

CHAPTER

1

QUAI BRANLY MUSEUM COMPLEX PARIS, FRANCE

Damn, it was still burning.

Kira Drake and her dog, Mack, moved through the fiery rubble of what was once one of the most beautiful museums in Paris. There was almost nothing left of the glass buildings and picturesque grounds. It had been more than thirty-six hours since a string of explosions had decimated the museum, and a dark haze still lingered, almost completely obscuring the Eiffel Tower, which loomed over the scene from just blocks away. The tower and the businesses within a radius of almost a mile were closed, and the surrounding neighborhoods were cordoned off to everyone except investigators and rescue workers.

Kira leaned over and rubbed the back of Mack's neck. He was a four-year-old golden retriever, and they had worked together in disaster scenes all over the world. Mack sniffed the air, which was thick with an acrid odor they'd smelled practically from the

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moment they'd landed at Charles de Gaulle Airport an hour before. Kira glanced around the depressing scene. Hot spots had erupted in flame pockets all over the grounds, and more appeared as quickly as firefighters could extinguish them.

"What are you getting, boy?" she whispered to Mack.

Her dog was on high alert, sniffing in every direction as he led her through the narrow pathways that crews had swept free of the twisted metal and shards of glass.

This wasn't a body hunt; 230 corpses had already been removed from the scene and identified, and she'd been assured there were no more to be found. She and Mack were there for a different reason.

"Kira!" a voice called out behind her.

She turned to see that it was Matt Graves, who had practically begged her to come to Paris and visit the site with Mack. Graves was a special investigator with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism. She'd never seen him in anything but a business suit, but today he was wearing a long yellow firefighter's jacket and tall boots. He stepped closer and spoke with his usual French accent. "Thank you for coming. Good flight?"

"Fine." She looked around the still-smoldering scene. "This is sickening. Any theories about who's responsible?"

"Lots of theories, but little concrete evidence yet. This museum features artwork by indigenous peoples of Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. There have been protests calling for the return of some of the artifacts to their homelands, so it could be related to that. Half the law enforcement agencies in Europe are here trying to make sense of this. You'll see some familiar faces."

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“I’ve already seen a few. French police, Interpol, Scotland Yard . . . Are there any other dogs working the case?”

“Henry Jaffer flew in from Holland yesterday.”

“With his white shepherd, Dancer?”

“Yes. They found the last two surviving victims in what was left of the parking structure. Vince McCall and his little terrier were among the first to arrive. They found several corpses that the rescue workers had missed.”

She nodded. “I’m not surprised. Harper is one of the best body dogs in the business.” She looked ahead. “Can you get us close to one of the main blast points?”

He pointed to the right. “The explosions started in the new modern art building. Jack Harlan was here for the dedication just last week. Detonations continued across the main building and finally to the administrative offices. Our best bet is to start at the offices. They’re the most intact.”

Kira looked at the heap of concrete and melted glass. “‘Intact’ is a relative term.”

“Absolutely. This way.”

He led her and Mack around a mound of blackened concrete to what was once a five-story administrative building. She had spent much of her flight from the U.S. familiarizing herself with the layout of the buildings and surrounding grounds, but there was little still standing that related to the online maps she’d studied. At least here, part of the superstructure remained.

Mack pulled on his harness and guided her around a hot spot she and Graves hadn’t seen.

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“Good boy.” Kira turned back to Graves. “Were the explosions at the lower level?”

“Yes, all the way across. They were carefully placed to cause maximum damage. The bomber may have had some professional demolition experience.”

She unclipped the leash from Mack’s harness, and the golden retriever bolted through the smoldering piles of steel and roofing material, stopping to sniff every few feet before moving on.

Graves watched for a moment, his face wrinkled with concern. “There’s a lot of broken shards of glass out there, and they’re still trying to tamp down the hot spots. Will he be okay?”

“He’s wearing protective booties, and Mack knows his way around disaster areas. Remember the stadium collapse in Barcelona?”

He grimaced. “I remember.”

“Trust me, he’ll be safer than we will. We just need to keep up.”

Kira and Graves followed Mack through the rubble. Graves finally raised an N95 mask over his nose and mouth. “When the wind changes, the smell is overpowering. Will he be able to pick up the scents?”

“I think he already has.” She pointed toward her dog, whose tail was furiously wagging as he darted past globs of melted glass. “He’s zeroing in on something now.” They broke into a run as Mack finally stopped short in front of a gaping hole and started barking.

Kira caught up and knelt beside him. “Got something, boy?”

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Mack barked again and looked at her with his big brown eyes.

“Good, Mack.” Kira extended her arms in front of her.

Mack faced her and placed his right paw on her left hand, then rested his chin on her right arm. Kira put down her arms, then raised them again. Mack repeated his motions. Kira rubbed his neck and gave him a treat. “You’re the best boy ever, Mack.”

She stood and turned back toward Graves. “It was RDX.”

He looked down in surprise. “He just told you that?”

“Mack can detect over two hundred explosive compounds. That’s why you brought us here, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but . . . the Paris police thinks it was C-4. We’re still waiting on lab results.”

Kira shook her head. “Mack doesn’t need a lab. It was probably transported here shortly before the blast. Otherwise, the museum security’s own bomb-sniffing dogs would have picked it up before detonation. More than likely, it was transported here in a well-ventilated vehicle. Which means . . .”

Mack took off, running for a nearby street. Kira ran after him and called over her shoulder, “Get some of your men. Now!”

Kira followed Mack down Avenue Rapp, and she’d gone barely half a block before she turned and saw that Graves had enlisted two plainclothes agents and a pair of Paris patrolmen to join them. She had no idea where this would lead, but she was glad to have backup if the situation demanded it.

“Slow down, Mack. We’ll get there soon enough.”

She hoped. The bombs could have come from anywhere, but she

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assumed the bomber wouldn't want to transport unstable explosive devices over a long and potentially bumpy journey.

Graves and the others caught up to her just as she and Mack turned left on Avenue de la Bourdonnais. "How certain are you of this?" Graves asked Kira.

She shrugged. "For now, extremely certain. But he could lose the scent at any time. We'll have to see."

The group followed Mack until they finally found themselves at an empty storefront on Rue Duroc, situated next to a dry cleaner. Kira and Graves peered into the plate-glass window and saw only a few dirty tarps on a concrete floor.

"There's nothing here," Graves said.

Mack barked and ran down a narrow alley next to the building. He stood in a driveway behind the empty store and barked at the rear entrance. The dog then spun around several times.

Kira pointed to the back door. "We need to go in there."

Graves nodded to the patrolmen, and the taller of the two kicked the door repeatedly until it finally splintered open. They rushed through an empty storeroom and glanced around the front area they'd seen through the windows.

The place was empty.

Graves sighed. "Wild goose chase?"

Kira grabbed one of the patrolmen's flashlights and trained the beam on the storeroom floor. "No. Look!"

They gathered around her and leaned over to see short lengths of wire, metal shavings, and pieces of insulation.

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Kira backed away. “The bombs were assembled here.”

Graves nodded and motioned for everyone to exit out of the back door. “Yes. Everyone out. I’m calling Interpol.”

RUE DUROC

FOUR HOURS LATER

Night had fallen over the city, and the empty storefront was now the center of activity for dozens of forensics specialists and representatives from scores of law enforcement agencies. Across the street, Kira could see all the television news crews that had set up shop; their reporters were doing stand-ups in the glare of bright camera lights.

She had just taken Mack for a walk around the block when Graves approached her at the corner. “Interpol thinks they have a lead. A security camera caught someone going in and out of this place a few days ago, and their facial recognition system matched an American who was in the country for a few days.”

“That was fast.”

“Yes. They’re not fooling around. They’ve had a lot of pressure on them this time.”

“Who is it?”

“They haven’t released that information yet. It’s probably no one you’ve heard of.”

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She shrugged. "It doesn't matter. Mack did his job." She scratched the dog's back, and he looked up at her with sublime appreciation.

Graves smiled. "Yes, he did. You both did. Thank you. If you'd like to spend another couple of days here, the hotel is already paid for. There are worse places than Paris for a little R and R."

Kira thought of the wreckage of the once beautiful museum area and slowly shook her head. Lord, she was weary of the acrid smell of smoke and the sight of death that clung to that place.

"Thanks, Graves. Maybe another time. There's someplace else we need to be right now." She tried not to show how eager she was to leave as she turned away. "Good luck with your investigation."

"Did you see this morning's headlines, Harlan?" Belson came into the study and threw the newspapers on Jack Harlan's desk. "They've identified the Paris bomber. It was our old friend Joseph Taylor. You called it."

Harlan brushed the newspapers aside. "Old news, my friend. My contacts at Interpol tipped me off last night. If you hadn't taken the day off, you would have known that." He grimaced. "I've been doing my best not to feel responsible."

"Why? Because you donated that new museum building? No one could possibly think that makes this your fault."

"You and I both know that's exactly why Taylor targeted this

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museum. Interpol knows it, the Paris police know it, and the reporters for these newspapers know it. He knew he couldn't get past the security here at my home. Taylor's been looking for a way to strike back at me. Up to now, he failed every time he tried, but he finally found a way to do it. Even if it meant killing two hundred and thirty innocent people."

Belson paced across the study to stand before the bank of television monitors. They were in a magnificent chalet on the outskirts of Paris, which became Harlan's home base when he oversaw the Western European operations of Harlan Enterprises, a multinational tech company that had burst onto the scene and come to dominate several consumer product categories in the space of just a few years. Floor-to-ceiling windows offered a magnificent view of the Paris skyline; the Eiffel Tower was slowly becoming visible again as the post-blast haze finally dissipated. Belson pointed to the bank of six screens, all still displaying international news broadcasts covering the bombing. "You've seen, of course, how they found out it was Taylor."

"I could hardly miss it." Harlan stared at the TVs. Three of the six broadcasts were showing footage of a golden retriever being guided by an attractive young woman near the blast site. "It's Kira Drake. She's the one you've been pestering me to put on my payroll."

"'Pestering' is too strong a word," Belson said. "I'd never be that crass. 'Strongly suggesting' is more like it. If you're looking for someone, she's the one you want in your corner."

"Is she really that good?"

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“She *got* the bastard. The entire city of Paris was crawling with police and military, and she’s the one who managed to zero in on Joseph Taylor.”

“But he still got away.”

“That isn’t her fault. He’d left the country before she even arrived. He’s back in the U.S. somewhere. It’s only the latest in a long line of successes for her.”

“Like what?”

“Did you even read the magazine I gave you last week?” Belson picked up a journal from the coffee table and tossed it on top of the newspapers. “Why do you pay me an exorbitant salary if you’re not going to pay attention to me?”

Harlan glanced at the cover of the magazine. “Maybe because most of your ideas aren’t as weird as the one you threw at me this time. Besides, I was busy with that conference in India. But I remember that when you mentioned her, I did tell you to try to engage her services. You had nothing to do with bringing her here?”

“No, she was flown in by a UN investigative team. I’d reached out to her less than a week before, but I didn’t detect a lot of interest.”

“Why not?”

“She’s always in demand. But it seemed like a good idea to me, and it still does. Every time Taylor comes up on our radar, he manages to slip away. It wouldn’t hurt to have Kira Drake on call to track him the next time we get a report on his location.”

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“There are other trackers and other dogs.”

“Not like her. That’s why I wanted you to read that article. She’s extraordinary. She’s a veterinarian, but her emphasis is on research. She’s helped develop drugs to double and perhaps even triple the normal life spans of dogs.”

This piqued Harlan’s interest. “My friend’s wife is doing much the same thing.”

Belson nodded. “Sarah Logan. She actually mentored Kira Drake at her Summer Island facility. They’ve worked together for years.”

“Interesting.”

“But Drake is probably better known for her work as a tracker. Most dogs are trained for one specialty, be it bomb sniffing, cadaver seeking, or straight-out tracking based on a scent. She’s trained her dog, Mack, for all these things, and he’s accompanied her all over the world for a variety of missions. She’s even used him for a few archaeological projects. The dog can identify areas where foreign objects have been placed in the earth hundreds or even thousands of years ago. Like I said, extraordinary.”

Harlan looked down at the photo of Kira Drake on the magazine cover. Long gold-brown hair pulled back from a face that was dominated by huge dark brown eyes and a smile that held a hint of mischief. “Lovely,” he said absently. “And character in every line of her features. I suppose it couldn’t hurt to take a chance interviewing her.”

“If she’d permit it,” Belson said. “Like I said, she turned me

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down flat when I approached her last week.” He grinned. “I don’t know if she even knew who you were. Amazing. Rich as Croesus, two Nobel Prizes, and a Presidential Medal of Freedom. Do you want me to keep on trying? It might be worth it.” His eyes were twinkling. “If your ego can take it.”

“You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?” Harlan asked with a small smile. “It might be worthwhile to make another try at persuading her to take my money. I’m sure you’ll enjoy a second opportunity to watch me fail to impress her with all that hype you’re so eager to spread. It’s one of your favorite sports, and you relish the chance to tell me about it later.”

“Perhaps,” Belson said. “Everyone needs to face an occasional put-down. Even me. But I don’t think that this will be one. I believe I have a way to get to her this time. I know someone who might persuade her that she wouldn’t be doing you a favor but saving the world. That way, she won’t think she’s wasting her time in the service of a rich, selfish playboy. My plan might work, but you’ll need to do something.”

“Heaven forbid. Marching orders, Belson?”

“Just a phone call. You’ll need to reach out to your friend John Logan and his wife and see if they’d be willing to put a good word in. As I said, Sarah Logan mentored her, and John has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the Summer Island research facility. Kira Drake might be more willing to listen to them than to either of us.”

Harlan nodded. “You want me to use my friendship with them to recruit her?”

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“For the very best cause. To catch someone who just murdered two hundred and thirty people. I know John Logan casually, and he might be willing to do it if I talked to him...”

“I don’t doubt it,” Harlan said dryly. “John Logan gave you a fantastic reference when you were applying for this job with me. You certainly managed to do a terrific con, talking him into doing it.”

“Con? I’m hurt. You know I’m a man who can reach out and make anyone come to terms with the world around them. It’s one of my gifts. This is relatively simple. One phone call from you, and then I’ll follow up myself. Yes or no: Should I tap the person who might lure Drake into your camp?”

“John Logan?”

“John’s wife, Sarah. He gave her Summer Island when they were newlyweds, and she allows Kira to use the island for training whenever she’s not on a mission. It’s fortunate Sarah has wonderful taste and finds me appealing and fairly brilliant.”

Harlan thought about it. “Why not? I’ve been after Taylor for a number of years and haven’t been able to catch him. I’m willing to try any avenue at the moment.” He dropped down in his office chair and opened the magazine. “I’ll research Kira Drake in depth and see what she has to offer.”

“That’s all I wanted,” Belson said. “You and Taylor have been playing cat and mouse ever since Taylor killed your brother, Colin. It’s become an obsession. You need to try something different. I like this job and don’t want to have to look for another one any-time soon. I told you that I investigated this woman, and she has

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the reputation of being a bloody wonder. There might be a way to use her to help you get to Taylor. He almost cut your throat in Rome last year.”

“And I was within a breath of getting him in Athens two months later.” Harlan’s lips twisted bitterly. “It’s only a matter of time.” He held up his hand as Belson started to interrupt. “But I admit I’ve reached a point where I’m desperate enough to listen to you. I’ll even read about this woman and her blasted dog and try to see what you see in her. Heaven forbid you end up on the unemployment line.”

“I won’t,” Belson said. “You wouldn’t let me. I’m too valuable. You’ll find you can’t exist without me. You just have to listen to me. It’s time you tried something new. So let’s go hunting. We can start near Mount Blue Sky in Colorado, where Taylor is rumored to have a hideout. You’re almost as good a tracker as that woman you’re so scornful about. You might even be able to get your hands on Taylor before she does. It’s what you wanted anyway. She’s unique enough that both the local cops and the Colorado governor might go for the idea of bringing her in just for the media exposure. They wouldn’t touch you given that you’re practically a national treasure.”

Belson chuckled as Harlan made a rude sound. “It’s true. No one wants to antagonize NATO or Congress. And this woman is something of an outlier, but she just might be able to help in some way. Give her a chance.” He got to his feet. “It’s time for me to get out of here. By the time you talk to John Logan, I’ll be on my way to

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Summer Island to try to persuade Sarah Logan to talk Kira Drake into giving you a chance to get what you want.” He tapped the magazine. “Be sure you read about how our dog lady managed to find that pirate treasure trove in the Bahamas. That should amuse you.”

“I doubt it. The only thing that will amuse me is getting Taylor in my sights.”

“Which might be the same thing,” Belson said. “Kira and her dog spent almost a year on that Caribbean island searching for those Spanish doubloons. When she found them, she insisted it was her dog’s keen nose that located the site where they had been buried. A bit hard to believe.”

“Don’t worry,” Harlan said grimly. “I’ll research everything about her before I interview her.”

“If you interview her,” Belson said as he left the office. “It depends on whether your connections and my charm are still as potent as ever. But you’ve got a great chance...”

SUMMER ISLAND TWO DAYS LATER

Kira pressed her forehead against the private jet’s side window and looked down. “Feels good to be here, doesn’t it, Mack?”

The dog licked her hand appreciatively.

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“It’s good to have you back,” the pilot said as he guided the plane over the island. “Both of you.”

“Thanks, Edward. I never feel better than I do when I’m on Summer Island. It’s a magical place.”

As they flew over the island, Kira smiled as she saw some of the site’s oldest residents, a group of dogs in their late twenties and early thirties who ran and played on an obstacle course as if they were puppies. A moment later, the jet swooped over a tall suspension bridge spanning a wide river that nearly cleaved the island in two. For all its majesty, the bridge melded with its surroundings, fitting in with the simple architecture and lush vegetation that characterized Summer Island.

Soon they touched down on the airstrip near the main research lab. Edward tapped his headset. “I’ve just been told Sarah is greeting us today. She’s finishing up an evaluation in the lab and will be out in a minute or two.”

“No problem. I’ll play with Mack for a while. He always gets excited when he comes here.”

They jumped out of the jet and started running in the large field next to the airstrip.

Mack dashed one way, then another, as Kira tried to grab him in a spirited game of tag. She finally cornered him against the communications shack.

“Got you, Mack. It’s about time,” she grumbled. “You could have remembered that I don’t have four legs like you. You ran me ragged.” She ran the rest of the way to where the dog was crouching

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and tagged him on the neck, which was the official victory signal in this particular game. “I win! My game. But you were particularly determined today.” She put her arms around him and gave him a hug. “I was actually very proud of you. You were exceptionally clever.”

He nodded solemnly.

She laughed. “Don’t be arrogant. You almost missed that last turn at the bottom of the hill.”

But Mack was no longer listening to her. His head rose, and suddenly he was howling with joy and running down the hill toward the lake.

“Mack!” She jumped to her feet. Then she saw who was coming out of the research lab and sighed in resignation. Of course Mack wasn’t paying any attention to her. She waved and started down the hill herself. “Hi, Sarah. There’s no way Mack is going to be able to concentrate with you and Monty here. He’ll think it’s play-time.” She watched Mack jumping around Sarah’s dog Monty like a young puppy. She hadn’t seen him so happy since the last time Sarah had brought him to the island. Monty was Mack’s sire, and they had been together for the first two years of Mack’s life as well as during his early training. “But it’s not time for Monty’s shots. I told you we should stagger them.”

“I’m not jumping the gun.” Sarah was climbing the hill toward her, but she was forced to leap around the two dogs. “I wasn’t going to miss bringing them together, though, since I was coming here anyway.” She was looking at the two romping dogs with affection.

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“I love to see them together. Admit it, so do you.” She held up a picnic basket. “So I brought lunch for all of us.” Her eyes were twinkling. “I’ll have to see if Monty can keep his son in line at the chow line. It’s the ultimate test of obedience.”

Kira’s eyes narrowed. “But that’s not the reason you showed up today,” she said. “Are you worried about Monty?”

“No,” Sarah said quickly. “I have faith in your latest versions of our serum. I couldn’t be more grateful to you. He has the health and energy of a five-year-old pup. It’s a miracle.”

“It’s only the first stages. I’m working on an advanced blend if this one shows signs of weakening.”

“No sign yet.” Sarah opened the basket. “Wine? You may need it.” She made a face. “I brought more than Monty tucked away in my bag of tricks.”

Kira stiffened. She went over possibilities with lightning speed and came up with the most recent. “The Paris bomber. Taylor. Is that what you’re talking about?”

Sarah nodded. “How did you know?”

“I heard from Carl Belson last week. He said he worked for Jack Harlan and wanted to know if I’d be interested in working on a retainer with the idea that I’d help them track down someone who’s been on international most-wanted lists for a few years. I had the impression that it was a personal grudge of Harlan’s, and I passed.” She made a face. “This was before Taylor became Public Enemy Number One after the Paris bombing. I knew Harlan must have really wanted him after that. The great

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man must have been furious that Taylor destroyed the Paris museum whose shiny new building had his own name on it. And everyone knows that Harlan was already obsessed with finding his younger brother's killer."

"One can hardly blame him," Sarah said quietly. "It was a brutal murder, and the word was that Harlan always took care of Colin. But I think you should consider that Jack Harlan has also donated millions to the survivors of those killed in Paris. There's more than one side to him. Still, the murder of his brother probably had a defining effect on his character."

"You're being very defensive." Kira's gaze narrowed on Sarah's face. "Why?"

"Because I might detect a hint of resentment toward Jack Harlan and his employees. True?"

"Maybe. I think I'm just tired of being pressured by all the rich and powerful who want to get their way and sometimes seem to leave the peasants behind. Belson was polite enough, but he really annoyed me when all I wanted was to get back to work." She scowled. "Actually, I don't know that much about Jack Harlan. Other than he's rumored to be some kind of genius." Kira wrinkled her nose. "Okay, maybe I'm not being fair. Why are you laughing?"

"Because John and I have worked hard and managed to acquire a good amount of money over the years. I don't believe you'd say we were completely ungenerous. And there's nary a suffering peasant in sight."

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“Of course not. You’re the most generous people I know. You’re absolutely exceptional.” Kira was laughing, too. “Okay, your point is that Harlan could also be exceptional? I’m listening. Convince me. How did the killing of Colin Harlan happen?”

“Colin worked at Harvard University and ran across Taylor when they had a computer lab together. Taylor was an assistant professor and usually managed to be charming if he made the effort. He must have made the effort with Colin, who said that Taylor was impressed when he learned what a celebrity his big brother, Jack Harlan, was, so he invited him home to the castle at the end of the quarter. He even persuaded Harlan to give Taylor some minor work to do on one of his latest projects. The two of them were supposed to be working on it together.” Her lips twisted. “But Taylor abused that generosity and stole Harlan’s algorithm for a new encryption program he had developed for online purchases. It was potentially worth billions. Taylor murdered Colin to cover up his crime and blew up the lab in an attempt to make Colin’s death look like an accident. We know Taylor stole the technology because he licensed it to companies in scores of other countries and pocketed almost a hundred million dollars before Harlan uncovered the crime himself and exposed him for the thief and murderer he was. That was the start of Taylor’s criminal activities, but far from the end. The museum bombing may be the most horrific thing Taylor has done, but it’s only the latest in a long line of horrible attacks against Harlan and his interests.”

Kira nodded. “I can see why Jack Harlan would want to put the

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bastard away. But tell him to talk to the FBI or the CIA. I gave in when Interpol asked me to look over that bombed museum, and it horrified me. So all I want to do now is go back to working with Mack and refining that serum. I don't have the time to deal with Harlan's personal problems. I'm busy doing something worthwhile that has to do with life, not death."

"And I applaud it," Sarah said. "I wouldn't have asked if John didn't want you to consider the possibilities. Harlan has done him a lot of favors, and he says he's a great guy. They're on several charity boards together."

"I don't have time," Kira repeated. "I don't want to do this, Sarah."

"Then don't do it," Sarah said. "But explore it and have a good reason to refuse. This Joseph Taylor is obviously a terrible man. Not only is he a master thief and murderer, but he has his own private criminal organization in a number of countries that rivals the mafia in effectiveness. Which makes it difficult for the Harlans to use the law to bring him to justice and keeps even the governor of Colorado from having him arrested for killing his daughter."

"Charming," Kira said. "He sounds like a total beast. However, I'm sure Harlan wasn't entirely innocent from all the stories and reports I've heard about their encounters."

"Harlan is a good man, Kira. Do you know what his two Nobel Prizes are for? One was for an incredibly effective water purification system that he developed and gives away to impoverished coastal and river communities all over the world. In some of these

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places, childhood morbidity rates have fallen sixty percent or more because of him. The second Nobel was for the atmosphere purification plants that he constructed in New Zealand. They're helping repair the ozone hole over that part of the world. In a few years, that same technology may help reverse global warming on the rest of the planet. He's making a difference."

Kira thought for a moment. "Where do they think Taylor is now?"

"Near Blue Sky, Colorado, although he may have already left there. Taylor has a way of staying one step ahead of the people after him."

Kira paused for another long moment. "I guess I can spare a few days in Colorado to see if Mack and I can find anything that might help. Okay?"

Sarah nodded. "Thank you, Kira."

"You're welcome," Kira said. "Now can we talk about something else, hopefully more pleasant?"

"Anything is more pleasant." Sarah frowned. "And I hated having to bring it up. So eat your sandwich and drink your wine, and we'll watch the dogs, and I'll tell you how impressed the International Veterinarian Council is with Monty's progress. It's my dream, but you've made it your reality."

Kira was silent for an instant but was still not happy. She knew that Sarah would not ask her again about Taylor, but it didn't change the fact that she also knew Sarah had listened to her ideas, brought her to this island, and taught her all she knew

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about veterinary science and rescue. She'd been orphaned as a ten-year-old child on one of Sarah's search-and-rescue operations, and Sarah had not only paid for her education but actually given her a career in this field of her choice. After college, Kira had come knocking on Sarah's door, and she had never regretted it. Sarah had become a teacher and a friend and had opened doors that Kira valued enormously. She'd never asked anything that Kira wasn't willing to give. She was having difficulty refusing her now.

She slowly nodded. "I'll explore the possibility of finding and bringing Joseph Taylor to justice, but I won't deal with Harlan. I'm sick about all that horror I saw in Paris, but I won't be caught between him and Taylor with their ugly revenge games. That's not what I do."

"Harlan wouldn't ask it of you," Sarah said.

"I won't deal with Harlan," Kira repeated. "But you can bet I won't go in blind. And if he tries to use me, I'll walk away."

"I doubt it." Sarah shook her head. "John gave me a few sickening autopsy reports, which I'll leave with you. They're probably copies of the same documents Belson gave you that you've been ignoring. I found I couldn't ignore them." She handed Kira a glass of wine. "Just be careful and don't be afraid of asking Harlan for help if you need it."

Kira shook her head. "I won't need it. All I need is Mack."

"I believe it." Sarah touched her own glass to Kira's. "And may you be happy together. But if that changes, call me. I had Monty

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but somewhere along the way I found that search and rescue wasn't enough for me. I gave you Mack, Monty's son, and you gave life to many other dogs over the years with that serum we invented. But I don't want you to entirely block out the possibility of some actual human intimacy. I want there to be a John in your life."

"I assure you I haven't been a nun," Kira said, laughing. "I'm just selective. You don't believe there are any men as good as your John anyway."

"True. So you can continue to do your work here for a little while longer while I look the field over for you. Now tell me how Mack is doing at the games." She handed her a sandwich. "I'd like to have the two dogs play a game together in a couple hours. I want to see if Mack has learned any tricks from you that he could teach Monty. But after that, I've got to get back to the mainland to meet John and drive back to our town house. He's been in London at a meeting for the last week."

"It's just as well." Kira made a face. "I've got to plan my trip to Colorado and then send a message to the governor to tell him that Mack and I will be paying a professional visit to his state in the next couple of days. I'm not looking forward to it."

"You can back out," Sarah said.

"Not likely," Kira said. "On the other hand, I could strike out. In that mountain area where this particular monster lives, it's almost impossible to track down criminals. The governor sent his people out to get Taylor and never located a sign of him. Besides, you wouldn't have asked me if you didn't really want it." She got

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to her feet. “Mack and I will go after this Taylor, but I gave you the rules.” She suddenly grinned. “Now that I’ve discouraged you, let me show you how good Mack has gotten over the last year. Prepare to have your Monty put in the shade...”

Sarah was laughing as she ran after her. “Be a little respectful. Monty will show that young whippersnapper what maturity is all about...”

