I'm implying nothing," Tony said. "I'm telling you. We all know what you've done, keeping the truth about the identity of the torso quiet. You know it isn't Eddie. What we don't know is why you're refusing to make that known and clear Philip of murder."

"Just because the body is not Eddie Tseung, that does not clear Chandler," Inspector Yiu said with a smirk. "Eddie Tseung is still missing and may be dead. Chandler may have killed him and the Captain of the yacht."

"Why are you so determined to make my son a murderer?" Raymond demanded. "He and Eddie are friends. He'd have no reason to kill him."

Inspector Yiu's tone and expression were unpleasant. "That is your opinion. I do not know this."

"You're not trying to find out either," Tony said. "You're so busy trying to pin this on Philip, you haven't bothered to look elsewhere. I find that highly suspicious."

Inspector Yiu's expression changed to one of intense anger. "You have no idea what I have or have not been doing. And if you interfere, I will see you are jailed for obstructing justice."

Tony took a step closer and stared down at the man. "I know that you've done nothing but hunt for Philip. We haven't been sitting idle here. I'm certain that the American Consulate would be interested to know that an American citizen is being charged with a murder he didn't commit and hunted like an animal by the authorities who don't seem to be interested in the truth."

"Is that a threat, Mr. Ferrone?" Inspector Yiu asked.

"No. It's a warning, *Inspector*."

The two men faced each other, neither one backing down or looking away for several long moments. At last, the Inspector turned on his heel and stalked out of the suite without another word.

"Who told him Jiang stayed at his father's office last night?" Jo broke the silence that followed after Inspector Yiu's departure.

Tran, Luk, Yau, and Brad all wore guilty expressions.

"You told him?" Jo asked.

"No." Tran was quick to answer. "But we knew he'd been there. Security called last night. We asked them to if anything strange happened. The power went out for about half an hour and then came back on. We had it checked. Someone had bypassed the emergency alarm on the basement door."

"Jai knows how to do that," Brad said. "And it made sense that it would be him since he has reason to want to go to Eddie's office. He's hiding."

"And we think he's hiding with Philip," Tran said.

"We checked this morning," Luk said. "Eddie's private room had been disturbed. The bed was ruffled. There were damp towels and dirty clothes in the bathroom. The sink had whiskers in it. They were there overnight."

"Where are they now?" Raymond asked.

"We don't know," Brad said. "Eddie has a computer in that room. Jai would know how to use it."

"So would Philip," Tony said. "As a matter-of-fact, he's very good with computers." He turned to Don. "Do you have any idea where this mental hospital is?"

"I do," Edward said.

"Then I would be willing to bet that Phil and Jai are on their way there. Philip has contacts in places even I can't get to. Don't ask me how. If he was at a computer, he was checking information. Odds are his information is the same as ours."

“Then we need to go there,” Don said. “We need to go now.”

Chapter Thirty-Five

The familiar clink of chains was missing when Eddie raised his arm. He sat up in on the bed and felt his wrists. The manacles were still there, but the chains had been removed. He leaned down and felt his ankles. The same was true of them. The drug was completely out of his system. All his sluggishness was gone. He had a slight headache, but he could deal with that.

What he didn't understand was his continued blindness. He ran his hands over his face and eyes. There seemed to be nothing wrong, yet he couldn't see. He held his hand in front of his face and strained to make out anything. His greatest fear was that the woman had rendered him sightless. If the blindness was permanent, his career would be over, both in front of and behind the camera. Without his career, his life would be over. But it might be what the woman intended, her final "punishment" for what she imagined had been his "sin" against her.

During his solitary confinement, he'd gone over long and hard the pictures and images with which he'd been tortured. The first images, the ones showing him in many instances of near undress and with other women throughout his career, he was ashamed to admit, were genuine. But the others, the ones of him and the unknown girls, he knew they weren't real.

She was obsessed. She'd made that more than clear. Obsessed fans were a hazard faced by any star, and there were those who went beyond obsession, who had turned to theft of pets, worse, kidnapping, and, in the most tragic cases, murder of the object of their obsession. This woman, whoever she was, was dangerous, and Eddie feared if he didn't escape her soon, he would become one of those victims.

He pulled himself to his feet. The drug wearing off had returned to him his strength. What he needed most was exercise. There had been no irrevocable damage to his body. He moved

forward, hands held in front of him until he felt the wall. Using the wall as a guide, he moved his way along the smooth surface until he reached a corner. He followed that wall to the next corner, then the next until he'd made four treks around the room. Moving was getting his blood circulating after all the...days? Weeks? Months? However long he had been imprisoned and chained.

The ability to move gave him hope. If he was careful and alert, he could overpower the woman despite his blindness. Without a weapon, he would have to depend on his strength and catch her by surprise.

He set along another trek around the room and encountered no obstacles, so he knew the room was empty other than the bed. As he walked, he listened for any indication the woman was coming. Time had long ceased to mean anything to him, so he had no idea how long it was before he heard the familiar swish of the door. He turned to the sound, which by his calculation, was directly across from where he stood.

He heard her soft gasp at finding him on his feet then a soft chuckle.

"Well, you're up," she said. "Good."

He set himself, waiting for her to move. She did. He heard her footsteps approach and felt the heat from her presence when she was close. When he was certain she was near enough, he grabbed her, hoping to take her by the throat. He miscalculated and grabbed her shoulders.

An electrical current coursed through his arms and legs. His knees buckled and he collapsed in a heap to the floor. Too late, he realized why the manacles had been left on his wrists and ankles.

"You stupid fool," she said, her voice filled with hurt and anger. "I was bringing your dinner, but since you have acted so stupidly, you can stay hungry."

She walked away from him in the direction he now knew was the door.

"You know, it would be easier if you would cooperate."

Shaken, Eddie used the wall to pull himself to his feet. Using the wall for support, he leaned against the smooth cold surface. Pulling in lungfuls of air, he finally managed to speak.

"I don't...understan'...what you want," he said.

"That should be obvious by now." Her voice held contempt. "I want you. I've always wanted you. You were meant to be mine." Her tone took on a plea of sorrow. "I tried to tell you, but you didn't listen. I have to make you understand." The contempt returned. "You belong to me. You will always belong to me."

He heard her take a step closer to him. When she spoke, there was sadness in her words.

"You weren't faithful to me." Anger crept back into her voice. "There were so many other women. I had to make you pay for your unfaithfulness. I had to make you understand that your body was to be shared with only one person, *me*. It belongs to me. *You belong to me*"

Her words grew sharper, more menacing, filled with threat. The change in her demeanor filled him with dread.

"You'll never leave me again," she said. "You'll never be unfaithful to me again."

The door opened and shut. Eddie crossed the room and fell against it, running his hands over the surface until he encountered an irregularity that might be a seam, but was unable to work his fingers into the tight space between the seam and the wall. Accomplishing nothing but broken fingernails and bleeding fingers, he slammed his fist against the door. There had to be a way out.

Leaning against the wall, he considered what the woman had told him. What had she meant? What had those pictures meant? .

Sinking to the floor and burying his face against his drawn up knees in frustration and anger, he knew without doubt that time was short. If he didn't escape her, find a way out of that room, he would become another statistic lost to an insane, obsessed fan.

Philip studied the abandoned, long, low concrete building that had once been the Kowloon Mental Hospital. The cracked, weather-worn walls were covered with overgrown vines. Tall grass grew halfway up the boarded windows. Originally there had been a concrete wall, which Philip estimated had been twelve feet in height that encircled the grounds. Parts of the wall were missing, crumbled from neglect and weather. A chain-link fence, probably built in vain by the government to keep out vandals and looters, and gates as high as the wall had been, were rusted. The locks on the gates were welded together with rust. In places were gaps where the fence had fallen into disrepair and lay flat on the ground. To reach the entrance, it would be necessary to wade through the overgrowth covering the grounds. There was no way of knowing what might lie in the tall grass, but Philip was sure he and Jai were on the right trail.

He glanced at his young companion who stood ready to go as soon as he gave the word.

“Come on,” Philip said.

They waded into the weeds. Flying insects shot out of the grass, some of them landing on their exposed arms and faces, biting and stinging. Philip caught sight of small mammals, probably rats, scurrying out of their path. Twice he saw a snake slither away, leaving narrow trails in the grass. In only minutes, he and Jai were sweating heavily despite the cool air. The sky had clouded early that morning, covering the sun and threatening rain. Philip prayed the rain wouldn't add to their problems.

At the edge of the overgrowth, where the area in front of the entrance to the hospital had been cleared, Philip stopped and held up a warning hand to Jai and scanned the outside of the building for security cameras that might or might not still be functional. He cast a sharp eye for any signs of movement that might indicate a guard. He saw no one. Barring any surprises, he and Jai might make it into the building without being seen or caught.

He motioned for Jai to follow as he moved towards the entrance, mentally crossing his fingers that he was right about this being where Eddie was held captive. They could be on a wild goose chase, but he was certain that wasn't the case.

At the front door, he hesitated, once again alert for any sentry or camera. Seeing none, he crossed his fingers and gently tugged at the handle of the door. Holding his breath for the possibility of an alarm, he pulled the door. Surprisingly it opened. No alarm went off.

He entered the hospital, Jai following.

The building was freezing cold, almost pitch black save for a gray light filtering down a long corridor. The air smelled stale, like an abandoned building, but fresher air came from the same corridor. Somewhere there had to be a generator being used for temporary lights and power.

Cautiously, Philip led the way down the corridor, checking behind doors on either side. None of the doors were locked. Some of them led to offices still furnished with rotting wooden or rusted metal desks and chairs, some to public rooms where counters and tables held molded and rusted sinks, coffee makers, and microwave ovens, some to private rooms furnished with metal beds and little else. Everywhere thick dust carpeted everything and feathery cobwebs floated like fairy wings from the ceilings and corners. One door led to what must have once been a physical therapy room. An examination table blanketed with dust occupied the center of the room. Worn canvas restraints dangled from the table. Along one wall, a metal cabinet and counter was covered with rusted instruments Philip didn't want to even imagine the use of.

Jai tapped him on the shoulder and motioned him in the direction of the end of the corridor. He picked up a whiff of food. It seemed to come from a hall to their right. Carefully, they moved toward it until a rattle of metal brought them up short. They waited. A door opened and someone appeared. In the gloom, it

was hard to tell if that person was man or woman. They waited until the person went further down the hall and they followed.

The person stopped and opened a door. There was a crash, yelling, then the person reappeared in the hall carrying what looked like a tray and something small and dark in his or her right hand. He or she stood for a moment, staring at the opposite wall as if in thought, then turned to another corridor.

When they were certain the person had gone, Philip and Jai moved to the door. Jai kept watch while Philip worked to get the door open. Jai's quick whisper alerted him that the person was returning. The men hurried back into the shadows of the main corridor and watched. This time the person carried something in his or her hand that looked long and pointed, like a knife. The person paused before the door, seemed to set himself or herself for what he or she intended to do, then opened the door. Philip didn't wait. He ran forward and shoved the door wide open.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Eddie had recovered from the first confrontation and set himself for what he knew would follow. He stood again against the wall closest to the door, ready to attack as soon as the woman returned. He could hear faint footsteps outside the door. One good thing from his blindness was the increase in his hearing and sense of smell. He caught the whiff of the perfume the woman wore. She was outside the door, preparing to return.

He took a deep breath. He had one chance and he mustn't fail this time. The door swished open. In a lightning move, he shot out his hand, closing it around her arm. She turned in his grip and he felt something sharp and cold rip through the flesh of his arm. The pain reached him a second later. She was armed, with a knife no doubt. She meant to kill him. He held on, refusing to give her a chance. He felt the stickiness of blood pour from the deep gash.

She struck his injury with the hard end of the knife. Eddie jerked his hand to his chest, stumbling away from her. The second blow tore down his shoulder and back. His arm swept out and contacted with her face. She screamed and drove the knife deep into his ribcage.

The sound of the door crashing open and the shout of voices intervened. Eddie heard the woman snarl as she turned to face the new threat. The world was tilting. Eddie felt his knees give way and a voice call his name, but the sound was too far away for him to comprehend what was said through the roaring in his ears.

Elizabeth Greenstreet turned with the snarl of a wild animal to meet Philip as he rushed into the room. The knife she wielded was covered in blood as she stood between him and an injured Eddie. Philip didn't move but fixed his eyes on hers, holding her gaze, never wavering or flinching. This woman was insane, and he knew she would attack at the slightest provocation.

He saw Eddie lying on the floor behind her, his body covered in blood. Philip didn't know how seriously he was injured, but Eddie was moving, still alive. He knew he had to get him away from Elizabeth, get him to safety and help fast.

"Jai." He spoke softly. "Go to your father. Get him out of here."

Jai didn't move.

"Jai." Philip spoke to the young man sharply.

"I'm afraid," Jai said. There were tears in his voice. "She might hurt him again."

Elizabeth growled, crouched as if preparing to spring. Philip continued to hold her gaze. He dared not show any fear, dared not back down. He had to make her know he would stand his ground, willing to fight her to reach Eddie.

"It'll be alright." He spoke softly again, tried to sound reassuring. "She won't attack you. Get to your father and get him out of here."

He hoped the hint of urgency in his voice would get Jai moving. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Jai inch around him in Eddie's direction.

Elizabeth's eyes shifted to Jai. Philip made a slight movement that returned her attention to him. Using his body as a shield, he circled, keeping Jai behind him. If she attacked, she would have to go through him. Elizabeth watched them, her eyes filled with the madness of the demons that possessed her. She bared her teeth and growled, a low guttural growl that sounded in no way human.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Jai reached Eddie's side and knelt on one knee, sickened by the blood, frightened that his father could be dying. Gathering Eddie into a fireman's hold, he lifted him. Despite the obvious weight Eddie had lost, he was still heavy, but the physical training Eddie had insisted Jai gain became an asset. Not daring to look in Philip's direction, he moved for the door. Philip stayed between him and Elizabeth.

The woman terrified Jai. She watched him like a cat would a mouse, but with Philip as a barrier, the way to the door was clear. Jai reached the open door and moved through it. He heard the unearthly scream as the woman charged. Not waiting to see what happened, Jai kept going as fast as he could carry his father out of the building. Each step seemed to take forever, but he soon reached the entrance and shoved the door open with his foot. Carefully, he eased his burden onto the wet patio. The rain had started while he and Philip were inside fighting for Eddie's life.

Time started moving in fast forward. Unexpectedly, there were people around him, talking and shouting. Jai heard his own voice say something about Philip, but the turmoil in his mind was too loud and confused. He stared into faces blurred by his tears. Only one stood out. Jo knelt next to him, her arms encircling his shoulders as she held him and Eddie to her. Blood soaked through the front of her blouse as she buried her face in Jai's wet hair. Somewhere in the distance, Jai heard a siren, then several. Help was coming.

Philip met Elizabeth's charge with a rock-solid stance. She plowed into him, her knife diving toward his chest. He grabbed her wrists and held tight, squeezing with all the strength he possessed to force her to drop her weapon. Her madness gave her inhuman strength. Screaming, she twisted from him, her eyes burning with

rage as she spat at him. Foam flecked the sides of her mouth as she bared her teeth and raked at his face with both knife and nails. He avoided the initial blows, keeping between her and the door, giving Jai time to escape with his father.

A backhanded slap sent Elizabeth reeling into the wall, giving Philip time to catch his breath and reset his stance before she attacked again. She feinted to the right. He reached to stop her, realized too late what she'd done, and in his attempt to correct his error, unbalanced. She drove her elbow into his side, causing him to stumble slightly. She swung the knife and barely missed his face but caught his arm as he raised it in defense. The blade of her knife raked the side of the bone from his elbow to his wrist.

Philip caught her by the front of her shirt and threw her violently away from him. She hit the wall, the knife flying out of her hand and skidding across the room.

Breathing hard from the battle and gritting his teeth against his pain, Philip kept his eyes on her, ready for her to try for him again. She slid to the floor in a huddle and drew into a tight ball, the fight gone out of her. She didn't move.

"No. No. No. No," she wailed. "You took him away. He's mine. He's mine. He's mine."

Philip allowed himself to relax but stood ready in case she recovered her fight. He watched her, a pathetic mad creature he should feel sorry for. But she wasn't some innocent. She'd bundled him in a canvas sail and thrown him into the ocean to drown. She'd kidnapped Eddie and tried to murder him. Remembering the blood Eddie lay in, Philip prayed she hadn't succeeded.

Elizabeth Greenstreet had butchered her accomplice to keep him from talking and used part of his body to implicate Philip as the man's murderer. Philip felt nothing for her. Who knew what she'd done to Eddie during his incarceration as her prisoner. She caused so much pain for Eddie's family, and for his own.

She shifted where she lay, and Philip came alert, but she didn't rise from the floor. Her keening was the only sound he heard until Tran, Yau, Luk, and Tony came running into the room.

"Buddy." Tony quickly hurried to his side.

The adrenaline leaving him, Philip swayed, becoming conscious of the pain in his arm and the blood dripping from his hand.

Tony took him by his shoulders and turned him to examine him.

"Let me see your injury."

The slash was deep, to the bone. Tony yanked the sheet from the bed and ripped it into strips to wind around the wound.

Tran, Yau, and Luk used the rest of the sheet to bind Elizabeth Greenstreet's arms. With Tony's help, Philip went through the corridor to outside the building. Eddie's Team followed, leading Elizabeth between them.

Outside, the world erupted with people. Police poured out of cars and into the building. Philip, meeting them at the door, directed them to the room. The Team handed Elizabeth Greenstreet over to them. Philip could see two ambulances waiting while attendants cared for Eddie.

Brad stood next to Jai who held his mother while Eddie was treated and gently loaded onto a stretcher then hurried to the first ambulance. Brad followed with Jo. Edward, hovering over the Tseungs, caught Jai in a hug, led him after his mother to the ambulance to see Eddie safely ensconced, then stood watching as the ambulance, with Jo attending her husband, took off, siren wailing.

Philip took it all in, feeling both relief and sick. It was over. Eddie was alive and safe. The woman was in custody.

A paramedic took over caring for Philip's injury. Philip sat on a low wall by the hospital door while the paramedic unwrapped the makeshift bandage, announced he would definitely need stitches, and re-banded the injury. The second paramedic stood

by ready with the second stretcher. Philip tried to stand, but a wave of weakness flooded over him and he swayed.

He was caught in Raymond's arms in a firm hug.

"Young man, if you don't stop doing this sort of nonsense, you'll drive me into an early grave," Raymond said.

Philip tried to smile, but it didn't quite make it to his lips.

"Philip Chandler," a familiar voice commanded from behind him. "You are under arrest."

Everyone turned to find Inspector Yiu and several officers standing with weapons drawn and pointed at Philip.

Tired beyond belief and angrier than he could remember being, Philip faced the Inspector. "For what?"

Raymond, Tony, and the Team members surrounded Philip in a show of support and protection. Edward and Jai moved to stand with them.

Inspector Yiu stood straight, commanding and professional, the disdainful sneer on his face letting Philip know there was no escaping him.

"For the kidnap of Eddie Tseung and the murder of Captain Bing Hai Kwon," Inspector Yiu informed him.

The men erupted into protests until Philip held up his hand to silence them.

"I didn't kidnap Eddie," he said. "Elizabeth Greenstreet, who is now in the secure custody of your own men, is the kidnapper. She is also the murderer of Hans Lowe, aka Bing Hai Kwon. If you care to check, you'll find Captain Kwon Bing Hai died when his ship sank off the coast of China. But I'm sure you already know all of this, since you are the one who has been helping her."

Everyone fell silent as the two men faced each other. The sneer vanished from Inspector Yiu's face, replaced by cold hatred.

"That woman didn't accomplish this all by herself," Philip said. "She had to have help. I saw her. She's not big enough, height or weight-wise, or intelligent enough to kidnap two grown men, toss one overboard to drown, butcher another, and keep one

captive without help. I've done a lot of thinking these past few weeks. You were so set on keeping the search focused on me, even after you knew I had nothing to do with it, that the only explanation that made sense is that you are one of her confederates. Since you're still alive, then you have to be the one who murdered Hans Lowe."

He took a deep breath, his strength and energy close to drained. He swayed and Raymond grasped his arm to steady him.

"What was your relationship to this woman?" Tony asked. "How did you know her?"

Inspector Yiu stared at him with unbridled hatred in his dark eyes. His pistol was aimed directly at Philip's middle. As with Elizabeth Greenstreet, Philip held the Inspector's gaze.

"She was no one to me," Inspector Yiu said. "But *Tseung*..." He said the name as if it was a foul taste in his mouth. "My son worked for him. My son was a wonderful athlete. He had a chance to be a gold medalist in the Olympics, but chose to be a *stuntman*, like his *hero*, *Eddie Tseung*, a worthless street scum who came from nothing and will always be nothing no matter how hard he tries to use his money to make others think he is something special."

Edward took a step forward. Philip grabbed his arm.

"Let him talk."

"My son had a good education," Inspector Yiu said. "He had skill, talent. He was somebody, but Tseung made him a nobody. Against my wishes, he joined Eddie Tseung. He was so proud, but stuntman is no fit life for a good man. Tseung praised him, lured him with lies of greatness. My son would have been great, if he had stayed away from Eddie Tseung. He was only twenty-two when he fell forty feet from a scaffold during a stunt and broke his neck." He pointed a finger in emphasis. "Eddie Tseung is responsible. He was my son's hero, not *me*. I should have been. I am the one who saw his potential as an athlete. I am the one who encouraged him to go to the Olympics. I am the one who saw he was given the best education and training. *Not* Tseung! I spent

time with my son. I loved my son. What has *Tseung* ever given his own son? *Nothing.*"

He raised his gun and fired.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Philip heard the door to his room open but didn't look to see who had come in. The only light was from the lamp over his hospital bed. His arm, freshly stitched and bandaged, ached dully. He was completely exhausted and grateful that he, Jai, and Eddie were all safe.

"Hey, Buddy." Tony came over to the bed. "How you doin'?" He pulled over a chair so he could sit. "Time to talk. What's going on?"

Philip raised the head of his bed slightly. Raymond had been with him all night and most of the morning until Philip insisted he return to the hotel to get some sleep. Tony had been in and out over the last twenty-four hours. He'd spent a great deal of his time giving statements to the police, about what part he'd played in finding Elizabeth Greenstreet, and about the suicide of Inspector Yiu.

"You look as tired as I feel," Philip said.

Tony shrugged, a smile twitching the corners of his lips. "You know, when you left Baytown, you were supposed to be on vacation. Don admitted that wasn't exactly true."

"It was and it wasn't," Philip said. "He called and I wanted to get away for a while. I didn't expect this." He motioned around the room. "I didn't know how much danger Eddie was in. I don't think Don did either."

Tony nodded, but Philip could tell that wasn't what he wanted to know.

"Drink of water?" Philip asked.

The bedside tray and the water pitcher were on the side of Philip's injured arm, making it difficult to reach. Tony poured some water in a plastic cup with a straw and handed it over. Philip took a long drink. His head was beginning to ache and he thought about calling a nurse for an aspirin. He was, he knew, stalling.

“Buddy?”

Setting the cup to one side, Philip shifted to a more comfortable position on the bed. He might as well get it over with.

“I found my birth parents,” he said.

Tony leaned back in his chair, a stunned look on his face, but said nothing.

Philip sighed. “The adoptee case. I found out more than I ever wanted to know.”

“That bad?” Tony asked.

Philip returned to staring at the ceiling. “Sometimes when you're adopted, you want to believe you came from a good background.” He laughed. “Sometimes you pretend you're a lost heir, things like that. I used to imagine those kinds of fairy tales when I was a child. I really never wanted to know. Mom and Dad loved me and that was all that mattered. Now I do know, and I wish I didn't.”

He turned his head and gaze to Tony. “Yeah, that bad. My mother was a waitress married to a bootlegger who ran a chop shop. He was a boozier, wife beater. She never wanted kids, didn't want them to grow up in that sort of environment. She tried not to get pregnant, but sometimes things happen. Both times, she ran to California from Arkansas had the baby and gave it away. She said she was protecting them.”

“Both times?” Tony asked, leaning forward. “Wait a minute. You were looking for the birth parents of that girl. You mean—are you saying that she was, is...?”

“I have a baby sister,” Philip said. “I had no idea anything like that would remotely happen. When it did, when I realized the truth, that Tork and Maggie Derguson were my parents too, I felt sick. They were both alcoholics. Maggie stayed with Tork out of fear and suffered for it. She gave her kids away as soon as they were born to keep Tork from knowing about them. What was I supposed to tell Ms. Grayson?” He shook his head. “She'll never know. If I told her, I'd have to tell her the rest and I can't do that.”

She has a chance for a happy, good life with her new husband, her adopted parents' family and her husband's family. I can't throw that ugliness into it. I can't."

"But didn't she want to know for medical history?" Tony asked.

"I told her both parents were alcoholics and both were deceased. That's all there is. I told her not to worry about the alcoholism. She was raised in a dry home. She had nothing to worry about. She seemed to accept that."

Tony didn't say anything for a long moment. "I don't know if I agree with you on that, but if you're any indication, you're probably right. What else is going on?"

Philip frowned and pushed down a pain that wasn't physical, one he had been fighting since leaving Baytown. "Ellen broke off our engagement."

"I know," Tony said. "She told me. That was her mistake. She'll realize it."

"If you knew, why'd you ask?" Philip asked.

"I wanted to hear it from you," Tony said. "You can't hold on to that. You need to remember what happened to you before, with Lily."

"How's Eddie?" Philip asked, changing the subject. He didn't want to talk about Lily, or Ellen.

Tony grinned and shook his head. "Resting. The doctor said he lost a lot of blood, but his injuries will heal. Eddie's so thin, there wasn't a lot of skin to deflect the blade. It missed his lung and heart, barely. The injury to his arm, shoulder, and back—just more scars to add to his collection. He's not allowed visitors, except family. Jo hasn't left his side. There's something going on with her, too, but I don't know what. I guess we may find out in due time."

Philip figured that was probably true. Then again, maybe not. Eddie and Jo needed time together to heal physically, emotionally, and spiritually after all Eddie had been through.

"What about the woman?" he asked.

“Elizabeth Greenstreet,” Tony said. “That’s her name. She’s from London originally, a real basket case. She’s been stalking Eddie since 1995. Everyone wrote her off as harmless whenever she’d show up. No one bothered telling Don or Eddie about her. Don is raking some of Eddie’s people over the coals for not reporting her before. She didn’t kill Hans Lowe by the way. As you suspected, Yiu did. The Hong Kong police are excellent at their job when they’re not being misled. As for Elizabeth Greenstreet, she won’t be leaving the mental hospital in Scotland ever again.”

Philip remembered the feelings he’d felt about the woman while he and Jai were fighting her for Eddie’s life. It was sad that someone could be that twisted. It was tragic that Inspector Yiu had been driven to murder by the death of his son. He’d blamed Eddie, but Eddie wasn’t to blame. The Inspector’s son had been twenty-two, old enough to make his own decision what he wanted to do. Children don’t always become what their parents want them to. He knew that from personal experience. His parents had wanted him to be an attorney. He’d gone to school, passed the bar exam in California and in Washington, but his dream since they’d read him their collection of murder and detective mysteries when he was young was to be a Private Investigator. He’d followed his desire instead of theirs. After all that had happened over the years, he wasn’t too sure Ray and Agatha hadn’t had the right idea.

“Yiu really hated Eddie,” Philip said.

“Yeah, but it wasn’t Eddie’s fault the kid fell,” Tony said. “I checked with Tran. The stunt was not for Eddie, but for another actor, a British actor, and not even a leading part. Eddie wasn’t even on the set that day. When he found out about it, Tran said, he was in a bad way for days. He really liked the kid and had high hopes for him. He had no idea there was a problem with the father. Tran says Eddie’s funny about things like that. He works hard to mend fences because he wants one-hundred-percent for his Team. Safety always comes first. If any of them are distracted by illness, family problems, anything like that, they don’t pay attention and

that's when accidents happen. Tran said the kid had a big fight with his father the night before the filming. He was upset, reckless, that day. Eddie would never have let him on the set in that state."

Philip felt a surge of anger against Inspector Yiu, remembering what the man had said against Eddie. "It's not right. Eddie will blame himself for Yiu's suicide if he finds out."

"Yiu had no choice," Tony said. "He'd gone too far and failed in his objective. I thank God for that. I mean that I thank Him that you and Eddie are both still alive. Yiu couldn't face the humiliation and the guilt, or the shame, of what he'd done. He'd been a cop for thirty years. He couldn't go to prison. In his mind, there was only one way out." Tony placed his arm gently on Philip's good arm. "Come on, Buddy. I know seeing him shoot himself must have hit you hard. You've been there before. Your mind must have been hitting *deja vu* all through this case."

Philip didn't answer. It was hard. Tony was right, sort of. Yiu's suicide happened too fast to register on him at first. It wasn't until he was in the ambulance on the way to the hospital that what happened hit him. The memories flooded his mind of the gunshot, the blood and brain matter splattering his shirt and jacket as he lowered his ex-wife, Lily, dying, to the floor of the courtroom. She'd killed herself to keep from going to prison after murdering her own father and attempting to murder him. Philip didn't want to remember, didn't want to think about it.

"How's the arm?" Tony asked. His expression was concerned. "Nan says to tell you she's praying for you and Eddie and put the two of you on the prayer request list at church."

Philip shook himself out of his thoughts and glanced at his bandaged arm. "Tell Nan thank you. I'll live. Nothing permanently damaged. Like Eddie, I'll have to have some physical therapy."

The phone to the room rang. He frowned at the interruption. "Where's Dad?"

"At the hotel," Tony said, picking up the receiver. "Yeah?"

"Philip?"

"No, Ellen, it's Tony. Just a second." He held the receiver out to Philip.

Philip didn't want to talk to Ellen right now, and maybe not ever. Reluctantly he took the receiver and held it to his ear. "Yes?"

Tony waved to him and slipped out of the room before he could stop him.

"Philip?" Ellen's voice was shaky. She sounded upset.

"Yes, it's me," he said.

"Are you okay? You sound tired," she said.

He ran the hand of his good arm over his face. "I am tired."

"Where are you?" she asked. "I called your hotel room and they said you weren't staying there. They gave me the number to another hotel. When I called, your father answered. I didn't know you were going with your father. He gave me this number and said I should call you. Philip, what's going on? Why is Tony there?"

Philip stared at the phone in disbelief. Hadn't Ellen watched the news the last few months? How could she not know? The entire world had known.

"Ellen, where have you been?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" She sounded defensive.

He waited. She didn't say anything then relented.

"I know what's been going on," she said. "I'm not a hermit. But it was all so crazy, I didn't believe it. And then I couldn't reach you and I was worried. Nan wouldn't tell me why Tony was out of town. As a matter of fact, she's barely speaking to me. Darla won't talk to me. I just couldn't believe that you were in so much trouble again."

"Again?" He wondered what that was supposed to mean.

"When are you coming home?" she asked.

She was changing the subject. It was just as well.

"I'll be home in six weeks," he said.

"Why six weeks?" she asked.

He didn't feel like explaining about the hospital, about Eddie's near death, or about having to talk to the police, give

statements, and wait until the investigation into Inspector Yiu and Elizabeth Greenstreet was over. He wished she hadn't called. He didn't want to talk to her.

"Philip, are you hurt again?" she asked. "You are, aren't you? You're in the hospital, aren't you?"

He took a deep breath and let it slowly out to calm his irritation. "Yes, but it's just a scratch on my arm. I don't even know why they thought I needed to come here."

"They? They who?" she asked.

"Dad, Tony," he hedged. "Look Ellen, I can't—I can't deal with this right now. I know how you feel. You made that perfectly clear. Please don't worry. I'm fine."

He hung up without waiting for her reply. He closed his eyes and forced his anger and tension down to a manageable level. When he was certain he had it under control, he let himself relax.

"I'm fine," he said to himself.

And he would be, eventually.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Eddie opened his eyes to dark. He was in a bed and he felt a weight on his wrist. Fear raced through him as he tried to remember what had happened. He was free, fighting against his captor. She had a knife, intent on killing him, but something had stopped her. That made no sense. He remembered someone calling his name, someone kneeling next to him.

He took a deep breath. The smell wasn't the same. The air was cooler. There was still the smell of antiseptic, but it was fresher. Despite his blindness, he could feel light on his face. Close to his head was a steady beep and hum. He turned his head. A sharp pain stabbed him in the ribs. Someone took his hand. He almost drew away, but this hand was soft and wore a ring on the left finger. He sniffed. The scent was familiar, fresh water and jasmine. He relaxed. He knew who was next to him and that he was safe.

"Hospital?" His throat was dry and he could speak only in a whisper. He rubbed his thumb over the ring. "Jo?"

"Yes," she said. "You're safe now."

He sighed in relief as she smoothed his hair from his face. He remembered. He'd been stabbed. People had burst into the room where he was being held. There were voices all around him.

"Philip?" He'd feared for his friend's life. "Did they—find Philip?"

"Philip saved you," Jo said.

Joy flooded Eddie's heart. "He's alive?"

"Very much so," Jo said.

"I thought—she had killed him," he said.

"She tried to drown him," Jo said. "He escaped but was very ill for a long time. That's why everything took so long. When he was well, he disappeared, determined to find you. He had help."

"Who?"

"The person who carried you out of that place, your son," Jo said.

He turned his head sharply towards her and immediately wished he hadn't. The pain in his ribs made him cry out.

"Easy," Jo said, caressing his face with her free hand. "Easy. You mustn't move. You'll tear your stitches."

"Bad?" he asked.

"We almost lost you," Jo said. "That woman tried to kill you. You lost a lot of blood. But her knife missed anything vital. The doctor says you'll be here for a while."

Eddie gulped deep breaths until the pain eased. "It's dark. What time is it? Why are you sitting in the dark?"

She didn't answer.

"You aren't sitting in the dark, are you?" he asked. "I'm still blind." His voice cracked in anguish. He didn't want it to be true.

"For now," Jo said. She kissed his forehead again. "The doctors say the drug she gave you blinded you. It was easier than keeping a blindfold on you. But it will wear off. It just takes a little while. There was a lot of the drug in your system."

"Are you sure?" He needed to know it wasn't permanent, had to be sure.

He felt Jo's soft hands on either side of his face. Her warm breath caressed him. "Eddie, I am sure. The blindness is only temporary. You must be patient, but you will see again."

Something wet traced a line down his face. He realized he was crying. His tears mingled with hers. Her face was close to his and she held him gently by the shoulders.

"I am so sorry, Eddie," she said. "Sorry that you had to suffer, that you had to go through this ordeal. I was terrified for you."

He drew his good arm around her and held her tightly to his chest.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Hong Kong," she said. "You're in Intensive Care. No one is allowed in except me, Jai, and your father. Edward and Jai have gone home to rest." She lifted away from him. "Jai was as terrified as I was. When he saw you with all that blood, he was afraid. We had to force him to go home."

"You said he was with Philip," Eddie said. "Where is Philip?"

"He's here in the hospital, in a private room. Tony Ferrone and Mr. Chandler, Philip's father, are with him."

"Mr. Chandler?" Eddie had a sinking feeling. That couldn't be good. "Is Philip hurt?"

Jo took his hand in hers again, kissed his fingers, and held his hand close to her breast. He felt the beating of her heart beneath his palm.

"He fought that horrible woman," Jo said. "She struck him on the arm. It's not serious. He'll be fine. The doctor wanted to keep him for observation. Things haven't been easy for him. The police thought—that he'd murdered you when you disappeared."

"What?" Eddie tried to sit up. Instantly he knew it was a mistake and fell back, grimacing at the pain.

"Eddie, don't do that," Jo said. "It's all over now. Philip is cleared."

"Tell me—what happened." He spoke through gritted teeth. The pain eased and he was able to breathe normally.

Jo told him. He listened in disbelief. It was crazy, insane, and he felt sick to his stomach. So many people had gone through purgatory because of him.

"My fault," he wept. "It's all my fault."

"No, it isn't," Jo scolded. "None of this is your fault. That woman was insane. She was stalking you. You're not responsible for her insanity. She couldn't distinguish reality from fantasy. That's not your doing."

He heard her take a deep breath.

"Just as you were never responsible for those two young women who committed suicide when you were thirty. They were your fans but lost in fantasy of their own making. Your fans aren't your responsibility." She paused. "You're trying to take in too much right now," she said. "I shouldn't have told you. But Eddie, I want you to understand, not only this, but everything."

He heard something in her voice that worried him. He tightened his grip on her hand and conjured her face in his mind, imagining he could see her sitting there, her eyes filled with worry.

"What is it?" he asked.

He heard her crying. She didn't speak for a long minute.

"I have a decision to make," she said finally. "We both have."

He felt a clinch in his stomach. This pain was different, the kind that is deep in the heart.

"I don't understand," he said.

"I know," she said, her fingers feathering through his hair. "We have time. You've only just awakened. You need to not think about anything except getting well."

"You're leaving me, aren't you?" He knew it, felt it. This was the casualty of the ordeal he'd just passed through.

"Eddie, please," she said.

"Is that it?" He was pleading. He didn't mean to, but he couldn't help it. He'd been abandoned before. It was the one thing he always feared between him and Jo, that she would abandon him, too. It amazed him that after all their years together, she hadn't. She would have been justified.

"I need to know," she said, her words slow and cautious. "How do you feel about us? I must know before I make my decision."

"Us?" he asked.

"Yes, us," she said. "I need to know, honestly, truthfully how you feel about...me, really."

He'd been thinking about it ever since his torture with the images in the padded room. He'd had a lot of solitary time to consider deep down in his soul the relationship between him and Jo. He was ashamed of his past behavior, ashamed of all he'd put her through over the years, and ashamed that he was never able to tell her how much she meant to him, how courageous he thought she was to put up with him, how loyal and dear she was to him.

He was tired. He needed to rest, but he couldn't leave her without an answer.

"Your father gave me an ultimatum," Jo said. "He told me to claim you or let you go forever so you and I can finally be happy, whether we stay as one or go our separate ways."

She placed her fingers over his lips to keep him from interrupting. "He's right, Eddie. This has proven how foolish and stupid that agreement between us when we married was. No other movie star, no other person, no matter how famous, has ever had to live under such a strict edict. You've been forced to live a life alone for the sake of strangers. And so have I. That's why I must decide to be your wife or let you go. And if you go, you have to go with the knowledge that you must find someone who you can publicly and happily love, not hide for fear of what might happen. You're not a slave. You're a man. If I stay, I have to make it crystal clear to the world from now on that you are *my* husband and I am *your* wife. You are *not* available and never will be again to anyone. I have to take my place at your side, not behind you. But this can't be my decision alone. I have to know where you stand."

She fell silent. He held her hand, almost desperate to keep her with him. He was afraid, and he felt she could see it in his face.

"I'm here now," she said. "I am here publicly as your wife. I don't care who knows. I want them to know. I want them to know how much I feared losing you. Because I did, Eddie. I was so afraid. While you are here, I am your wife and you are not available."

"Jo." Eddie found it hard to force the words from his mouth, to find the words in his mind and assimilate them into coherent speech. "Why? What did Ba ba say?"

"That woman almost killed you," Jo said, her tone sharp edged. "That's the result of that stupid agreement you were forced into, to keep your family a secret for the sake of your fans, strangers. It can't go on that way. It has to stop. You have to stop it, you and I."

She pulled back, her hand slipped from his. "I've said too much. You shouldn't have had all of this put on you. You need to rest. I didn't intend to do that. It hurt you. I don't want to hurt you."

"You didn't hurt me," Eddie said. "I asked. You never lie to me." He turned his head from her. "I have to decide what kind of man I am." He wouldn't lie to her either. "There were pictures. Did they find them?"

She said nothing for a long moment.

"The police informed me they reconstructed shreds of some pictures they found on the floor of one of the hospital rooms, and of one found hidden in the room that woman had occupied," she said.

He closed his eyes. His tears trickled out from under his lashes and down his cheek, onto the top of the hospital gown he wore.

"Did you see it?" he asked.

Another long silence.

"Yes," she said.

"Then you understand what..." he said.

"It was fake, Eddie. Your face was used from an old photograph of you singing in the shower. I know. I took it. I have the original. Your face and head were manipulated onto a body that wasn't yours. The girl in the photo wasn't the woman holding you prisoner. That was also faked. The woman's name is Elizabeth

Greenstreet and she's British. She has blond hair and blue eyes. Those photos were meant to torture you into questioning yourself."

Her hand caressed his face, wiping the tears away.

"You didn't really think you had done such a thing?" she asked. "You would know. What sort of a man do you think you are?"

What sort of man? That had been the question he'd been asking himself for those long horrific days.

"I was beginning to wonder," he said. "After a while, locked in the room with those photos and the images flashed in film on the walls, I wasn't sure anymore."

"You would never be that kind of man," Jo said. "You never were, not even at the worst of times."

Eddie's ribs were beginning to hurt. His headache had increased and he needed to sleep. He should have waited and let Jo tell him in her own time.

"I wish I could see your face," he said. "I want to see your face."

She kissed his cheek. "It won't be long. You need to sleep. Your face is pale and your hands are cold."

The worry in her voice had returned. He wanted to reassure her, but his mind was going fuzzy. He was so extremely tired.

"Don't leave me," he whispered. "Stay with me. I need you."

She leaned over him and kissed his lips. "Go to sleep. We'll survive this, you'll see. I love you, Eddie."

Chapter Forty

A warm breeze tousled Philip's hair. He took a deep breath of the sweet tropical flowers carried within it. He let the sun warm his face as gentle music wafted, a joyful messenger, through Victoria's Peak down to the bay of Hong Kong. The soft silk of his dark blue suit of Chinese cut tickled his skin as it fluttered in the gentle wind.

Identically dressed, Tran stood at his side, caught his eye, and winked.

"Are you sure I look okay?" An impeccably dressed but extremely nervous Eddie tugged at the hem of his silver silk brocade suit that shimmered in the sun as if alive. Eddie's hair, its natural rich blue-black, shone like patent leather. His face, still thin but healthier, was touched by a soft flush of pink from his excitement.

"Come on, Dai Goh," Philip said. "I've already told you six times you look very debonair. Calm down before you wind up back in the hospital."

Eddie wrinkled his nose at him and adjusted the collar of his jacket, pulling it out of place again. Philip readjusted it for him for the dozenth time then turned his attention to the people standing within the circle of the overlook, familiar faces of Eddie's close friends, colleagues, and relatives. Beyond them, lining the walks, streets, paths, and parking lots, hundreds of members of the media from all over the world and thousands of fans, well-wishers, and business associates waited.

The music changed to the lilt of a traditional love song. Eddie started to adjust his collar as he stepped forward. Philip slapped his hand and shook his head, frowning at him. He and Tran took their places by Eddie's side.

Two women dressed in pale peach silk gowns, carrying cascades of peach and cherry blossoms that emitted sweet

fragrances, approached the men. Behind them, Jai, dressed in a formal tuxedo, escorted his mother. Her hand rested lightly on his sleeve as she walked straight and beautiful in a gown Eddie designed for her and had made by Hong Kong's top designer. The blush of the peach color highlighted the blush of her cheeks as Jai placed his mother's hand in Eddie's. She carried her bouquet of peach, ivory, and pink roses complimented by the ones she wore in her ebony hair. Jai bowed to his father, then took a seat next to his grandfather in the front of the gathering.

For the first time, Eddie allowed himself to plunge into the beauty he had never really noticed, to see the woman who had, even in the worst of times, remained by his side.

After his release from the hospital, he and Jo had spent his weeks of recovery together. She encouraged him when his depression pulled his spirits to his feet. She admonished him when he showed indications of giving up during physical therapy. She made him laugh when the guilt threatened tears. With her and through her, he was learning to give the love he'd never known how to give freely and without compunction.

They'd talked through many nights alone in their room at their house in Hong Kong. During those nights and days, he realized the treasure he'd always possessed but had neglected. They examined their separate lives and made their decisions, knowing it would take both to build the life they'd denied themselves in the past. He wanted the chance and she was willing to give it. She believed in him and in herself.

In deference to their unconventional life, Eddie chose the western wedding ceremony. Their first wedding had been no more than a few words in front of a Justice of the Peace. This time, he would speak the words properly and give them not only to Jo, but to God, who he knew had blessed his life, even if he never really understood. He'd not been raised as Christian, or any type of religion. The fire he'd just passed through had changed that as well.

He and Tony and Philip had spent long hours discussing that aspect of his life.

He faced Jo and listened to the words as he said them, letting their true meaning soak into his being. He gazed into Jo's eyes and felt pride when she said the words to him. They exchanged rings, hers a gold band with an oval jade stone. His was a dragon, specially designed for him by her.

"Do you, Tseung Shu Dai Chong, take Tseung Chao-Xing to be your lawfully wedded wife, forsaking all others, binding only to her, through sickness and in health, for rich or for poor, until parted by death?"

"Yes," Eddie said.

"And do you, Tseung Chao-Xing, take Tseung Shu Dai Chong to be your lawfully wedded husband, forsaking all others, binding only to him, through sickness and in health, for rich or for poor, until parted by death?"

Jo stared straight into Eddie's eyes, her smile gone.

"No."

Eddie started, confused as he searched her eyes for an explanation. Behind him, the guests murmured and whispered.

Jo laid her hand on Eddie's face. "I, Tseung Chao-Xing, take you, Tseung Shu-Dai-Chong, as my lawfully wedded husband, *banning* all others from your life and mine and binding only to you forever, and you to me forever, against anyone who would come between us, through sickness, death, danger, and joy, in health, for rich or poor, never to be parted even in death."

Eddie started breathing again as relief washed over him like a downpour of rain. He could swear he heard the congregation and everyone in attendance let out a collective breath. He glanced at Philip who was quietly laughing.

The Minister cleared his throat. "Then before God and this gathering, by the powers vested in me through Hong Kong and through the Lord Jesus Christ, I pronounce you husband and wife." He placed his hand on Eddie's shoulder. "You may kiss your wife."

Eddie wrapped his arms around Jo, wincing a little at the twinge of pain in his shoulder and arm, and kissed her as he had never kissed her, or anyone, in his life.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," the Minister announced. "I am pleased and privileged to introduce to you Mr. and Mrs. Tseung.

The crowd erupted into applause. Hands reached out to shake his hand. He gritted his teeth against the slaps of congratulations on his shoulder, smiling through the pain, until Philip moved to his side, shielding his shoulder from further well-wishers. He saw that Jo was enveloped in hug after hug, given kiss after kiss on her cheeks until he feared they would be chapped from all the attention. He finally managed to take her hand and lead her through the path of people to the reception tent close by.

Their cake was cut. The toast was made and drunk. Pictures were taken, then Jo briefly left to change into a pale pink suit for traveling. They kept their honeymoon destination a secret from everyone.

Eddie turned and gave Philip a bear hug. "Doh je, Sai Lo, thank you, little brother, for being here when I needed you."

"Anytime," Philip said.

Jo joined them and hugged Philip tight. He returned the hug.

"Doh je, Philip," she whispered. "Thank you for protecting him, for caring enough to risk your life for him. Forgive me any doubts I had about you."

He released her and backed away. "Take care of him this time. Don't let him get away from you."

She took Eddie's arm and smiled up at him. "Don't worry. Never again," she said.

Chapter Forty-One

The smell that greeted Philip when he entered his house was of a dwelling too long empty. He flipped on the lights and turned the thermostat up to get rid of the chill of the fall evening. He couldn't believe he'd been away nearly a year.

He dropped his bags at the end of the stairs and flipped on a lamp next to his couch. He looked around the open space of the converted warehouse and felt lonelier than he had even when he was homeless.

The flight from Hong Kong had been long and uncomfortable. He wasn't sure he would ever recover from the past ten months of uncertainty, fear, flight, and injury. His body ached all over. He'd wanted nothing more than to come home. Now he was here, he was amazed to find he didn't really care. Nothing had changed. But he had changed, and that was going to be a problem.

His house phone rang and he answered. "Yeah?"

"Hey, Buddy," Tony's cheerful voice greeted him. "How was the wedding?"

Philip struggled out of his coat and threw it on the recliner next to the couch. "Fabulous. The press went wild when Jo announced from that moment on Eddie is off limits to anyone, especially women, but his family. They asked what happens when he goes on location. She told them he won't be going alone anymore, ever."

Tony laughed. "I'm glad they decided to work things out. I know it's very 'western' of me, but I think it's about time."

Philip dropped onto the cushions of the couch and yawned. "Me, too."

"How about you?" Tony asked. "It's been three months since you found Eddie, got out of the hospital, and completed your physical therapy. Think you can get back into the swing of things?"

Philip didn't speak. He'd just been thinking about that very thing. He didn't know.

"Phil?"

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I think so. But not right away."

"Good," Tony said. He sounded relieved. "Call me if you need to talk. I'm right here."

"Yeah," Philip said. "I will. Thanks, Tony. Goodnight."

He replaced the phone in the charger and carried his bags up the stairs to his bedroom. He unpacked, took a long hot bath, and pulled on the pajama bottoms he wore around the house. Barefoot, he padded around downstairs to check his messages both on his office and home phone and his mail. He left his emails for a later date. Aside from three checks from clients, there was nothing of interest. Anything that had come in his absence, he was certain Darla had taken care of.

He went to the refrigerator and stared into the cool depths. There was nothing of interest in there either. Giving up, he went to the couch and sat down. His arm ached. The tissue around the scar was still tender.

The phone rang again. He stared at it, debating whether he wanted to answer or not. Whoever was on the other end was persistent. He gave in.

"Yeah?"

"Philip, can we talk?" It was Ellen.

He sighed and ran his hand through his hair. There was no way to avoid her forever. He might as well get it over with. "Okay. The door's unlocked. I'll be up."

Ellen pulled into the parking area next to the deck that had once been an old dock in front of the warehouse that was now Philip's home. She got out of the car and went to the door, knocked then entered the house. The only light was a lamp next to the couch in the living room area.

"Philip?" She moved into the room and saw him sitting on the couch in the dim light of the lamp. "Why are you sitting here in the dark?" She pulled off her coat and laid it across the back of a chair then sat in the chair. "Are you alright?"

His head was down when she sat, but he raised his gaze to her face and she saw lines of weariness, pain, and sadness.

"Why does everyone always ask me that?" he asked. "Truthfully, no, I'm not alright."

Ellen was startled by his blunt, almost rude reply. "Philip, I think..."

"Why are you here?" he asked. His tone was bitter and unfriendly, as was his expression.

She wasn't sure what to think or how to answer. His question hurt.

"I was concerned about you," she said. "I wanted to make sure you were alright. You sounded strange the last time I talked to you and you hung up before I had the chance to finish what I wanted to say."

He shifted and grimaced. Her eyes found the raw puffy tracks of recent stitches.

"What happened to your arm?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I told you. A scratch."

His attitude was making her angry. "Professionally speaking," she said coldly, "I'd say that was made by a knife, and not 'nothing'. Am I right?"

She saw one corner of his mouth turn up in a partial grim smile.

"You have good eyes, *'professionally'*," he said. "Yes, it was a knife."

Ellen sat on the edge of her chair, her elbows resting on her knees as she leaned forward facing him as a mother would a wayward child.

"I know what happened in Hong Kong," she said. "I saw the news, read the papers. You've been away for nearly a year,

several months of which you were wanted by the Hong Kong Police, the Chinese Government, the FBI, Interpol, and nearly every law enforcement agency in the world for the murder of Eddie Tseung, which, it turns out, never happened in the first place. What I don't know is how all that came about, or why. Philip, what happened?"

He sat staring at his hands for a long time, unwilling or unable or both to look at her.

"It's odd how some people get lost in their fantasies," he said. "They convince themselves other people belong to them, even when they don't know them. Those people become their whole world, and they confuse the fantasy with reality."

"Philip, what are you talking about?" she asked, growing frustrated.

He looked up at her. "It was a crazy fan, a stalker, a woman who convinced herself that she and Eddie had a relationship. She even went so far as to forge documents saying they were married. She kidnapped, drugged, tortured, and nearly stabbed him to death."

He bit each word as if the taste of it was bitter and vile. He held up his arm. "I was almost too late."

Ellen turned her face away for a second, relieved that what he'd been saying wasn't what she feared.

"You thought I meant us," he said.

Her eyes found his.

"Maybe I did in a way," he said. "It was too soon—too soon after Lily. I should never have gotten close to you. I mistook your friendship for more than it was. It was my mistake. I'm sorry."

Ellen couldn't keep from crying as she listened. It hurt to hear his words, to see the grief and loss in his eyes.

"Philip, I-I do love you. I think I did from the first time I saw you in the IC Unit. I just—I just didn't—couldn't..." She couldn't find the words she needed to explain.

"You couldn't live with what I did for a living," he said. "But you knew my story when you first met me. You knew how I'd made my living before then. And you knew I'd gone back to it."

"I didn't know how dangerous your life was," she said. "I didn't know it meant cuts and bruises and gunshots and explosions. I wanted to love you, not keep putting you back together."

She leaned closer, imploring him. "You don't have to be a Private Investigator. There are things less dangerous. You have your Law degree and license. You can be a lawyer. You don't have to work at all for that matter."

He stood and walked over to the window to stare into the darkness outside.

"You don't understand," he said. "What I am is what I've always wanted to be. I could be a lawyer. I passed the bar. I have my certification and license, but it's not what I want. I never wanted to be a lawyer. That was Dad and Mom's wish. I turned away from them, from all their hopes for me to do what I really wanted to do. And it cost me. I can't complain about what happened then or since. It was my choice. It is my choice. I could be the richest man in the world and it wouldn't make any difference. This is who I am." He turned to her. "I wouldn't ask you to give up being a nurse to be a receptionist just because it's safer. There's no job that's completely safe. I wouldn't ask you to give up what you are, what you love, because I wanted you to. That only leads to resentment. You can't live with my career and I understand that. I won't ask you to. I want you to be happy and to have that person who can make you happiest. I'll give myself time to meet other women, to breathe and live a little before I decide what I want for the rest of my life. I think that's reasonable, don't you?"

Ellen bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling. She swiped at the tears on her face. Philip handed her a tissue. She accepted it and daintily blew her nose.

“Go home,” he said gently. “Call your friend and be happy.”

She studied him, tried to see what he worked so hard to keep hidden from her. He'd spoken without anger, without emotion, and it had frightened her. It was almost as if he'd given up.

She went to him and kissed his cheek. “Get some rest.” She picked up her coat. “Goodnight, Philip.”

Philip watched her leave without moving. He stood where he was even after he heard her car start and the drone of the engine fade into the night.

“Good-bye, Ellen,” he whispered.

He prowled the house like a restless cat. Thinking of cats, he went upstairs and retrieved a photo Jai had given him. He smiled at the furry little face staring with curiosity into the camera as the photo was snapped on Jai's cell phone. He'd printed it out for Philip to bring home with him. Sing was in quarantine for observation, but she'd had all her shots, was licensed, was micro-chipped, and was spayed. Jai assured Philip he would probably not have to wait long before he was allowed to bring her home. The house would be a little less empty with a busy kitten around, he decided.

Which reminded him, there were some things Sing would need. He stuck the photo on his mirror as a reminder. Another photo, this one an 8 x 10 in a hand-tooled gold frame, sat on his bureau. In it, Eddie and Jo, their arms around each other, smiled in their wedding finery, the backdrop of Hong Kong behind them.

He hung up his wedding suit and ran his hand over the material. He liked the feel of the silk, but knew, in all likelihood, he would never have occasion to wear it again. Because of its provenance, however, he'd never give it up.

He went downstairs and rummaged through his mail again. Six envelopes he'd missed the first time contained checks. He set

them with the other three on his desk for Darla to deposit. He made a mental note to call her in the morning to let her know he was back. There was nothing in his inbox, so he knew she had kept up with the office business. There were papers waiting on his desk to send to his lawyer and accountant. He hated dealing with estate business. He found a letter from his parents wanting him to call as soon as he arrived home. He glanced at his watch. They would be asleep. He'd have to wait until morning.

He was restless, lonely, as he puttered around not really doing anything. He finally returned to the refrigerator and pulled open the door. His eye caught six dark brown bottles in the back of the top shelf, beer he kept for company. He stared at it and felt a strong desire for a drink. Somehow tea or a soft drink didn't appeal to him. He needed something stronger. Not letting himself think about it, he extracted one of the bottles and closed the refrigerator door.

He carried the bottle to the counter and set it down, staring at it. His mouth watered in anticipation for something wet and cold. He opened the bottle, held it for several minutes, then set it down and studied it. He wanted to drink it, to get drunk and lose himself in that nonsensical world Eddie had escaped into that one night in the hotel. He took a deep breath and picked up the bottle. He took several more deep breaths, closed his eyes, lifted the bottle to his lips—and hesitated. He set the bottle back on the counter and backed away.

You're being stupid, he told himself. He took a step forward, snatched the bottle off the counter and downed it in one gulp.

The bottle crashed to the floor as his stomach clenched and heaved. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't remember ever experiencing such pain. He felt as if someone had grabbed his insides and attempted to wrench them out through his throat. He collapsed to his knees, lights exploding behind his eyes as his stomach heaved and he vomited into the floor, wave after wave of sickness. His entire body shook. His skin felt ice cold.

He crawled to the counter and, grabbing the cord to the phone, pulled it onto the floor. He could barely make out the numbers as he dialed the only person his addled mind could think of.

Chapter Forty-Two

"Hello?" Tony's voice was heavy with sleep.

"Tony, help."

"Buddy?" Tony sounded more awake. "Buddy, what is it? What's the matter?"

Philip grabbed gulp after gulp of air trying to fill his lungs so he could breathe.

"Oh, bad idea," he groaned. The phone hit the floor and he fell into another bout of sickness.

Tony found Philip curled into a ball, his arms wrapped around his stomach. The empty shattered remains of the bottle lay as silent witness to what he had done.

"You idiot." Tony yanked his cell phone from his belt and punched in 9-1-1. He barked orders for an ambulance before draping a throw from the couch over Philip's shivering body. He held him, rubbing his arms to try and warm him until the ambulance arrived.

"Buddy, why? You knew what would happen."

A sound that might have been a laugh or a sob escaped Philip's mouth. Tony sighed.

"I don't believe you," he said in exasperation.

He heard the sirens and then a loud knock at the door.

"Come on," he shouted.

The paramedics hurried in and Tony let them take over caring for Philip. He stood to one side, out of the way. Philip was awake, aware of everything, but unable to speak or control his body. Perversely, Tony was glad. At least this was a lesson Philip would not soon forget.

Through half opened eyes, Philip could see Tony leaning against the door frame, arms crossed, and frowning in disapproval as he studied his friend in the hospital bed.

"What were you thinking?" Tony demanded.

"Go away," Philip said.

He didn't want to see the expression of disgust Tony wore, so he shifted on the bed and grunted. His insides were still tender from all the vomiting. His throat hurt from the tube shoved down his throat for the stomach pump which had taken what little was left in his stomach by the time he reached the hospital.

He remembered something and turned to face Tony. "Did you call me an idiot last night?"

"I did," Tony said. "And you are. What were you trying to do?"

"I don't know," Philip said. "I wasn't—I just—I just wanted to get 'lost'."

Tony huffed. "Well, you almost got lost permanently. Fortunately, beer in your refrigerator has a low alcohol content and isn't quite as hard on you as the other stuff. It won't kill you."

"That's what you think," Philip said. "I feel like I've been turned inside out."

"You deserve to," Tony said.

Tony wasn't going to give him an inch. He'd done a stupid thing and he needed to remember it, as if he'd ever forget.

"You're so kind," Philip said.

Tony moved a chair next to the bed and took a seat. "Your dad called. I told him what happened."

Philip moaned and closed his eyes, which felt like they were going to fall out of their sockets if he didn't keep them closed. On top of everything else, his head throbbed.

"Thanks, you're a real pal," he said.

"Serves you right. He said to tell you to expect a visit this weekend," Tony said. "I have a feeling you're in for a long, long talk."

Tony sounded way too pleased with himself.

"Wanna tell me what was the cause of all this?"

Philip ran his hand over his face and opened his eyes. The light in the room pierced his pupils causing his eyes to water.

"I took a trip to Hong Kong." He laced his words with sarcasm.

Tony said nothing.

Philip looked at him. "Ellen came by last night."

"Ah, now we're getting somewhere," Tony said. "And did all this help?"

Philip glared at him.

"She wanted to check on you this morning," Tony said. "I convinced her it wasn't a good idea."

"Thanks," Philip said. "And this time I mean it."

He let his head sink into his pillow and closed his eyes again. He heard Tony leave the room. In a few minutes, he was asleep.

Two hours later, Philip was released by the doctor into Tony's care. Tony drove him home. When they arrived, they discovered a taxi waiting outside the house. Philip exited Tony's SUV and waited for the passenger in the taxi to exit as well. The tall lanky figure of Jai Tseung paid the driver, collected a suitcase and a cat carrier, and walked over to Philip. He handed him the carrier. A tiny paw poked out of one of the air holes.

"Your new charge, sir," Jai said, grinning.

"Thanks."

"What brings you to Baytown?" Tony asked.

"I had a couple of days free before classes begin for the semester," Jai said. "I promised Dad I'd not neglect my education. I'll finish my degree, pursuing my singing and acting between semesters." He smiled. "Sing needed a chaperone anyway."

Philip led the way to the front door and into the house. "Guest room, second door to your right, top of the stairs. Make yourself at home."

Jai thanked him and hurried to find his room.

"I'll get on home," Tony said. "You two stay out of trouble." He clapped Philip on the shoulder and left the house.

Philip set the carrier on the floor and opened the door. Sing took a tentative step out, sniffed the new air, then shot out of her confinement, made three dizzying turns around the house, and came to rest at Philip's feet, mewling plaintively to be held. Philip scooped up the tiny ball of fur and placed her on his shoulder just as Jai reappeared dressed in jeans, an oversize t-shirt, and sneakers.

"Nice place," Jai said. "I like it. Dad said it was once a derelict warehouse. I love the view of the pier. Who remodeled it?"

Philip studied the younger man. Dressed as he was, Jai was a carbon copy of his father at that age.

"Thank you for the compliment," he said. "Yes, it was once a derelict warehouse. The view is great. And the warehouse was remodeled into this house by a firm hired by my late ex-wife's lawyers. How long are you here for?"

"It's still a week before classes begin. I thought if you didn't mind, I'd hang out here with you until then."

Philip didn't mind and said so. "You're welcome anytime, as long as you keep your word to Eddie and your mom. How are they doing, by the way? Would you like something to drink?"

"A beer if you have one," Jai said, perching on one of the stools by the kitchen bar.

Philip felt a twinge of nausea as he handed Jai one of the beers from the refrigerator. He pulled a ginger ale out for himself.

Holding Sing so she wouldn't slip from his shoulder, he went to the couch and sat down. Sing immediately began purring in his ear and went to sleep. Jai moved from the stool to the recliner.

“Mama and Dad are great, happy, on location in Taiwan. Some dingy girl fan had Dad in the clutches at the premier of the new movie, which is terrific by the way. Dad loved the way they rewrote the story. Anyway, this girl grabbed Dad and Mama popped her a good one. I think she broke the girl's nose. She meant what she said at the wedding.” He laughed. “Poor Dad. The girl took him by surprise. So did Mama's reaction to her.” He sobered. “It scared him, too, I think. Mama was furious. She let the fans know. *‘Look but don't touch.’*”

His smile returned. “The girl wanted to press charges, but Don persuaded her not to. He reminded her what Dad had been through earlier this year and she backed off.”

Philip was glad to hear the Tseungs were doing well.

“Eddie's back at work?” he asked. “Great. Is he still doing his physical therapy?”

“Oh sure,” Jai said. “But he couldn't be idle any longer. You know how he is.”

“What's the new movie about?” Philip asked.

Sing left his shoulder, stretched, and scrambled over to Jai. Climbing into his lap, the kitten fell back to sleep. Jai stroked her tiny head.

“It's a new role for Dad,” he said. “It's about an adventurer who had a terrible accident and has to retire. It's about his struggle to come to terms with a different life.” Jai looked up, grinning. “The story was written before all that happened to Dad. How's that for ironic?”

Philip nodded. The premise sounded interesting and like a challenge. It would give Eddie a chance to grow as a dramatic actor, something he'd said he'd always wanted to do.

“What's the name of the movie? Does it have a title?”

Jai set Sing gently to one side and scooted forward on his seat. “*No More Heroes.*” His eyes took on an imploring look. “Can I help in a case? I can do it. We made a good team, you and I. Can I?”

Philip was taken by surprise at Jai's eagerness and by the unexpected request.

"I thought you wanted to be an actor and singer," he said.

"Well, yeah, I do," Jai said. "But imagine the characterization I could do with experience as a P.I."

Philip was dubious. "We'll see." He held up his hand as he saw the light of excitement ignite in Jai's eyes. "We'll see, if I have a case to investigate that's not too dangerous and before you leave for school. I'm not going against your Mom and Dad. Promises first."

Jai's smile was broad and excited. He held out his hand to seal the agreement. "Deal," he said.

About the Author

Cherie' Waggie, a native Oklahoman, is the author of six mysteries and lives in Skiatook, Oklahoma with her mother, their four cats, Goldman, Sunny, Happy, and David, and their 1 year old Schnauzer, Mahla.



Clean Reads

GREAT STORIES. NO GUILT.

www.cleanreads.com