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GREEN**

**DOUBLE
DEAL**



**PANTERA
PRESS**

1

Barcelona, Spain

Tori Swyft's eyes were glued shut. Her head was pounding, her body quivering, yet this wasn't a hangover. Couldn't be.

At last night's celebrations she'd let barely a drop of alcohol touch her lips. How could she risk any misstep when the treaty – the one she had personally negotiated – was 'the first major shake-up of the Arctic's balance of power since the Cold War'? And that was *The New York Times* speaking, not her.

With Tori's help and guidance, Greenland – her client – chose China as its future polar partner, ending centuries of Danish colonial rule and decades as an American ally. If the US and Russia, the Arctic's two prevailing powers, kept out of the way ... a very big if ... this new accord would unlock a vast treasure trove of prosperity for the tiny population of this icy nation.

For chrissakes, her eyes ... They refused to open, no matter how much Tori rubbed them. Her world was totally dark. Pitch black.

This wasn't eye gunk from sleep. It wasn't conjunctivitis.

Glue?

Was it actual glue? Was that even possible?

Had someone – *who?* – glued her eyes shut?

Her skin prickled and her breath shortened as a quake of terror surged through her. Panic wasn't the answer, she knew that, but her body wasn't listening, her hands taking it upon themselves to scrub and yank at her eyes, every muscle in her face contorting as she tried to open a crack between her lids.

With her heart hammering, sweat flooding from her pores, the locomotive of panic kept roaring through her.

Breathe, she commanded, but even her nose wasn't cooperating. Her nostrils were clogged too, so she inhaled through her mouth. Belly breaths, deep breaths.

Someone did this. To her.

Was it linked to the accord? Was it the Russians? The Americans?

Was this how they were going to play their hand?

The monster who'd done this, where was he? Close by, out in the blackness? Silently baring his teeth at her? Exulting in her terror?

She strained her ears but all she heard was the rumble of the air-conditioner and the sound of her own breathing.

No one was moving, no one crowing over what they'd done. To her.

She tried to sniff the air, to detect a scent – cologne, perhaps, the sourness of body odour, bad breath – but her nose was blocked.

She pressed a thumb over her nostrils, first one then the other, blowing hard, her hand catching the slugs of snot, which she wiped off on her pillow.

The rasp of her lungs, the pounding in her ears, the thump of her heart ... she needed to slow it all down. Breathe, Tori, she told herself. Synch with something rhythmic, anything. The drone of the AC was the only thing.

Slow. Down.

Her heart rate *was* dropping and her nose began to sense an odour. It was not a welcome one. The first whiff was acrid, sour. The second was repulsive, stomach-churning, a stink Tori knew well but wished she did not, the same stench of death she'd gagged on two years ago in a Mosul hospital.

Her stomach heaved like it had that day in Iraq, the pit of her gut hurtling up to her throat. She whipped her head to the side, hoping her vomit would splatter the bastard who did this to her – if he was there.

He didn't flip out, didn't make a sound.

But that didn't mean he wasn't present, watching and smirking.

Tori knew the power of silences. Interrogation Techniques 101 at the CIA included a whole chapter on silences. She had applied them herself.

Now she brushed her fingers over her body. It was bare, varnished with sweat.

She understood.

Today, she, Tori Swyft, was the target.

She visualised her captor, leering at her from some vantage point, revelling in his handiwork as he calibrated his next move.

Confront him, she told herself. She wiped the puke off her lips with the back of her hand. 'What do you want?' She pushed out the question, her words dry and croaky.

She wanted his name, to make a connection, to remind the ghoul that *I'm a person, not simply your captive*, a standard tactic in hostage negotiation she'd also learnt from the CIA.

Except she knew it would not work. A man prepared to glue a woman's eyes shut would know that game and refuse to play it.

He'd proffer his name when it suited him. *If* it suited him.

'What do you want?' she repeated, her voice clearer, firmer.

The monster said nothing.

She pictured him holding a knife and silently stepping closer, almost felt him hovering over her and running his tongue along the blade of a KA-BAR. In her harrowed imagination she saw his fingers around the leather-washer handle, his reflection in the polished Cro-Van steel blade, brain drunk with his power over the naked woman he'd blinded, the tingle of cold metal against his tongue.

The fear welling up inside her was a dead weight, a barrier to action. She shook herself. There was nothing to be gained if she kept imagining the worst.

What if this silence signalled his absence?

If he'd stepped outside – a possibility – she'd have a small window to make her escape, or at least to try.

Again she pulled at her eyelids, but still failed to wrench them apart. This time, though, her fingernail caught on a thin lip of gum, a hard thread like plastic that snaked across her lashes and fused them together.

She picked and scratched at it, ripping clumps of eyelashes out. But not enough to see.

Without thinking, she opened her mouth to scream, opened it wide, drawing in as deep a breath as she could, and stopped herself. If he really had stepped out, the racket would bring him back and then ...

That smell and her glued eyelids told her what he was capable of.

She exhaled, closed her mouth and groped sideways for a nightstand, hoping to find a phone. Hers. Anyone's.

As she reached out she experienced a sharp twinge in the crook of her arm. Felt a tiny lump, right over the bulge of a vein.

On top of whatever else the bastard had done, he'd drugged her.

2

Tori groped her left hand across the top of the nightstand beside the bed, its glass surface cold and strangely barren. She couldn't feel a lamp, a clock, not even one of those ludicrous fifteen-dollar bottles of hotel water that housekeeping left in her room every night – the kind she always refused to open on principle but would have paid ten times for right now.

Her hand nudged something metallic. It slid away, almost falling off the edge. She caught it in time and ran her fingers down its tapering length ... an open penknife.

Did her captor leave it behind as a threat? Or was it meant to tantalise her, a possible weapon to use against him, only to have him whip it away at the last minute?

She swung her legs to the side of the bed, keeping her feet away from where she anticipated the puddle of vomit had

landed, and sat up. With her head spinning – she assumed from the drugs – she sat still, waiting for the wooziness to settle, half expecting this to be the moment her tormentor would say his piece. Yet he remained silent.

She weighed the small knife in her hand as a new fear came over her. What if the glue had got onto her corneas? Almost in a panic she pinched the hairs on her left lids between her thumb and forefinger and pulled. The suction popped and her lids lifted off her eyeball. Thank heavens.

She repeated the procedure with her right eye and thankfully got the same result.

Her eyelashes had done what eyelashes were meant to do, they'd trapped the foreign matter and stopped it from getting into her eyes.

She balanced the knife in her hand again and decided her only way forward was to cut off her lashes. It would make her look weird, but weird was not blind.

With her left hand she pulled at her lashes and with her right took the knife and worked gingerly at the hairs, just tiny nicks, chipping as close to the skin of her lids as possible without slicing into them.

3

In the room across the hotel hallway, Tori's work colleague Frank Chaudry sat at the end of his bed, his eyes briefly on his left foot as he pulled on a sock then looked up again to catch the sub-titles scrolling across the bottom of the TV screen.

Yesterday had been epic. The best day in his post-MI6 career. He and Tori – well, Tori mainly – had tied up the Greenland–China deal in time to make the evening news bulletins in Europe and the mid-morning ones in America.

But this morning Barcelona TV was barely mentioning the story. That wasn't really strange, not with the state funeral this afternoon overshadowing everything, and the buzz of all the global politerati starting to converge on the city. Prime ministers, chancellors, a couple of kings. Even US President Isabel Diaz was coming.

Frank and Tori had been present three days ago when Oriol Casals – president of Spain’s autonomous region of Catalonia and the host of the secret talks – took the fateful call. They watched the colour leach from his face as he dropped the phone.

His cousin’s heart attack in New York City hit him hard. Not only had they grown up together on the same street in Barcelona, she’d also gone into politics, in her case to become one of Catalonia’s – and Spain’s – favourite daughters. Once the country’s celebrated defence minister, it was only six months ago that Montserrat Vilaró i Mas was elected the youngest ever secretary-general of the United Nations. All of Spain loved her and called her Montse.

The bad news hit at a tense moment in the talks when Rao Songtian, China’s lead negotiator, was at his most intransigent. So Tori, God bless her, whipped up the death, and the funeral, as a spur to bring the deal to a close. Their host, Oriol Casals – Uri for short to people who were close to him – was about to become completely preoccupied with the arrangements for his cousin’s funeral. And, as Tori also knew, he had an election coming up.

The ante was upped even higher the next morning when America’s president called both Casals and Greenland’s newly elected prime minister. The US had got wind of the talks and was seeking a delay to give them time to put together a counteroffer to China’s, one that Greenland would find compelling.

‘This is brilliant,’ Frank remembered Tori whispering to him and Greenland’s leader, Nivikka Petersen, in a side room as she high-fived each of them. ‘Let’s go back in and really put the squeeze on China.’

Tori was class, thought Frank. She strode back into the negotiation room, sat directly opposite Rao Songtian, who was putting his own phone back onto the table, and regarded him coolly.

Not only did he return the stare but he spoke before she could. 'I know.'

'What do you know?' Tori kept her tone light, playing out a standard tenet of negotiation, *never assume*.

'I know that the United States knows,' he said, his eyes glancing back at his phone. 'You leaked these talks to them,' he added and pushed back his chair, started to stand and turned to Petersen. 'Madam Prime Minister, this breach of security is intolerable,' he said. 'On behalf of the People's Republic of China, I regret to advise you that we are done here.'

Frank watched. Tori's gaze was unwavering, her back straight. 'Rao,' she said, 'the leak did not come from us, you have my word. But Washington does know, that's a fact. The other fact is they want Greenland at least as much as China does. More, perhaps. So here's how we'll play this. Walk out of here if you wish. We won't stop you. But if you do I'll pick up my phone,' she put it on the table, 'and as soon as you slam the door shut we'll open talks with Washington. If you stay, we keep negotiating only with you but, with the US trying to bash down the door, your exclusivity will now end at 3 pm tomorrow. If you haven't reached a deal with us by then, we will invite Washington to come in and join the party.'

Rao Songtian had sat back down.

Frank stared at his socks. Black. Like all his socks. Bland. Plain. Frank liked to blend in. Unlike Tori, who shone even in black, which was her trademark. Everything she wore was black. She said it was purely utilitarian, so everything went

with everything else, but he wasn't so sure, since it made the red of her hair crackle like flames across any room. At least he'd persuaded her to make a slight change for last night's celebration, even if it was only to move from black to black and white.

4

Oahu, Hawaii

It was just a month earlier that Tori had been on her surfboard, moving up and down on the swells, manoeuvring and waiting for the right wave. Time had faded the freckles that bridged across her nose as a child surfing on Sydney's famous northern beaches – these days her skin had a pasty bookish pallor. Yet out here the power of the sea offered her more solace than any book possibly could.

The incoming surge felt right and, grabbing her board's rails, she raised her torso and flicked back her hair, flinging out a sparkling curtain of spray. The salt on her lips cracked as she fleetingly looked back and, at the perfect moment, she started paddling hard and caught the wave.

Close to shore, Tori heard gasps from the beach as she leant forward, placing her hands on the board, then her head and,

after forming this human tripod of support, she kicked her legs back and out, arcing them up into the air above her into a headstand. Balancing herself upside down, a manoeuvre that for most surfers was near impossible, she let the wave glide her all the way in to the shore.



An hour later, Tori was sitting in a sun lounge on a rooftop terrace looking out to sea, though unsure what she was hoping to spy. A whale? A pod of dolphins?

Her phone vibrated but she ignored it. She'd even switched off her voicemail. This month, this break, was meant to be sacred. She'd put everything else on hold. Tori needed the water, the waves. The solace.

The phone didn't care and vibrated again, more insistent this time.

She told her eyes not to look at it, but they disobeyed her. *Axel Schönberg III* the screen said.

She swung herself off the sun lounge and stepped closer to the rooftop's balustrade, debating whether or not to answer.

Gazing out, she watched the waves, low and slow, rhythmic, carefree. A giggling rabble of children leapt in and out of the lacy froth at the shore. She was here alone, which was exactly what she needed. At least that's what she told herself.

Axel was her boss at SIS, a secretive family-run firm that, under the one red-tiled roof in Boston, brought together the smarts of a Goldman Sachs and the wiles of a CIA. It was why so many MBAs and former security services personnel worked there. People like Tori. People like Frank.

SIS was a firm whose clients – kings, presidents and billionaires – only picked up the phone if their problem needed

the special dose of discretion, guile or judgement that the publicity-shy Schönberg dynasty had been quietly mustering on their behalf for three generations.

She remembered that Axel – the third, and possibly the most successful of his family line – had personally signed off on her leave, agreeing to her request that no one disturb her. Yet here he was, calling her himself. ‘The soul does need time out,’ he’d nodded, ‘a time when we can shut ourselves off from ourselves, as much as from what’s swirling around us.’ He’d taken a long draw on one of his Montecristo cigars and Tori wondered if he’d been speaking to himself as much as to her as she watched his smoke ring drift up to the ceiling.

Despite his wealth and influence, Axel was an incredibly thoughtful and respectful employer, her best, in fact, so if he felt he needed to intrude on her sanctuary, it must be quite important.

Axel was old-school so she expected he’d start off with an abject apology, and he did. It was genuine, she knew that, but she also knew his clients trumped everything. Their needs won out over anything else.

‘Tori, it’s the Arctic. Greenland, specifically.’

The Hawaiian sun was still high, almost directly overhead, but the mere thought of ice and snow and blizzards sent a shiver through her skin.

5

‘Greenland?’ Tori repeated, while she pondered what could possibly be behind Axel’s call.
‘Tori, what do you know about Greenland? Geopolitically?’

‘Geopolitically? Didn’t Donald Trump have some cockamamie plan to buy Greenland from Denmark a few years ago?’

‘Not so cockamamie, actually,’ said Axel pensively.

She heard water glugging into a tumbler. Once it would have been champagne, but Axel was a different, thinner man now and he’d taken to honing his new body shape like a man running a hot knife through the butter he no longer let himself slather on a morning muffin.

Apart from whales and polar bears and the impact of climate change on the ice sheet, and the blustering attempt by

ex-President Trump to purchase it, Tori's mental search engine didn't have much on Greenland. 'Axel, can we stop the twenty questions? All I know is that Greenland is a huge icy landmass with a tiny population.'

'Yes, with a squeeze, Yankee Stadium could seat every single Greenlander, man, woman and reindeer, all 56,000 of them. It's such a small population that the country is only economically viable because they've got a *Juulimaaq* ... to a Greenlander, that's Santa Claus.'

Where was this going?

'Every Christmas, Denmark slides down Greenland's chimney and pops a half-billion dollars into their budget stocking.'

'What's in it for the Danes?' she asked. 'It can't be charity.'

'Originally it was, kind of. A mix of altruism and post-colonial guilt. But in more recent times it's become a down payment on the future, staking a claim on the bounty that climate change is bringing to the Arctic.'

'*Bounty*?' Tori blurted out, thinking Axel's new diet must be making him too weak to think straight.

'Tori, our warming planet has grim downsides but for the Arctic there are a few positives as well. As the ice melts, a diamond mine of potential reveals itself. Remember, Greenland was actually green once.'

'So what's this about? Potential farmland?'

'And mining, oil and gas, fishing. Huge opportunities for tourism. With all that becoming possible, shipping and international trade will be early and huge beneficiaries. Russia got onto this years ago and already they've got forty icebreakers plying the Arctic with more on the production line. America, on the other hand, has been slow off the mark, a single operational icebreaker with a second that seems to spend its summers *and* winters in drydock for repair.'

While Tori still didn't follow where Axel was going, that was not unusual. He often approached a topic obliquely. 'Axel,' she said, 'you're not about to tell me SIS has accepted a job to work on Greenland for Russia, are you?' If Russia was his client, she'd sit the deal out. The country's current president, Maxim Vladimirovich Tushkin, was dark and primal, a chunk of dirty black coal as far from a diamond as she could imagine.

'Heavens no. It's our good friend President Hou Tao—'

She almost whistled into the phone. Putting China and Greenland together would be huge. Not necessarily a good thing, but it *would* be massive. 'You've persuaded China to step into Denmark's, er, clogs?'

'Actually, the word for clogs in Danish is *træsko*, but yes ... President Hou is keen.'

'But isn't his attention on the BRI? China is spending trillions on it.' Tori had read a lot about China's Belt and Road Initiative. Via this vast infrastructure and investment project involving between sixty and seventy other countries, China was building the modern Silk Road – land *and* sea routes – to gain better and cheaper ways to ship its goods to Europe across Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

'Tori, Hou is a deep-thinking strategist. Yes, he's building the BRI but he also wants to advance a Plan B, an alternative and competitive route that can zip his ships to Europe even faster, even cheaper. If he can seize an opportunity like that, China will be far less beholden to foreign powers. That Plan B is the new *Polar* Silk Road.'

'Are you telling me that Greenland is his key to carving that out?'

'Exactly. He'll pare twenty days off China's shipping times to Europe if their cargo freights go via Greenland instead of the traditional route that winds through the South China

Sea, the Molucca Straits and the Suez. That's a time-save of forty per cent. The current forty-eight days at sea cuts back to twenty-eight. It's not just the time-to-market benefit, it's also the savings in charter and fuel costs and dodging the huge port charges all those countries on the way are thrusting their hands out for. Shipping is the bread and butter of his Plan B, but the cream is mining and—'

'So Donald Trump wasn't a complete airhead.'

'On this issue.'

'If this is China's Plan B, why the urgency?' Tori asked, code for *why couldn't this wait till I got back from leave?*

'Because this is a charms race, Tori.'

She wondered if she'd misheard. 'Did you say *arms race?*'

'No. This is about charm, and resources, both of which President Hou has in abundance. The thing is, Russia won't accept a Chinese push into what they consider their territory lying down. America won't either. They've tried to court Greenland before – incompetently – and they'll try again. When Trump's thought bubble flew out of his mouth everyone slapped him down ... Greenland, the Danes, the media, the Twitterverse, you name it. But here's the thing, Tori. The day after Isabel Diaz moved into the Oval Office we ... I ... gave Hou a call and, while I can't claim credit for the actual idea, we did fast-track his thinking. We told him that if a new administration in DC decided to dust off Trump's idea, they'd approach it properly and professionally so he needed to move before they did. The elections in Greenland last month gave us the perfect opportunity, so now it's all systems go, go, go. We started working seriously on this just after you went on leave and—'

'Whoa, Axel.' A scrap of intel from Tori's CIA days had come back to her. 'Greenland hosts a number of US military

bases. DC will never countenance China wangling its way in—’

‘Which is why we’re playing Hou’s cards very close to our chest. By the way, he’s not our client. Greenland is. The new prime minister agreed this strategy with me long before she won the election. You’ll really like her. Nivikka Petersen. She’s quite the dynamo. An old family friend, actually.’

Of course she was. Tori smiled. For a century the three Axel Schönbergs had been gathering friends and influence as matter-of-factly as Elton John collected sparkly jackets and Grammy awards. ‘How much of a friend?’

‘When Junior took me to Greenland for our fishing trips Nivi was our deckhand. Her dad was our guide.’

It was bizarre, Tori thought, to hear her boss, not exactly a young man, referring to his late father, Axel II, as ‘Junior’ or his grandfather Axel as ‘Senior’. It always reminded her of an old joke: What’s the difference between an eccentric and a screwball? Money.

She pictured Axel holding up a glass of sparkling water, Badoit maybe, and watching the bubbles playfully rise to the surface the same way his family’s connections inevitably did.

It wasn’t only the past that was another country. The rich were too, Tori decided. They definitely did things differently.