

**DEAD DROP by Ross McKenrick**

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## **PROLOGUE**

SUNDAY 6:00 P.M., 11 NOVEMBER 1990

He watched and waited from the darkness of his car. Across the street a red 1954 Porsche Speedster rolled out of a driveway and headed toward Monterey. His pulse quickened as he slid down in his seat and listened to the sound of the car's tires against the wet pavement. When the Porsche disappeared into the fog, he started his own car and pulled out after it. Within a minute he closed the distance and regained sight of its taillights.

The Porsche wove its way across town toward Cannery Row, then turned into a large parking lot. He slowed down at the entrance and let the car get out of sight before following it into the lot.

The parking space he chose along the south side of the lot gave him an unobstructed view of the three routes into the area. The air was dead calm. Only the faint intermittent wailing of a foghorn in the distance and the occasional closing of a car door interrupted the silence. A harsh orange light was cast over the area from three lampposts.

He slipped a magazine into the nine-millimeter Glock's black polymer frame. The gun sat well in his hand, though it just missed feeling comfortable because of the large grip. He threaded the suppressor onto the muzzle of the automatic, pulled back the slide, and let it slam forward chambering a

round. Too bad he had to use the suppressor. Without it the pistol was evenly balanced, an instinctive pointer that could be brought on target quickly. He cradled the pistol in his lap and draped part of his gray plastic raincoat over it. He reached up and removed the bulb from the car's dome light.

Across the lot two white pillars supported a large sign painted with the words "American Tin Cannery." Just beyond that, a footbridge over a narrow street carried an occasional shopper to the parking lot from a tower above the upper level of a small indoor shopping mall. Ahead and to his left, half shrouded in fog, concrete steps led down to the street. Behind him, beads of water clung to the chilled metal strands of a chain link fence that capped a six-foot retaining wall. To his right, the only vehicle exit emptied onto Eardley Avenue. The Porsche was parked forty meters away near the center of the lot. It wasn't an ideal location, but it would do.

Again he watched and waited. The dampness made it feel colder than it really was. As time passed, shoppers entering and leaving the parking lot became fewer and the fog grew thicker.

It was seven-forty when Howard McGuire walked out of The Tavern and turned onto the main concourse of the small shopping mall near Cannery Row. He enjoyed seeing Stan and reminiscing with him, but more importantly he got what he came for.

Howard lingered in front of a large display window filled with shoes. His right hand adjusted his glasses and brushed a strand of gray hair back away from his weathered face. He studied the images of nearby people reflected in the window. He pulled a crush hat out of his coat pocket, set it squarely on his head, and walked to the escalator that led to the American Tin Cannery's upper parking lot.

The mall wasn't normally open this late on Sundays, but Monday was Veteran's Day and the shops were having sales with extended store hours. "Operation Desert Shield" was

grabbing all the newspaper headlines and retailers were eager to capitalize on the patriotic mood of the country.

Howard McGuire was forty-eight and hadn't been in the Army for twenty years, but there was still a military cadence to his stride. He surveyed the area as the elevator took him up to the bridge tower. There was no sign of Indians. Only a few shoppers strolled near the storefronts as merchants prepared to close for the night. He loved the game; it didn't matter what he was playing for. The purpose and objective ceased to have meaning for him long ago. The process, the successful execution of the task, was its own reward.

As he came out of the tower, Howard turned up the collar of his Burberry trench coat and stepped out onto the footbridge to the parking lot. He stopped in the middle of the bridge to light a cigarette and glanced at the entrance to the mall. It was the same routine he'd used an hour and a half earlier.

His mind wandered for a moment. Had it been five years since he last spoke with Stan? He knew Stan had arrived at the Defense Language Institute in June. They had given him orders to avoid all contact with Stan, but what Howard had wanted—and had gotten—was more important than following the orders of some faceless men thousands of miles away. His last contact with Stan had been in Pusan, Korea, just after everything had come unstuck—just after his fatal mistake. Stan didn't blame him for it, but everyone else did. Shortly after that Howard began playing the game by his own rules.

Their meeting tonight at The Tavern reminded Howard of old times. To arrange the meeting, he had to come up with an appropriate pretext and devised a short cryptic phone message. Under the circumstances, he would have preferred to have someone watch his back for him, but there wasn't anyone suitable. Wedge would've done it, perhaps even without an explanation, but he had no right to expose Stan to Wedge. And he wasn't sure how far he could trust Wedge. And

. . . this was different. If Wedge became involved in this, even unwittingly, it could ruin Wedge's career.

He stood there on the bridge and finished his cigarette. No one had come near the mall entrance. Except for the foghorn in the distance, it was quiet. Satisfied, he discarded his cigarette and walked to the end of the bridge. On the other side of the parking lot a car door closed.

The leather heels of Howard's shoes clicked softly against the pavement as he headed across the lot toward his car. He jammed his hands deep into his coat pockets, tucked his chin into his chest, and walked slowly. The brim of his hat shielded his glasses from the mist.

Halfway to his car he stopped to light another cigarette and glanced around. The only person he could see was a man in a gray raincoat walking in his direction from the far side of the lot.

Howard maneuvered between two cars to get to his red Porsche just beyond them. The parking lot lights, filtered by the fog, reflected off the wet black asphalt. He reached his car and stopped to fish his keys out of his pocket. The man in the gray raincoat came around the back of his car. Howard looked up just as the man raised the pistol. Trapped between the parked cars, there was nothing he could do. He tried to mentally record as much as he could—six foot tall, medium build, dark hair—before two rapid muffled blasts jolted his chest and head. He fell back onto the pavement.

The gunman knelt over the body, noted the placement of the two bullets, and rifled his victim's clothing. The target's face was a disfigured mess. There was no telltale bubbling of blood near his mouth. Within seconds he found the wallet, stood up, and looked around in all directions. A silver Dodge pickup truck passed behind him and slowly came to a stop. Two men got out of the truck and appeared to look around for the source of the sounds. The truck cut off his route back to his own car.

The gunman crouched and wove his way between three parked cars, then stood and walked briskly toward the steps at the corner of the parking lot. He disappeared into the fog.

The steps took him down to the Sloat Street entrance to the mall. Inside was an unfinished blend of mauve metal trim, bare concrete, and safety glass. It was well lighted, even though all the stores and most of the other establishments were about to close. The doors to The Tavern were open and out of them drifted the indistinguishable babble of mingled conversations.

The gunman descended the stairs to the lower level of the mall and crossed the main concourse. Only a few people lingered in front of display windows. From there he went out the other side of the mall, headed east along Oceanview Avenue, and turned onto Cannery Row.

The street curved sharply near the entrance to the Monterey Bay Aquarium. The area nearby was deserted, but just ahead the sidewalks were crowded with tourists. The street passed under an enclosed skywalk connecting the second stories of the two Monterey Canning Company buildings.

On the eastside of the building he found a secluded spot where he took off the cheap gray plastic raincoat, wadded it up, and dropped it in a garbage barrel. Under the raincoat he was wearing a navy blue car coat.

He walked back to the Monterey Canning Company building, which housed a small shopping arcade and a restaurant. The area was brightly lit and bustling with people. He browsed along a row of shops until he reached a wooden walkway on the eastside of the restaurant. The restaurant and the walkway extended out over the water on large wood pilings. High tide covered most of the small sandy beach beneath it. The sky to the east was clear; he could see the dark expanse of the bay. The city lights appeared to rise out of the water and spread out toward the east and south. A few stars were visible in the eastern sky. The aroma of seafood escaping

from the restaurant mixed pleasingly with the smell of the ocean and stimulated his appetite.

At the end of the walkway he leaned against the railing and glanced around before dropping the pistol into the dark water below. He pocketed fifty-eight dollars in cash from the wallet and dropped the wallet over the railing. Satisfied that no one had observed his furtive movements, he sauntered to the street and headed back to the American Tin Cannery.

Despite the silver pickup truck getting in his way, he was pleased with the way it went. It was foolish to return to the scene of the shooting. He told himself he wanted to do something about the car, but he knew it was unnecessary. What he really wanted was to see the faces of the policemen as they tried to discover what had happened. He wanted to stand near them knowing what they would never know.

It had been a slow night, but now it was approaching prime time. O'Donnell put away his paperwork and prepared to get out on the street for the remaining two and a half hours of his shift. He was what taxpayers pray for in a cop—not too tall, not too muscular, mature without looking old, competent, maybe even half-clever, but certainly not brilliant. At fifty Francis Xavier O'Donnell was the oldest sergeant on the Pacific Grove Police Department. No one dared to call him Francis. Some of the younger patrolmen hesitated to call him Frank.

O'Donnell heard Kenneth Graves, the swing shift desk clerk, coming down the hall. As O'Donnell got up from his desk, Graves entered his office and approached him. He straightened himself up to his full height, turned and looked down at Graves with a practiced glare. He strapped on his utility belt and said, "What is it?"

Graves quickly back pedaled two steps and braced himself in the doorway. "Ah, Ybarra called in. Says he's . . . ah . . . not feeling well. Wants to go home early," Graves said. Normally

the department had three patrolmen on duty during the swing shift, one in each of the two beat areas plus a follow-up unit.

“Tell him he can go,” said O’Donnell. “I’ll take over as the follow-up unit from Mosley. Have Mosley cover beat two.”

Graves nodded and scurried back to the front desk.

O’Donnell cruised the main business district in his patrol car and headed west down Oceanview Avenue toward the Point Pinos Lighthouse. O’Donnell was testing his spotlight when the call came over the radio.

“Five-eighty-two, Center.”

“Five-eighty-two.” Monk Mosley answered the call.

“Five-eighty-two, man down and bleeding, upper parking lot, American Tin Cannery, handle code three.”

“Check.”

O’Donnell glanced at his rear-view mirror. He switched on his emergency lights and siren and spun the steering wheel hard to the left as he jabbed at his brake pedal. The patrol car responded perfectly on the wet pavement and spun around a hundred and eighty degrees. O’Donnell smiled broadly and checked his rear-view mirror again as he slowly pressed the accelerator halfway to the floorboard. He grabbed his microphone just as Mosley’s voice came over the radio.

“Center, five-eighty-two. I’m ten-ninety-seven, ATC.” Mosley had arrived at the scene.

O’Donnell waited an extra second before keying his microphone. “Center, five-eighty. I’m in the area and responding.”

As he passed the Hopkins Marine Station, O’Donnell’s radio crackled with static. “Five-eighty, five-eighty-two. I’ve got a man down. He’s bleeding bad from gunshot wounds.”

“Five-eighty-two, ten-four. I’m two blocks away.” O’Donnell’s grip tightened on the steering wheel and his foot pressed down harder on the accelerator.

# CHAPTER ONE

SUNDAY 8:00 P.M., 11 NOVEMBER 1990

Keith McGuire had spent most of the day cleaning his apartment. It was something he forced himself to do every month or so. It was a small apartment that shouldn't have taken long to clean, but he'd spent two hours just dealing with the mildew on the walls of his bedroom closet. Hundred-foot-tall Monterey pines surrounded his and most of the other apartment buildings in the complex. The rustic wooded setting attracted retired people, young singles, and fungus. Between the fog and the tall trees little direct sunlight ever penetrated into his apartment.

At five he had turned on the television and watched the Forty-Niners humiliate the Cowboys until halftime. By six-thirty he had finished eating what passed for dinner, added one more dirty dish to the stack in the sink, and placed the empty box of macaroni and cheese in the garbage. Dishes rarely found their way into a cabinet; they generally rotated between the sink and the dishwasher. At the moment there were still a few clean plates in the dishwasher.

McGuire slouched down in the sofa with a book cradled in his hands. No hint of his thoughts showed in his angular face. His deep-set mobile eyes darted across the page, then stopped abruptly. Damn these Russian names, he thought. There were way too many characters to keep track of, and

they all had names that were impossible to pronounce and remember. He identified strongly with Colonel Vorotyntsev, whom he saw as a dashing figure, close to forty, medium height and build, and somewhat athletic with rugged good looks—much like himself.

McGuire pulled a business card from his shirt pocket, used it as a bookmark, and laid Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *August 1914* on the coffee table. He went into the kitchen for another beer. Now that he was well into the battle of Tannenburg, he felt vindicated for having had the patience to suffer through a hundred boring pages of prologue. He had found the book buried under a pile of neglected sports gear on the floor of his bedroom closet. It was a hardcover edition someone had given him. Judging from its musty smell, the book must have been sitting in the closet for some time. Earlier he had given some thought to going out for the evening and doing what single guys are supposed to do, but the book was interesting, the beer was cold, and the couch was comfortable.

The telephone rang as he opened the refrigerator and reached for another beer. It had to be the department. Alycia was up in Santa Cruz at some meeting trying to save the world from nuclear war, ozone depletion, de-forestation, Styrofoam, or disposable diapers. No one else ever called, even on a weekend night. He grabbed the wall phone by the breakfast bar before the second ring.

"Hello."

"Sergeant McGuire, this is Kenneth at the station. There's been a shooting at the American Tin Cannery. They need you down there, code two and a half."

"And?"

"And what?"

"Is there a suspect? A victim? Was anyone killed or wounded?" McGuire asked.

"I don't know. I'm pretty sure someone was shot. I wasn't listening to the radio very close."

“Have you contacted Upham yet? He’s the on-call detective this week.” “I paged him, but he hasn’t called in yet. Sergeant O’Donnell told me to call both of you in.”

“Okay, call O’Donnell and tell him I’m on my way.”

Three patrol cars, a fire department medical van, and an ambulance were haphazardly parked with their red and blue emergency lights flashing in chaotic rhythm, creating a frenzied scene. A small area of the parking lot surrounding the red Porsche was cordoned off with yellow police tape. A few people gathered just beyond the tape. As Keith McGuire got out of his Chevy Blazer, he saw Frank O’Donnell walking across the wet pavement toward him. O’Donnell held up his hand, motioning to him to stop.

“Wait a minute, Keith.” His breath was steaming and labored. Sweat covered his face and neck, and blood glistened on his hands.

“You okay, Frank?”

“Look, I’m not sure, but . . .” O’Donnell paused for breath. “I think the victim might be your brother.”

McGuire’s eyes shifted over to the ambulance, then back to O’Donnell. He stared at O’Donnell without responding.

O’Donnell hesitated, then continued, “He’s been shot twice—once in the chest and once in the face. There’s no wallet, no ID, but the keys in his hand fit the red Porsche and the car’s registered to your brother.”

McGuire started toward the ambulance. O’Donnell blocked his way. “Why don’t we let the ambulance crew take him away before we go over there. We’d just be in the way.”

“How bad is he?”

“We gave him CPR until the EMTs got here.”

“And?” McGuire stared at O’Donnell’s eyes, searching for an answer.

“I don’t know. They’re doing what they can. They won’t know till they get him to the hospital.”

“I want to know now whether or not it’s my brother.”

O'Donnell stepped aside to let him pass and fell into step behind him. McGuire covered the distance to the ambulance in a few swift strides and peered over the heads of the EMTs. Even with blood covering half his face, there was no doubt; it was Howard.

McGuire backed away from the EMTs until he bumped into the side of O'Donnell's patrol car. He leaned against the wet car and reached into the pocket of his leather flight jacket for a cigarette. All around him he could hear the squawking and garbled voices coming over police radios. He took a long deep drag from his cigarette before he turned to O'Donnell.

"Okay, Frank, so what happened?"

"The shooting occurred about fifteen minutes ago. Two soldiers driving out of the parking lot heard some sounds, stopped, and went over to check it out. They found the victim lying next to the Porsche. They also saw a man walk away from the scene." O'Donnell's breathing gradually became more controlled. "Mosley has them over by his unit. We still haven't heard from Upham. Why don't you go over to The Tavern and have a cup of coffee? I'll send a patrol unit over in a few minutes to take you to the hospital."

McGuire looked over and saw the gurney being hoisted into the ambulance. "No, Frank. I should question the witnesses and start processing the scene before it becomes a total loss. Who the hell knows when Upham will get here." McGuire reached into O'Donnell's patrol car and dropped what remained of his cigarette into the ashtray, then headed over to where Mosley was talking to the soldiers.

When McGuire walked up, Mosley took a step back, motioned his head toward McGuire, and said, "This is Detective McGuire. Keith, this is Specialist Vernon and Corporal Landrey. They're assigned to Fort Ord. They found the victim and called it in. Tell Detective McGuire about the sounds you heard."

McGuire quickly looked the two men over from top to bottom. Both wore blue jeans and cowboy boots. He settled his gaze on Landrey who spoke up first.

“Well, we were on our way out of the parking lot,” he said. “Heard two sounds—one right after the other—loud enough to get our attention, but not like gunfire. Well, maybe like muffled twenty-two rounds. I stopped over there.” He pointed to his truck several yards away. “If my window hadn’t been down, probably wouldn’t have heard it. Got out of the truck to see where the sounds came from and saw a man walking away in the other direction. I went to where I first saw the man and found the body lying nearby.”

Landrey paused for a second, nodded his head toward Vernon. “Sent Vern, I mean Specialist Vernon here, back into the mall to call nine-one-one. Checked the man for a pulse; couldn’t find one. Officer Mosley got here real quick, even before Specialist Vernon got back.”

Landrey knew how to brief a situation. Direct and to the point, he’d make a good witness in court. McGuire guessed he was about twenty-six, perhaps five years older than Vernon. Corporal had become an uncommon rank in the Army—a rank usually reserved for those busted back from sergeant.

“Corporal Landrey, can you tell the difference between the sound of a twenty-two caliber and that of a larger weapon?” McGuire asked.

“Sure. Had a twenty-two when I was a kid; fired a lot of M-16 rounds, as well as forty-five caliber and nine-millimeter in the Army.” Landrey zipped up the front of his gray canvas tanker’s jacket and stuck his hands into his jacket pockets.

“You know, weapons sound different in town than they do on the range”

“In Panama City last December there was a lot of different kinds of gunfire; guess I can tell the difference.”

“What about the man you saw walking away?” McGuire jotted down a few words in a small spiral notebook.

“Already out of sight by the time we found the body. Looked for him, but . . . think he might’ve gone down those stairs.” Landrey pointed to the northwest corner of the parking lot.

McGuire glanced in the direction he was pointing. He returned his gaze to Landrey and continued his questions. “What did he look like?”

“Don’t know. Only saw his back. Medium height.”

“Did you notice anything else?”

“He was wearing a dark-colored raincoat.”

McGuire turned his attention to the other man who had been fidgeting non-stop for the past few minutes. Vernon wore a gold and red “Forty-Niners” warm-up jacket. “Specialist Vernon, what were you and Corporal Landrey doing before you heard the sounds?” McGuire asked.

Vernon jammed his hands into his pants pockets, but his feet continued to shuffle about as he answered. “Ah, we were . . . ah, just on our way out of the parking lot.”

“No. I mean before that.”

“Oh, ah . . . we were shopping.”

McGuire got their address and phone number and arranged to see them at the station Monday morning to get written statements. McGuire and Mosley thanked the two soldiers and walked over to the Porsche. McGuire crouched down next to Sergeant O’Donnell.

O’Donnell fixed the beam of his flashlight on an empty bullet casing and said, “It’s a nine millimeter.”

McGuire examined the markings on the base of the casing and confirmed O’Donnell’s observation.

“Yeah, let’s find the other one. Monk, did anyone else see or hear anything?” asked McGuire.

“I didn’t have time to question anyone besides Landrey and Vernon. I’ll go around and F.I. the rest of ‘em now.” Mosley lumbered off in the direction of the small crowd that had gathered behind the yellow police tape and continued with his field interrogations.

McGuire got an oversized gray plastic tackle box and a large black nylon camera bag from his car. He methodically went about taking the photographs he needed and was putting his camera back in its bag when Mosley interrupted him.

“Keith, there’s a man over there, the dark-haired guy in the blue coat, says his name’s Karasov. The blue sedan parked over here is his, and he wants to go home.”

“So?” McGuire said without looking up.

“Your Blazer’s got him blocked in.”

“Oh, okay.” McGuire zipped up the camera bag and looked up at Mosley. “Has he been F.I.’ed?”

“No. I didn’t get that far.”

“I’ll take care of him.” McGuire went over to the crowd of people that had gathered, spotted Karasov, and walked up to him. Karasov stood just over six feet tall and weighed about two hundred and ten pounds. He appeared to be in his mid-fifties, but there wasn’t a hint of gray in his straight black hair.

“Mr. Karasov, I’m Sergeant McGuire.” McGuire opened his jacket enough to expose the gold badge clipped to his belt. “Would you come over here with me?”

Karasov carefully stepped over the police tape and followed McGuire to the side of Karasov’s car.

“Is this your car?” McGuire asked.

Karasov nodded a reply. Just under his chin he had a vicious looking two-inch scar that ran from one side of his jaw to the other.

“What’s your full name?”

“Sergei Ivanovich Karasov.”

“Where do you work?”

“I am teaching Russian at Defense Language Institute.”

“Where do you live?”

“In Pacific Grove on Ransford Avenue, number twenty-four, fifteen, apartment four.” Karasov spoke slowly with a heavy Slavic accent.

“Did you see what happened?”

“No.”

“Do you know the man who was shot?”

“No. Who was he?”

“Do you know who was driving that red Porsche?” McGuire pointed to his brother’s car. Karasov seemed to hesitate momentarily before answering each question, but maintained eye contact. Perhaps too much eye contact.

“No.”

“When did you first see the red car?” McGuire watched Karasov more closely as he answered.

“Maybe ten minutes ago when I return here. It was not here when I park my car.” Karasov moved a half step closer to McGuire as he answered.

McGuire instinctively took a small step back with his right foot and unlocked his knees. “Did you notice anything unusual when you parked here?” McGuire asked.

“No.”

“What time did you park here?”

“Perhaps two hours ago.”

McGuire reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a business card. “Mr. Karasov, here’s my card. If you remember something later that might help us, please call me. You can get in your car now. I’ll move the car in front of yours; when I do, you can drive out.”

McGuire moved his car, then went back to the Porsche and pulled a clipboard and tape measure out of the side pocket of his camera bag. He began making a rough sketch of the scene showing the different positions from which he had taken his photos and distances between objects.

McGuire saw Neal Upham’s BMW negotiate its way slowly through the crowd toward him. He glanced at his watch. It was 8:55 P.M.

At thirty-one Upham was the department’s youngest sergeant and at five-foot-eight he was the shortest officer. He got out of his car and closed the door. The woman in the passenger seat remained in the car. McGuire couldn’t make

out who she was. Upham was wearing an off-white linen suit and a black silk crewneck shirt. His nickel-plated Colt Python revolver bounced noticeably in its shoulder holster as he strutted across the parking lot.

“Good of you to join us, Neal,” McGuire said.

“I was at the Whaling Station having dinner. I came as soon as I could.”

“The Whaling Station’s less than four blocks from here.”

“The waiter just brought out our food when I got the page. If I’d known it was something serious, I’d have called in right away.”

“Didn’t you hear the sirens, Neal?”

“Well . . . Keith, I guess I’m just lucky you don’t have a social life and could cover for me.”

McGuire to turn his back on Upham and continue diagramming the crime scene. This was no place for an argument.

Upham paraded around the area and spoke with O’Donnell and each of the patrol officers. Before he finished his tour, McGuire yelled over to him, “Upham! I’m going to the hospital now to check on the victim. Have the Porsche taken to the city yard. I’ll see you back at the station.”

“Wait a minute, Keith! I need to take Carmen home first.”

Upham walked over to McGuire.

“You mean the bimbo in your car? Just give her some cab money.” McGuire packed away his equipment.

“That happens to be Carmen De La Silva from the Public Defender’s Office,” Upham said.

McGuire stood up with his camera bag in one hand and his tackle box in the other and turned toward his car. “Give her your keys,” McGuire said over his shoulder. “She knows . . . .” He stopped abruptly when he saw the television news van pull into the parking lot.

Karl Waldrip hopped out and bounded across the pavement before Max, his cameraman and driver, brought the van to a full stop. “Hey, guys. *Que pasa?*” Waldrip walked

right past them without waiting for a reply. “Ooooh! . . . this is good; we can do this with the emergency vehicles in the background and the police tape in the foreground. This is great. Max! Get your stuff over here.”

“I can handle this, McGuire,” Upham said. “Why don’t you go up to the hospital and check on the victim.”

“Kiss my ass,” McGuire muttered under his breath as he walked over to his car.

## CHAPTER TWO

SUNDAY 9:30 P.M., 11 NOVEMBER 1990

At the crime scene Keith McGuire had concentrated on the task at hand and refused to think about his brother. Now he could think of nothing else as he negotiated the winding road to the hospital.

Since his brother returned to the area four years ago, Keith had only seen him a dozen times, mostly on business. They had dinner together twice in the past twelve months—once before and once after Keith's divorce. Both occasions had been awkward for Keith. His mind drifted back to earlier years and experiences he had shared with Howard as a child and a teenager.

They had been close when he was young, but just after Keith turned seven, Howard went away to college. Since then Howard had been more like a favorite uncle than a brother. He'd show up unexpectedly for a birthday or Christmas bringing presents from foreign countries. Keith was a sophomore in high school when he first fully understood the nature of Howard's work. That was the year Howard was at the Defense Language Institute studying Japanese. He was in Army Intelligence at the time. Later he joined the CIA and remained with them until early 1986. The following year he got a job with the Defense Investigative Service in Monterey

conducting security clearance investigations for the Department of Defense.

McGuire's car glided quietly into the fog-shrouded parking lot of the hospital. He pulled into a space, killed the engine, and sat there looking at the large low-slung white building. He half-expected a flood of emotion and didn't want to leave his car until it had passed and was under control. He sat and waited, but nothing happened.

McGuire waited for the doctor. He sat sipping coffee at one of the dozen groupings of rattan furniture around the hospital's big indoor pond. A small island in the pond supported a twenty-foot tree and a few tropical ferns. Several potted ficus trees and bamboo plants were scattered around the dimly lighted area. An elaborate pattern of illuminated water in the pond gushed up three feet and danced in the air. A geodesic dome skylight forty feet across reflected back some of the light from the pond. Orange and white koi carp swam about aimlessly. The sound of the falling water drowned out all other noises, creating the feeling of being next to a waterfall in a tropical forest.

In the snack area a gray-haired Filipino man in a white uniform quietly stacked chairs as a prelude to mopping. Against the far wall near the unmanned information desk wheelchairs were clumped together like abandoned shopping carts. Occasionally an orderly or nurse would stroll by.

It was 11:43 P.M. when the doctor, dressed in a pale green scrub gown, came over to McGuire. The Main Operating Room was directly across from the pond. McGuire felt better when he saw the doctor was an older man, over fifty, perhaps a few years older than his brother.

"Detective McGuire?"

"Yes." McGuire rose to his feet.

"I'm Doctor Hernandez. They're taking the patient directly to ICU instead of the Recovery Room."

"How is he?"

“Not good. One bullet entered the right side of his chest, pierced his lung, and lodged at the rear of the thoracic cavity. The second bullet entered the left side of his face near his nose and exited behind the left jaw. A major blood vessel was severed and there was massive bleeding. His breathing’s being supported by a respirator, but his heart is functioning on its own. His blood pressure is back up to ninety over sixty and his pulse is down to a hundred. It’s hard to tell if there’s any brain damage—”

“Brain damage?”

“We don’t know how long his heart stopped before they started CPR. Under these circumstances there’s always the possibility of brain damage.” The doctor paused. “There’s also the possibility of coma. Right now he’s still under the effects of the anesthesia. We’ll know more when it wears off in a couple hours.”

“Where can I collect his clothing and the bullet you extracted?” McGuire asked.

“They’re in the custody of the OR nurse. You can see the patient in ICU, but as I said he’s still unconscious.”

McGuire sealed the mushroomed bullet into a clear plastic zip-lock bag and examined it briefly before putting it in his jacket pocket. He turned his attention to the bag of clothing. At the bottom of the bag was a school ring. Stanford University, 1964. The inside of the ring bore the inscription “HCM.” He could check out the remaining contents of the bag later.

McGuire pressed a buzzer by the door to the Intensive Care Unit. In a few seconds a young nurse came to let him in. There was a nurses’ station situated in the center of the horseshoe-shaped main room. Surrounding the area on three sides were a number of small glass-walled rooms. The nurse led him to one of the fishbowl-like rooms, pulled a curtain halfway across the glass wall, and returned to the nurses’ station.

With his hands in his trouser pockets and his shoulders slumped forward, he stood over the bed and stared down at his brother. Howard's face was heavily bandaged and a ventilator tube was taped to his mouth.

McGuire settled into an armchair next to the bed. He sat quietly, alternately looking at his brother, the bellows of the ventilator, and the monitoring equipment mounted on the wall. The room was in semi-darkness. The only light came from the nurses' station and the various displays and indicator lights of the monitoring equipment hooked up to Howard. Again he waited for an emotional response, but there was none. This wasn't really happening. It couldn't be his brother lying there. It came to him—the Solzhenitsyn book. Howard had given it to him for Christmas three years ago.

His eyes settled on the IV bag hanging a few feet above Howard's head. The clear liquid dripped from the bag into the tube leading to Howard's left arm in a slow mesmerizing tempo. Any minute now Howard would open his eyes and regain consciousness and everything would be fine. He kept waiting, but nothing happened.

A long time passed before he looked up and saw a nurse standing in the doorway speaking to him. He recognized her face and saw her lips moving, but no sound seemed to escape from her mouth. He felt confused for a moment, then began to hear sounds that slowly became words.

"Keith . . . Keith, are you all right?"

"Uh, I'm okay, just a little tired," McGuire said and rubbed his eyes.

"What are you doing here?"

He motioned with his head toward the bed and said, "My brother, Howard."

"I didn't know you had a brother. Keith, are you sure you're okay? Can I get you anything?"

"Thanks, Gayle, I'll be fine. I'd just like to sit here with him for awhile longer if it's all right."

Keith knew a few of the nurses at the hospital. During his years as a patrol officer, he had transported a lot of people to the hospital for treatment and had been treated there himself more times than he cared to remember. Many of the nurses had worked in the emergency room at one time or another. It's where he had met his second wife, Cristina.

He sat motionless in the chair for about an hour, looking at his watch and at Howard's eyelids. His mind wandered aimlessly, unable to focus and hold a thought. He felt helpless, unable to do anything for his brother. Gayle came every fifteen minutes to check on Howard. Each time she looked at her watch and shook her head, but said nothing.

There was something he could do. He could get the person who shot his brother. He made a silent promise to himself and to Howard, then got up and walked to the nurses' station. Gayle Fantes looked up from her charts. It was just past 3:00 A.M.

"It doesn't look good, does it?" McGuire asked.

"He can regain consciousness at any time."

"I'd appreciate it if someone would contact me through the department the minute he comes out of it." McGuire placed a couple of business cards on her desk.

"I'll call you. Hiroko's on the next shift. I'll ask her to do the same. I can have Dr. Hernandez call you later today. He usually makes his rounds about noon when he has patients here."

McGuire got to the station at 3:30 A.M. He spent the early hours of the morning putting the incident out on the teletype, preparing the bullet and the two empty nine millimeter casings for shipment to the state crime laboratory, and reviewing the news release Upham had written and left for him. He went home long enough to shower, shave, and find a photograph of Howard. After a quick breakfast, he made eight Polaroid copies of the photo, met briefly with Upham at the

station, then went to the city yard to check out his brother's car.

Upham had agreed to stay at the station to give out the photographs and press release and answer questions. Maybe he'd get some more camera time. At least Upham was dressed more professionally this morning. Upham rarely wore a suit to work, but on this occasion he had on a dark blue suit with subtle gray chalk stripes, a white shirt, and a yellow tie. McGuire was glad Upham was so eager to handle the press. If he dealt with the press himself, it would only draw attention to his relationship to the victim, which was something he didn't want.

McGuire returned to the station at ten. His examination of the car failed to turn up anything of value. He and Upham reinterviewed Corporal Landrey and Specialist Vernon separately and got their statements in writing. After enduring lunch together, the two detectives went to the American Tin Cannery and spent the next few hours canvassing the stores and restaurants, talking to store clerks and waitresses, and showing them the photo of Howard. No one remembered seeing him. Before the light faded, they took daylight photos of the crime scene.

Upham was clever, perhaps even smart, and the Chief had selected him two months ago to temporarily fill a vacant position in the two-man Investigations Section. He would return to Patrol as soon as Toshiro Noguchi came back from the Middle East. When Upham first joined Investigations, McGuire tried to guide him along and consciously made every effort not to be patronizing. But Upham refused any assistance and chose to do things his own way.

McGuire was too used to partnering with Noguchi and had no desire to work with anyone who wouldn't meet him halfway. In the past eight years there had been five murders in Pacific Grove. McGuire and Noguchi had worked well together; there had been five arrests and five convictions. This

case was classified as armed robbery and attempted murder, but that could change any day.

Noguchi was also a CID Agent in the US Army Reserves. Two months ago he was called to active duty for Operation Desert Shield and deployed to Saudi Arabia to join a few hundred thousand other American servicemen, leaving McGuire no choice but to work with Upham.

Back at the station McGuire settled in at his desk and reviewed the written statements of the two soldiers. Corporal Landrey impressed McGuire. He was very direct in his answers and sure of himself. Specialist Vernon equivocated a bit, but he'd probably be okay in court. McGuire looked up from the statements as Upham entered his office.

"I didn't get a chance to ask earlier, how did your meeting with the press go?" McGuire said.

Upham took off his coat, hung it on the coat rack, readjusted his shoulder holster, and settled into a chair before answering. "It went well enough. They'll run the photo with our phone number. Maybe we'll get lucky."

"Hey, the news will be on TV in a few minutes. We ought to check it out and see how you look." McGuire baited him, knowing Upham had probably set the timer on his VCR to record all the local news programs.

"I'll catch it on the late news tonight, if I can stay awake till then."

"So, what do you think of this case so far?" McGuire asked.

"Expensive car, nice overcoat, not to mention the Rolex Oyster. Made him a good target. Probably did something to spook the robber and got shot for it," Upham said. "There's been a few armed robberies and strong-arm robberies in that area. Should've taken the watch though . . . unless Landrey and Vernon scared him off before he could get it."

"I checked Howard's clothing for pocket litter last night. There wasn't anything that suggested any recent activity." As

he spoke, McGuire played with a staple remover trying to occupy his hands and resist the urge to light up another cigarette.

“You know,” Upham said, “Landrey’s description of the two shots sounding like muffled twenty-two caliber rounds makes me think our robber might have used a silencer. Frankly, that plus the apparent speed and placement of the two rounds suggests a professional, not your average crook. Kind’a makes you wonder what your brother was up to.”

McGuire kept his mouth shut and clinched his teeth.

Upham continued, “I’m curious to know how your brother could afford those expensive things.”

“We don’t have any evidence, except for one slug, two spent casings, and what two G.I.’s thought they heard, and you’ve got my brother being shot down by a professional hitman because of what . . . drug trafficking . . . Mafia involvement . . . what?”

Upham folded his arms on his chest. “I’m sorry it was your brother who was shot, but it’s questionable whether you should even be on this case, and you sure the hell shouldn’t be in charge of it, if you can’t approach it objectively.”

“Objectively? I’m not the one drawing conclusions from supposition; I usually try to gather some evidence first.”

“Look,” Upham said, “your brother works for the government at a pay grade of GS-11. That equates to about thirty-three thousand a year, gross. He probably barely clears enough to pay for food and housing around here. I make more than that and I sure the hell can’t afford a Rolex or a Dunhill lighter or Burberry trench coat.”

“Not good enough, Neal. Hey, I’ve got a novel idea.” McGuire got up from his desk. “Why don’t you collect some evidence, perhaps even investigate the matter?”

“That’s exactly what I’m going to do.”

McGuire left the office without replying.

In a larger police department McGuire wouldn’t be allowed on the case because of his relationship to the victim,

but the department only had two investigators and Upham had never handled a major felony investigation. McGuire knew Upham wanted to be in charge of an investigation like this, and he wouldn't hesitate to try to get McGuire taken off the case. If Upham could show McGuire's judgment was being influenced by personal considerations, the Chief would have to take him off. What really bothered McGuire was he had already considered the possibility of a professional gunman and couldn't rule it out. He would have to be careful around Upham and not give him any excuse to go to the Chief.

## CHAPTER THREE

TUESDAY 8:15 A.M., 13 NOVEMBER 1990

McGuire pulled up near the front entrance of the police station. He was careful to avoid parking directly under the two fifty-foot palm trees. They attracted flocks of birds that perched there for hours and did indescribable things to objects under them.

The station had dark red roof tiles and wall panels framed by concrete columns and beams. The panels looked like paving tiles. Unlike the rest of the building, which was windowless, the entrance was surrounded with glass. Portraits of current and past Chiefs lined the walls of the lobby. At the far end was the front desk and to its immediate right was the door that separated the public area from the interior of the building.

Pinkney Grant was at the front desk when McGuire walked in. She was an attractive, long-legged woman with medium-length red hair and large green eyes. She seemed effortlessly pretty, but McGuire knew better. It took some work to look twenty-three when you're actually thirty-something. She hadn't allowed herself to put on any extra weight. The only bulges in her clothing were the ones that made men stare a little longer than was polite.

The Chief knew how to pick 'em—well, at least some of them. McGuire recalled the Chief had also made the decision

to hire Kenneth Graves, the swing shift clerk. It was a lot easier to overlook Pinky's shortcomings, not that there were many. In fact it was pretty easy to lapse into all kinds of sexual fantasies whenever you saw her and forget she actually had a job to do.

"Good morning, Pink."

Pinkney looked up from her computer console. "Good morning, Keith. I'm so sorry about your brother. How is he?"

"Not too good, but he's a tough old bird. He may fool everyone and pull through okay." McGuire paused at the door next to the front desk and waited for Pinkney to let him in.

"Are you okay?" she asked. "Is there anything I can do?"

"I'm fine. Thanks for asking." He noticed she held eye contact just a little longer than normal before she glanced down and pressed a button causing the familiar buzz of the electric latch. He pushed open the door and decided he was confusing genuine concern with something else.

McGuire grabbed a cup of coffee in the break room, went straight into his office, and closed the door behind him. Pinkney's concern and expression of sympathy made him a little uncomfortable. There wasn't much he could say in response to people's offers of condolence. He had experienced the same thing when his parents died six years ago and again when Cristina divorced him ten months ago. He didn't like people feeling sorry for him.

McGuire rocked back in his chair and sipped his coffee. It was a medium-size windowless office with two desks separated by a seven-foot partition. Both sides of the partition were covered with police posters, calendars, newspaper clippings and photographs of crimes he and Noguchi had investigated. The calendars depicted seductive young female models wearing abbreviated police uniforms over captions that asked, "Do You Have Court Today?" The wall space that wasn't hidden behind filing cabinets was covered with framed commendations and school certificates.

McGuire drank half of his coffee before he gave in and lit his first cigarette of the day. He knew if he was ever going to quit smoking, he would have to give up coffee too, and alcohol, and probably sex. For a moment he saw himself lying in bed next to a beautiful young redheaded woman with large green eyes and thick sensuous lips, languishing in post-coital bliss, and reaching out with his hand toward the nightstand for a pack of . . . chewing gum. A shudder ran through him and the vision dissipated.

McGuire had worked until 8:00 P.M. last night drawing up a detailed diagram of the crime scene. Later he had gone up to Community Hospital to check on his brother's condition. Nothing had changed. He had returned home around 10:00 P.M. and crashed.

He started his morning with a review of his unfinished work from last week. There was a juvenile matter he could back out of and let Child Protective Services handle. He still had some follow-up work to do on a pair of residential burglaries. The problem with the library books he could put on permanent hold; it was one aspect of his job he really hated, but the Chief was big on community service.

Every few months McGuire had to go to the city library. The head librarian would give him a list of ten or twelve grossly overdue books and he had to go around reminding these library patrons of their errant behavior. Mostly they were little old ladies in their seventies or eighties who had so many books checked out they lost track of them. No matter how gentle McGuire was in his approach, once he identified himself as a police officer, they would go into a panic, fearing their delinquency might result in a criminal record. McGuire worried that sooner or later one of these geriatric misde-meanants might keel over with a heart attack when confronted about their overdue books. The newspaper headline would be ugly.

McGuire telephoned the Defense Investigative Service's Monterey Field Office and made an appointment to see

Howard's supervisor, Clayton Butler, the Special Agent-in-Charge at ten o'clock. In the meantime he could take care of some other matters.

McGuire consulted his business card file before dialing. A woman's voice answered the telephone. "Good morning, Holcomb, Tarantino, and Eisner."

"This is Keith McGuire. Is Mr. Tarantino in?"

"Mr. Tarantino is on another line. Would you like to hold?"

"Yes, if it won't be too long."

"May I tell him what this is in reference to?"

"I'm a former client of his. My brother was involved in a near fatal incident Sunday night, and I need some help in connection with his affairs."

"Please hold, Mr. McGuire. Mr. Tarantino shouldn't be long." The secretary's voice was replaced by unidentifiable background music.

McGuire's parents had died in a car accident in 1984 and Tarantino had handled the probate. His parents hadn't left much of an estate. His father had been crippled by a land mine at Omaha Beach during the Normandy Invasion. He had made a comfortable living as an accountant after the war, but never accumulated any wealth. When Keith's parents died, the only thing they had of real value was their home. At the time Vincent Tarantino had just quit the DA's office, joined a small private practice, and was eager for any work no matter how small. McGuire had worked closely with Tarantino on a number of criminal cases and trusted him.

"Keith, I'm sorry to hear about your brother. How is he?" Tarantino had a deep rich sincere voice that could enthrall a jury. He now did a lot of product liability cases and spent more time in court than most lawyers. That's where the money was; there sure wasn't any money in criminal defense.

"He's in a coma and, well, his condition's kind of iffy. The doctor doesn't give him much of a chance."

"How can I help?"

“I’ll need to attend to my brother’s personal affairs. If there’s no change in his condition and he remains in a coma for awhile, I want to make sure his assets are protected and his bills are paid.”

“As I recall you don’t have any other siblings?”

“There was only Howard, and he never married.”

“I’ll need a letter from the attending physician indicating Howard is not physically able to manage his own affairs. I can have you appointed conservator. In the meantime you can do whatever is necessary and reasonable. I’m sorry about this, Keith. Is there’s anything else I can do?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Well, if you need anything, please call me.”

“Thanks, Vince.” McGuire set the phone down. He knew Tarantino would handle the matter for him. From the very first case they had worked on together, they had treated each other as professional equals and had respected one another’s abilities. That hadn’t changed. But eight years ago Tarantino’s salary as a relatively new Deputy District Attorney was just a little more than McGuire’s pay as a brand new sergeant. Since then McGuire’s income had increased about fifty percent, whereas Tarantino’s had increased about three hundred and fifty percent. They lived in two different worlds now.

The Naval Postgraduate School occupied the grounds of what was formerly the Del Monte Hotel. It covered a quarter of a square mile within the City of Monterey, less than a mile east of the main business district. Herrmann Hall, the old hotel building, was a multi-winged five-story wood structure with white stucco walls and steep-pitched red tile roofs.

The fifth floor of Herrmann Hall was an unlikely place for the offices of a federal investigative agency. Never having been to the DIS office, McGuire began to wonder if he hadn’t misunderstood the directions Clayton Butler had given him.

McGuire entered the building’s east wing and found the elevator out of order. A wide, red-carpeted stairwell next to

the elevator went up to the fourth floor. From there he ascended a narrow, uncarpeted set of steps to the fifth floor. About ten yards down a tall narrow bare corridor McGuire saw a blue, plastic sign indicating he had arrived at the right place.

He identified himself to the secretary who seemed vaguely familiar. She asked him to wait and announced his presence to Clayton Butler over the intercom. She was an attractive Japanese woman with long straight raven-black hair. Her age eluded him, but he placed it somewhere between thirty and forty. She returned to her typing without a second look at McGuire.

The ceiling in the secretary's office sloped down at strange angles towards the outer wall and jutted out into a dormer window. The bottom half of the walls were covered with wood grain contact paper that tried to pass as paneling, but was betrayed by bubbles of trapped air. Otherwise, it was a fairly typical old government office—institutional beige walls adorned with unframed travel posters, a mismatch of tan and gray metal office furniture, uncovered florescent light fixtures suspended from the ceiling, and surface mounted electrical conduit. Standing behind the secretary's desk were three heavy gray Mosler four-drawer safes with reversible magnetic "Open" and "Closed" signs stuck to the front of each control drawer.

Butler had a coffee mug in his right hand as he emerged from a narrow passageway that looked like it had once been a small closet. He was younger than McGuire had expected, perhaps thirty-five. He stood about five-foot-nine and was stocky with prematurely graying hair. The tan corduroy sports coat he wore should have been retired years ago.

"I'm Clayton Butler. I don't believe we've met."

"Never had occasion to come up here before."

Butler pointed his coffee cup at his secretary. "This is Michiko Thurgood, my secretary. Michiko, this is Howard's brother, Keith McGuire."

Michiko acknowledged McGuire's greeting, expressed sorrow for Howard's condition, then promptly turned away and returned to her typing. McGuire thought her eyes seemed a little moist.

"Would you care for some coffee?" Butler asked. Before McGuire could answer, Butler stepped out of the office, across the corridor, and into another room. McGuire followed him into a room that was a mirror image of the secretary's office.

"Yes, black please," McGuire answered and glanced around the room.

"This is our bullpen. It's where the agents come in to do their paperwork. These rooms were once maids' quarters back when the building was a hotel." Butler handed McGuire a mug of coffee. "We're tenants here; we rent this space from the Navy."

If office space was any indication of status, the Navy certainly didn't hold DIS in very high regard.

Butler leaned against a desk and motioned McGuire to a nearby chair. "I'm sorry about Howard. How's he doing?"

McGuire remained standing. "If he survives, there may be brain damage. If there isn't any brain damage, the doctor says it will take several months for him to fully recover. Under the circumstances I thought it'd be best to collect his personal items. There might be something among them that could assist our investigation, and I figured you'd be needing the space for his replacement."

"I don't expect a replacement for Howard." As he spoke Butler seemed to be inspecting the cracks in the angular ceiling. "There's a hiring freeze because of federal budget problems. Even with this Iraq problem I doubt our agency'll be hiring any new employees for some time." Butler stopped speaking for a few seconds while a large jet airliner passed over the top of the building with a deafening roar. Until the noise died down to a reasonable level, he intently studied the inside of his coffee mug as if some foreign object were floating around in it.

When the noise subsided, Butler continued, "Howard worked with Gordon Wedgwood at our office at the Defense Language Institute. I'll have Wedge meet you at DLI and help you with Howard's things. I've already instructed him to take over Howard's caseload. He's in the best position to help you sort through his things." Butler's voice had an irritatingly detached and disinterested tone.

McGuire took a sip of coffee and asked, "Who were my brother's closest associates?" It was good coffee, much better than they had at the station. He covertly inspected the inside of his own mug, but didn't see anything unusual.

"Howard wasn't really close to anyone here . . . well, except for Steve Wepsala. He's retired now. They knew each other from the Agency. Steve recommended him for this job. I don't know any of Howard's personal friends, other than Steve. Frankly, I don't think he had any. Your brother is a very private person, almost secretive in some respects."

McGuire stared at Butler and allowed an uncomfortable silence developed before breaking it. "What can you tell me about his recent activities?"

"Not much. His work was all fairly routine, except for an occasional hostage case at DLI."

"What's a hostage case?"

"That's a term we use for cases involving people who have relatives in communist-controlled countries . . . because of the possibility the relatives could be used as hostages to pressure a person into cooperating with hostile intelligence agencies. In fact, Wedge has been working a hostage case with Howard for the past few months. He'll be able to tell you more than I can. As for Howard's personal activities, I'm afraid I don't know anything about what he did after work hours."

McGuire grew bored watching Butler talk to his coffee mug about Howard's health insurance and other personnel matters. Butler promised to call the hospital and give them the necessary information from Howard's personnel file. McGuire agreed to return any DIS property at Howard's

home, particularly his badge and credentials. Arrangements were made for McGuire to meet Wedgwood that afternoon.

## CHAPTER FOUR

TUESDAY 2:00 P.M., 13 NOVEMBER 1990

McGuire returned to the office and worked through lunch. He managed to successfully divest himself of the juvenile case and close out the two residential burglaries before heading over to Howard's office.

He drove onto the Presidio through the Taylor Street Gate and wove his way downhill. Classes had resumed about an hour ago and the streets were relatively empty. He turned his Ford Crown Victoria left into the parking lot in front of the Tin Barn. He was high on the hillside. McGuire admired the view of the wharf, the harbor, and the bay stretched out in front of him. The water was a bright teal blue. He could faintly hear the barking of sea lions coming from the Coast Guard pier. The morning fog had burned off and the sun warmed the air, raising the odor of damp fallen leaves. The sky was clear and offered a crisp view of the Gabilan Mountains to the east and Santa Cruz to the north. This had once been a perfect position for a battery of cannon to command the harbor and protect the Spanish port from Russians.

The DIS office at the Presidio was in the Tin Barn, a large tan building covered with corrugated metal. The main part of the structure was a theater used for graduation ceremonies, but along the north side were offices.

McGuire entered the side door at the front of the building. He looked down the long hallway and saw a cardboard sign with red stenciled letters “Defense Investigative Service” at the end of the hall. The door to Room 6 was open and a man with rolled-up shirtsleeves was sitting in front of a personal computer with his back to McGuire.

McGuire stood in the doorway and said, “Excuse me. Are you Gordon Wedgwood?”

Wedgwood jerked his head around toward McGuire and looked surprised. “Oh, hi . . . you must be Howard’s brother. I didn’t hear you come down the hall. Clayton Butler told me you’d be coming.” As he got up his right knee smashed against the side of the computer stand causing the video monitor to shake violently. He grabbed his knee and fell back in his chair. Wedge pushed himself clear of the computer stand, then rose slowly to his feet. He grimaced, limped over to McGuire, and extended his right hand. “You can call me Wedge.”

Wedge’s hand was large, and his handshake firm. He was probably six-foot-two when he stood erect.

“I’m Keith, Keith McGuire. Is this Howard’s office?”

“Yeah, I was like, just going through his computer files trying to sort things out. I’m really sorry about Howard. How is he?”

McGuire shook his head. “He hasn’t regained consciousness yet.”

Wedge looked at the floor for a second before raising his large boyish face with its limpid blue eyes. “Can he have visitors? I’d like to see him, and I’m sure Steve Wepsala would too—I’m sorry, you wanna sit down?” Wedge motioned toward a gray straight-back chair in front of the desk and remained standing as McGuire sat down.

Wedge was about twenty-five and looked as though he weighed two hundred and forty pounds. He had strong sloping shoulders, chunky arms, a massive chest, and a thick waist. His hair was short-cropped and relatively straight.

Dark brown cowlicks sprouted up at the back of his head. “How about some coffee or something?”

“No thanks,” McGuire said and reached in his coat pocket for his cigarettes. “My brother’s in the Intensive Care Unit at Community Hospital. They don’t allow visitors in ICU, except for family members, but they may move him out of there in a few days. I’ll let you know.” He looked around for an ashtray. When he didn’t see one, he put his cigarettes back in his pocket.

“If there’s anything at all I can do to help,” Wedge said.

McGuire fished around in his pockets until he found a pack of gum and offered a stick to Wedge.

“*Spaseeba*,” Wedge said and accepted the gum.

McGuire looked at him quizzically.

“It means thank you in Russian. I’m trying to learn a few words in each of the languages they teach here.”

McGuire nodded absently and asked, “How well do you know my brother?”

“I met Howard almost a year ago when I hired on with DIS. I saw him around office every day, but we really didn’t talk much until Steve Wepsala retired in April. Since then I’ve worked with him every day.” Wedge tested his knee before moving around the desk and carefully settling into the swivel chair next to the computer. As he did, his gut strained against his belt and rolled over his low-slung slacks just a little.

“Steve was my training officer,” he continued, “so I didn’t have much contact with Howard during my first four months. With Steve busy training me, Howard had to take care of some of Steve’s caseload. I think Howard didn’t want to interfere in my training. But once Steve retired, I started going to Howard for advice . . . but then, we all do.”

“Can you tell me about the cases Howard was working on?”

“Most of his work was fairly routine stuff—security clearance investigations on the students here. We have our

share of the usual drug, alcohol, and credit problems young people get into—”

“Any heavy-duty drug trafficking?”

“No. Nothing like that, mostly low-level recreational use.”

“How about people involved in violent crimes?”

“He got a confession out of a rapist last month and there was a guy at D Company involved in a murder conspiracy. That one went to polygraph before he was able to get a confession.”

“What happened to them?”

“Both were kicked out of the Army. There was nothing more they could really do to the rapist.” Wedge loosened his tie and unbuttoned the collar of this shirt. “The statute of limitations had expired. The other guy was extradited to Virginia. I think he was convicted and sent to prison.”

“Where’s the rapist now?” McGuire began to feel too warm, so he took off his sports coat and draped it on the back of his chair. He noticed Wedge sneak a look at the Browning Hi-Power he wore in a brown leather pancake holster on his right hip.

“He’s in some mental institution in Arizona. The guy like, flipped out after he left here. It was his sister he forcibly raped . . . at knife point.” Wedge added, “This building doesn’t have any insulation. When the sun’s out, it gets a little warm in here.”

McGuire nodded an acknowledgement and let his eyes wander over to two large oriental scrolls with Chinese writing on them decorating one wall. He had no idea what they said. He turned back to Wedge. “I always thought most of the young people here at DLI were former Boy Scouts.”

“Most of them are. Only a few turn out to be real nasty cases.” Wedge made small popping sounds with his gum. “A few thousand students come through here each year, but we only get involved with the ten percent that have had serious problems.”

McGuire checked out a large map of the world held in place by thumbtacks on a framed corkboard just to the right of the Chinese scrolls. Dozens of red map tacks identified most of the major cities in Europe and the Pacific Rim. Places Howard's been, McGuire wondered. "Has my brother ever been physically threatened by anyone he's investigated?"

"Not since I've been here," Wedge said. "Well, he did receive a couple of hate letters, but he didn't take 'em seriously. Steve would know if there was anything serious like that in the past."

McGuire's brow furrowed. "Who were the letters from?"

"I think one was from a guy who got bounced out of here and wound up in Saudi Arabia as a 'grunt' in the 82nd Airborne Division."

"And the other?"

"He's still here, assigned to Company D. When his security clearance was denied, they yanked him out of class and placed him in a casual status. That's kind'a like the military equivalent of purgatory. They're processing him out of the Army for fraudulent enlistment."

"What was that case about?" McGuire asked.

"Well, they're discharging him because of undisclosed pre-service drug use, but the main issue was his involvement in satanic cult activity. It's not as bad as it sounds. He was into some really strange shit, but nothing criminal other than the drugs." Wedge got up and walked carefully around the small office, limping slightly.

"Can I get a copy of the threat letter from the second guy?"

Wedge stopped pacing and rested his hand on a document shredder sitting on a table near the door. "If the letter isn't here in Howard's files, he may have given it to Butler. I should be able to get a copy for you." He must have noticed McGuire staring at a sign taped to the document shredder, dedicating it to Fawn Hall. "I think this is Howard's idea of a

joke,” he said. “Steve thought it was funny. It has something to do with the Iran/Contra hearings.”

A smile spread across McGuire’s face. “Well, if you find a copy of the hate letter, just fax it to me at the station.”

“I would, but we don’t have a fax machine.”

“Doesn’t your agency have a lot of offices spread around the country?” McGuire asked.

“Yeah, about two hundred.”

McGuire just shook his head. “We should get started sorting through Howard’s stuff. I brought two cardboard boxes with me; they’re out in my car. I’ll be back in a minute.”

When McGuire returned, Wedge had already emptied the desk drawers onto the desktop and was sorting through the items. McGuire went to the credenza. Lying flat in the bottom of the first drawer he opened was a framed photograph of himself when he was fifteen. He was wearing hip waders and standing in the middle of a mountain stream with a fly rod in one hand and a large cutthroat trout in the other.

He grasped the photograph and stared at it intently. As he wiped the dust off the cold smooth surface of the glass with his hand, he realized a lump had formed in his throat. Howard had taken the picture on their last fishing trip together, twenty-two years ago, just before Keith’s interest in fishing was displaced by a preoccupation with cars and girls. He set the photograph aside so he could place it in the cardboard box last.

McGuire cleared his throat and said, “Clayton Butler mentioned a hostage case Howard was working on.”

“He started a SOVBEAR case in August, actually two of them.”

“SOVBEAR?”

“Oh, that’s what Howard calls hostage cases involving Soviet Block Émigrés And Refugees. There’s like, a few hundred instructors here at DLI from Warsaw Pact countries. They don’t need security clearances as such, but because they have such close contact with students who are all going on to

intelligence jobs, the instructors are investigated to determine their loyalty to the United States.” Wedge placed a thick blue three-ring binder and a DIS telephone directory into the bottom desk drawer. “Butler had me work with Howard on the case. As I said, it’s actually two cases, a husband and wife who work as instructors in one of the Russian Departments.”

“What can you tell me about the cases?”

“Well, they’re not classified . . . but there are some aspects of the case that are like, kind’a sensitive.” Wedge stopped what he was doing and turned toward McGuire. “I’m not sure what I can tell you.”

“Skip it for now. If we need to, we can deal with it later. Who were Howard’s closest friends?”

“The only person I know is Steve Wepsala,” Wedge said. “There really wasn’t anyone else Howard was particularly close to.”

“How did he spend his free time?” McGuire wondered how others would answer the same questions if they were asked about him—one intermittent girlfriend, one close work associate, one distant brother, no outside interests.

“He reads a lot. I don’t think he had any other interests, except maybe fishing.” Wedge paused and looked quizzically at McGuire. “Look, what is it you’re not telling me?”

“What do you mean?”

“I thought Howard was shot and robbed outside the American Tin Cannery.”

“Yeah . . . well, he was shot, and his wallet was taken. That doesn’t necessarily make it a robbery.” McGuire paused as the image of his brother lying in a hospital bed with his head bandaged and a hose taped to his mouth invaded his thoughts. “I think there might be something else involved. Perhaps it was only made to look like a robbery. I’m not sure of anything yet, and I don’t have much to go on. Whoever shot my brother took his wallet, but didn’t take his Rolex watch. Two witnesses are fairly certain the gunshots sounded muffled, indicating a silencer may have been used.”

“What about Howard’s years in the CIA? Maybe something from his past caught up with him,” Wedge said and placed two thick volumes on interrogation techniques into a cardboard box.

“It won’t do any good to speculate about that until I’ve looked into things that are closer to home. I could use your help. Howard and I haven’t had much contact recently. I hardly saw him, even after he moved back here in eight-six. I don’t know who his friends are or anything about his recent activities. I didn’t even know he could operate a computer.”

“Is your department letting you investigate this case?” Wedge asked.

“For the moment anyway. There’s only me and one other detective at the department.”

“Look, what I told you about Howard’s casework has to be off-the-record. If you need some of it for your report, we’ll have to go through official channels. I’m sorry, but I can get into a lot of trouble for not following procedures.” Wedge’s face began to redden. “I’m still in my probationary year with DIS. What did Butler tell you when you talked to him?”

“Hardly anything at all. He said you knew more about Howard’s work than he did, and I should ask you about it.”

Wedge’s mouth tightened. “He just didn’t want to bend the rules himself.”

“Rules or no rules, I’d still like your help.” McGuire loosened his tie and rolled up his shirtsleeves.

“I’ll help in any way I can, as long as you don’t put any of this stuff in your reports.”

As they talked they continued to rummage through Howard’s belongings. It was amazing the things a person accumulated in a few years—coffee cups, plaques, radio, pictures, books—things that transformed a sterile office into a personal workspace. They were barely able to fit all of it into the two boxes.

McGuire learned Wedge was recently married. He graduated from San Jose State University in 1987, majoring

in Administration of Justice. For two years he tried to get hired as a police officer, but he was never able to pass the physical agility test. In the meantime he tried selling cellular telephones to support himself, but being a salesman just didn't appeal to him. In fall of 1989 DIS needed additional personnel, and they had no physical agility test. Wedge applied and was hired in December.

They finished at a little after five. Howard's personal effects contained nothing that shed any light on his activities. As they loaded the boxes into the trunk of his Ford, McGuire's stomach growled noticeably. "I missed lunch today," he said. "Do you want to join me for dinner? There're still a few things I'd like to go over with you. That's if you don't have other plans."

"Dinner sounds great," Wedge said. "Tonight's a school night for my wife. Katherine's taking night classes to finish her degree in business. She won't get home till late. Where do you want to go?"

"It doesn't matter. I want to drop these boxes off at the station first. It won't take a minute. Why don't you leave your car here and ride over with me?"

Wedge glanced at McGuire's left hand and didn't see a ring, but decided to ask anyway. "What about your wife?"

"I'm not married . . . anymore."

## CHAPTER FIVE

TUESDAY 5:30 P.M., 13 NOVEMBER 1990

Wedge saw a battered green Toyota Corolla sitting in front of the police station. McGuire parked right behind it. In the lobby of the station, a man was standing at the front desk talking to the desk clerk. The clerk was shaking his head from side to side, then he saw McGuire and pointed to him.

The man turned around to face McGuire and Wedge. He was tall and lanky in his mid-forties. He extended his right hand toward McGuire. "Keith, I'm so sorry about Howard. I just can't believe it."

McGuire, balancing a cardboard box in his right arm, parried his outstretched hand by gesturing toward Wedge. "Eugene, this is Gordon Wedgwood. Wedge is a federal agent. Wedge, meet Eugene Leach."

Wedge shifted the box he was carrying to his left side and reached out with his right hand to shake Eugene's. He disengaged his hand quickly and shot McGuire a sideways glance.

McGuire introduced Wedge to the Kenneth Graves, the desk clerk, and Graves tripped the electric latch to the door to the interior of the station. Wedge got into step behind McGuire as he pushed his way through the door. He could feel Leach looking him over from head to toe.

Leach caught the door before it closed. "Wait a minute, Keith, I need to talk to you about Howard."

"Well, come on back to my office."

Wedge set his box down on the floor and found himself a chair near McGuire's desk. McGuire remained standing and appeared to be reviewing items in his "in" basket as Leach seated himself next to Noguchi's desk.

"I saw Howard Sunday night," Leach began.

McGuire turned and stared at Leach.

A half-smile appeared on Leach's face creating a smug look. "I've been trying to get hold of you since Monday morning, but every time I called, you were either out or in an interview."

Wedge noticed McGuire's face soften as he spoke. "Well, I'm here now. Tell me about it." Leach looked at Wedge, back at McGuire, and hesitated for a moment. "It's okay," McGuire said, "you can talk in front of Wedge. He's Howard's partner."

Wedge had never thought of himself as Howard's partner, but in a sense he was. They'd worked together on the two hostage cases. That was enough to establish a partnership. The idea appealed to him.

"Well, I'm at The Tavern Sunday night around seven," Eugene said. "I see Howard sitting at a corner table with another man. I've got some information for him, so I walk over toward his table. But . . . he sees me and he gives me one of those hard looks out of the corner of his eyes, like he doesn't want to be recognized. So, I just go back to my table, finish my drink, and leave."

"Who was he with?" McGuire asked.

"Don't know. Never saw him before." Eugene crossed his legs exposing part of a hairy calf above his gray and maroon argyle socks.

"What did he look like?"

"Early fifties, short black hair, dark leathery complexion with thick eyebrows, a big man, larger than Howard. He was

wearing a green plaid shirt, buttoned at the collar but no tie, pleated tan corduroy slacks, and cordovan penny loafers.”

“Anything else?”

“They were huddled together talking quietly. I couldn’t make out what they were saying.” Leach folded his arms across his chest and occasionally pulled at his chin with his right hand, displaying long slender fingers with a large signet ring on his little finger and a heavy gold bracelet on his wrist.

“How long did you stay there?” McGuire asked.

“About twenty minutes. They were still there when I left if that’s what you mean.”

Wedge noted Leach had a full head of wavy blonde hair that was just a little too blonde and a little too thick. His gray Harris tweed jacket was patched at the elbows and under it he wore a maroon turtleneck sweater. His navy wool slacks had a sharp crease and his black oxfords were highly polished.

“You had some information for Howard,” McGuire said. “What was it?”

Eugene pulled out a notebook from the inside pocket of his sports coat and leafed through some pages. “Ran into Howard at The Gilded Cage last Thursday. It’s about noon, and he’s sitting at a table with Louie Joubert. When I come in, Howard gets up and asks me to step outside. He tells me he’s interested in someone called Dale who’s a client of Louie’s. Howard says Louie won’t tell him shit. Well, I don’t know who Dale is, but Howard says it’s important and involves national security, so I promise to find out for him. Frankly, I’m a little suspicious. I think Howard might be throwing up a smoke screen to cover his meeting with Louie. Anyway—”

“Why did you think that?” McGuire interrupted.

“Because I saw Howard hanging around Lovers’ Point a couple of times last month, trying to look inconspicuous. That’s where Louie meets most of his, ah . . . clients. I do some checking and find out that Dale’s an officer in the Navy. I think he works at the Naval Postgraduate School. I don’t know

his full name yet, but he lives in an apartment on Sloat Avenue.”

“Is there anything else?”

“No, but there is something you can do for me.”

“What’s that?” McGuire asked.

“It seems Bruce got himself into a minor jam at Lovers’ Point. Maybe you could talk to the DA’s office about it.”

“Who was the arresting officer?”

“Sergeant O’Donnell.”

McGuire grimaced. “That’s going to be tough, but I’ll see what I can do. Call me if you get anything more on Dale. Oh, and Eugene, let’s keep this just between the three of us, okay.” He walked Leach back out to the lobby, then returned to his office.

“Well, what do you think?” McGuire asked.

Wedge shook his head in disbelief. “Who in the hell was that?”

McGuire smiled and reached into his coat for his notebook. As he talked, he jotted down some notes. “Eugene’s one of my snitches . . . I mean, one of my confidential informants. I introduced him to Howard when he was working a case that led to a group of homosexual students at DLI.”

“What’s he do?”

“I think his parents left him some property. He doesn’t have to work. I’ve helped him once or twice and he’s given me some good information.” McGuire pulled an ashtray out of a desk drawer and set it on his desk. He patted down his pockets until he located his cigarettes and a lighter. He lit up and inhaled deeply.

Wedge got up and moved to where Leach had been sitting, away from the cloud of gray smoke forming over McGuire’s desk. “Like, who’s Louie and Bruce and what’s The Gilded Cage?” he asked.

“Bruce is Eugene’s sometimes boyfriend. Probably got caught giving someone a blowjob at the public restroom at

Lovers' Point. Louie Joubert is a local dope dealer. He's been in and out of jail on a number of drug offenses. Mostly he sells cocaine and ecstasy to gays. Sometimes he trades it for sex . . . sometimes with kids." McGuire settled into his swivel chair and propped his feet up on his desk. "The Gilded Cage is one of our local gay bars. I'm surprised you haven't heard of it."

"Is Joubert gay too?" asked Wedge.

"I wouldn't label him as gay. He's either bisexual or just totally indiscriminate. Was my brother working any cases at the Naval Postgraduate School?"

"No. I'm sure he wasn't."

McGuire dusted a long ash off his cigarette into the ashtray. "How about Navy officers at the DLI?"

"What about 'em?"

"Well, did Howard have any cases on Navy officers at the DLI?"

"No. There weren't any among his cases," Wedge said.

"Any idea why he would be checking on Dale?"

"Well, Howard could have like, received information about Dale from a walk-in informant . . . but we're not allowed to do any investigative work in those situations." Wedge fell silent. He didn't like what he was thinking, and he sure the hell didn't want to raise any suspicions about Howard.

McGuire interrupted Wedge's thoughts. "I don't understand. What do you mean you can't investigate?"

"We can only report what we're told by an informant. If someone at a higher level decides to open a case on the matter, then it's sent back down to us for the appropriate investigative work."

"So, if you find out someone with a security clearance is, for example, doing drugs, you can't open an investigation on your own initiative?"

Wedge said, "Yeah, kind'a sucks doesn't it?"

McGuire shook his head. "Let's go eat. I'm getting a headache."

From their table at the Tinnery Restaurant Wedge could see the tall stately cypress trees and jagged rock formations of Lovers' Point Park across the street. Beyond it the shimmering reflection of the moon rising in the east made a wide silvery stripe across the bay. Only four other tables in the restaurant were occupied. There was a low murmur of conversations and the occasional clatter of silverware against china.

Over dinner they kicked around a few possible explanations for Howard's visit to The Gilded Cage, but wound up discarding all of them. After a prolonged silence, McGuire broached the topic Wedge had previously considered, but had chose not to bring up.

"Look, my brother's not gay, but I can't rule out the possibility that he might have been involved in something shady . . . maybe even something to do with drugs."

"I respect Howard a lot," Wedge said. "I can't believe he'd be into anything illegal." The thoughts that crept into his head bothered him, but he was having trouble saying them out loud. "Look, your brother, he—"

"What?"

"He . . . ah, had an appointment book. Have you gone through it yet?"

"What appointment book?"

"He kept a pocket calendar, the type you record your appointments on."

"It wasn't in his clothing."

"Maybe it's at his house."

"We ought to go over there and look around," said McGuire.

"I don't know. I don't have any authority to search his house."

"It's all right. I'm being appointed his conservator by the court. I'm supposed to go over there and handle his personal matters." McGuire pushed himself away from the table.

“Wait a minute,” Wedge said. “That doesn’t give me any authority to rummage through his house with you.”

“Well, Butler asked me to return Howard’s badge and credentials along with any other DIS property I find.”

“So?”

“So,” McGuire said, “we’re going there to recover DIS property. And if we find any, you’ll be there to take custody of it.”

“Okay, but I need to call home and leave a message for Katherine, so she won’t worry if she gets home before me.” Wedge got up and handed McGuire a twenty-dollar bill. “Here, can you take care of the check while I make my phone call?”

## CHAPTER SIX

TUESDAY 7:45 P.M., 13 NOVEMBER 1990

A heavy cloud cover had moved in and obscured the moon. A street lamp cast a harsh light across the front of Howard's townhouse. Cream-colored duplex and fourplex units with dark brown roofs stood primly behind uniformly manicured lawns. The buildings were all the same yet different. One had aluminum siding, another was stucco, and yet another was board and batten.

Wedge got out of the car and cleared his throat. "Keith, you know, the thought occurred to me earlier that your brother was, ah . . . well, Howard was in a position to—"

McGuire stood on the concrete path to Howard's front door and signaled Wedge to stop. "Did you see that?" he whispered.

"See what?"

"Something in the window on the second floor."

Wedge looked up at the window, but saw nothing.

"Are you armed?" McGuire asked.

"No."

"Don't you guys carry guns?"

"Guns. We can't even carry Mace. I have to rely on my good looks and charm to get me out of a bind," Wedge whispered.

“It’s a wonder you’re still alive.” McGuire bent over and pulled up his left trouser leg. From an ankle holster he slid out a stainless steel Walther PPKS. “Here take this. Flip the safety up. Leave the hammer down. There’s a round in the chamber. It’s double action.”

Wedge hesitated before accepting the gun. “Do you think whoever’s in there is armed?”

“Howard was shot forty-eight hours ago. Now someone’s burgling his house in the middle of the night. Do you want to operate on the assumption he’s not armed?” McGuire pulled a key ring out of his coat pocket and selected one of the keys. “Here, I think this is the key to the front door. Give me a couple minutes to get around back, then make a lot of noise opening the door, but don’t go in until I call for you.” McGuire slipped quietly through the gate at the side of the duplex and disappeared into the backyard.

Wedge stood in front of the building staring at the gun in his hand, wondering what he had gotten himself into. Wasn’t this what he had always wanted; wasn’t it what he had spent four years in college preparing himself for? He hefted the gun. The cold metal made an audible click when he flipped the safety off. Adrenaline pumped into his blood, and the muscles in the middle of his back began to tighten up as he made his way up to the front door. He had often day dreamed of situations like this, but somehow he never really imagined how it would feel.

As he reached the door, he heard something move inside. His body froze and tensed up. Make some noise, he thought.

He tried to insert the key into the lock, but his hand was trembling. Wedge steadied his hand against the doorframe and managed to force the key into the lock. He pushed and pulled the doorknob, then twisted it back and forth. He waited a few seconds before he turned the key and shoved the door. The door swung wide-open and slammed up against a wall.

When Wedge realized he was silhouetted in the doorway by the street light, he jumped to one side and pressed his back against the outside wall of the house. Both hands tightly gripped the gun. He felt sweat trickle down the side of his face.

McGuire crept around to the rear of the townhouse. He opened the screen door and found the door to the kitchen ajar. With his Browning drawn, he crouched down and slowly pushed the door open. It was dark inside the house. He listened intently before stepping into the kitchen. He strained to see into the dark corners of the room. There was a faint glow of light beyond a doorway straight ahead.

McGuire stepped cautiously across the vinyl floor, out of the kitchen, and into a carpeted hallway. The light was coming from a stairwell to his left. With his Browning held in both hands at chest level, he pressed his back against the wall and sidestepped until he reached the corner of the stairwell. He crouched down again before pivoting around the corner and looking up the stairs over the top of his pistol. The sudden loud rattling of the front door and the sound of the door slamming made him jump before he could remind himself it was only Wedge.

A dim glow coming from a skylight made it possible to barely see the carpeted treads of the stairs and the broad landing halfway up. Just as he got to the landing, he heard the latch of a door close. He stood motionless and strained to hear, but there was only silence. Let it be him; let it be the man who shot Howard, he thought.

His attention was focused on the top of the stairwell as he resumed his slow ascent. There was a hallway at the top. About twenty feet to his right at the end of the hall, he could see a thin ribbon of light escaping from under a door. His pulse quickened. He inhaled slowly, held his breath momentarily, then exhaled completely. Relax, be calm, be controlled, he told himself. With his gun in front of him, McGuire took

one step toward the light when a closet door in the narrow hall swung open forcefully.

The door knocked the gun out of his hand and sent him sprawling to the floor and onto the stairs. As he struggled to get up, a knee smashed into his face. He grabbed desperately at the leg attached to it, wrapped his arms around an ankle, and yelled out for Wedge.

The person fell over on top of him, and they both rolled down the stairs to the landing. McGuire crawled up onto his knees, but the intruder wrestled him back down. He couldn't make out the person's face as they struggled in the darkness, but he was certain it was a man. Where was Wedge?