

Chapter Three

I walked out of the office, passing John leaning against the wall in his chair.

“He’s a live one. We’ll need a couple of beers.”

Behind the bar, I pulled and opened a couple of Pacificos, grabbed a lime for each and headed back to the hall.

John took the beer from my hand, squeezed the lime into the neck.

“So, what’s up?”

“Dean’s number is a Langley number.”

“So?”

“Langley’s CIA. The CIA’s charter specifically prohibits domestic ops. I’d say Hood River is definitely a domestic operation. Remember the fallout when Nixon used a bunch of agency bagmen? The Watergate deal. Big no-no for those guys. This sort of stuff is DEA and FBI territory.”

“Anderson told you this?”

“No, Anderson was out. I made a call to a guy I worked with and got a quick read on Anderson. Nothing on our buddy Dean.”

“What’s this old number shit? I didn’t know you worked for those guys.”

“I didn’t really. When I was in Nam and then after, in a couple of deals, I was working with them, but not for them. Sort of joint projects. I was what they now refer to as a contractor. After I quit and before I moved to Breckenridge, I did one last hard gig in ‘75. They had four guys up in the Highlands, in the Golden Triangle, who’d been working with the Hmungs in their poppy growing and weapons training.

“Everything intertwined back then. Hmungs grew poppies with the Agency’s help and advice. Air America, flew the paste to a lab in Hong Kong. The cash from the paste and then the China White bought weapons back in and paid folks off-the books. We funded the really deep black black ops for the Agency. Air America flew the stuff back and forth. Cash off-the record. Self-supporting loads flying both ways. Probably still works that way, somehow. I’ve heard pretty interesting rumors the Agency ran the same deal supplying the Northern Alliance before we moved into Afghanistan. Remember the contractors in some of the firefights on CNN just before the invasion? Same deal. Contractors consulting. Poppies for cash for the Northern Alliance.

“Any way, with the fall of Saigon, some Agency guys were trapped up in the Golden Triangle. For a large sum of cash, and the dubious promise of permanent retirement, I gathered together a team, went in and extracted them. My only contact since has been my Control. I’ve done several informational jobs for him over the years. We stay in touch. No hard stuff. Too old.”

“You looked OK on the hard stuff today.” John laughed, shaking his head.

“That was soft. I want this guy out of here and I don’t want the dope to surface in any part of it. I’m too close to some stuff after Nam to have that happen here.”

John took a drink, wiped his moustache.

“You don’t have to mix much with them on this, if you don’t want to.”

“How’s that?”

“Have Greg handle it. As Chief, he would have a lot of leeway. On the record or off. As they leave, he can hand them his card, ‘Any questions, give me a call.’ With a little local egg on their face, they may want to stay out of town for a while. Don’t mention the dope. Dean’ll clam up too.”

“Makes sense. I’ll call Greg.”

Tracy answered at the station. “Greg’s out, Charlie. Can he call you later?”

“Have him call me as soon as possible. It’s business. In the next ten minutes would be great.”

“I’ll page him. Are you at The Grill?”

“Yeah.”

“It’ll be a few minutes.”

“Thanks.”

I set the phone down on the desk and leaned back in the chair to wait for Greg’s call.

It rang almost at once.

“So, what’s all this business shit? Someone hold up your bar for the twenty-seven bucks and loose change in the till?”

“No. I wish. I have a spook in the walk-in.”

“You need an exorcist, not a cop.”

“CIA. The Agency. A Spook. For some reason, looking for quiet place I guess, this guy ended up in The Grill, taking pot shots at his buddy running out the door. Something went sour. Real sour.”

“How do you know he’s with the Agency?”

“He gave me a phone number and a confirmation number. The phone number’s a covert operation desk at Langley headquarters.”

“You’re kidding me, right?”

“Greg, this is no joke.”

“Are you OK?”

“Yeah, I just want the guy out of my life. Simply.”

“I thought you were out.”

“I am.”

“Well, as they say, ‘Only in Hood River.’ Where do I come in? Book him on a weapons discharge?”

“No. I don’t want to do this as a ‘Book him, Dano’ sort of deal. I want you to help me turn him over.”

“Official or unofficial?”

“Let’s start unofficial and hold the official in the wings in case they move back.”

“I’ll change and be down in a few minutes.”

“Great.”

“This could be great fun.”

“I’m glad you think so. I think it’s a bloody hassle. I was rid of these jerks and now they’re busting up my bar. I’m pissed.”

“Lighten up. We’ll dump the guy and you can go back to your simple life of pulling micro-brews. OK?”

“Yeah. Sure. Wear that red ball cap with the bird logo.”

“Anything else?”

“Not that I can think of.”

“This ought to be a gas. I haven’t dealt with these guys for years.”

“Great. See you in a bit.”

“I can’t wait.”

“Shit. I’ll bet.” I hung up the phone.

John looked me. “And the dope?”

“I think I’ll keep it as security ‘til I’m sure these guys are going to leave us alone.”

“Think it’s a good idea?”

“Yeah. With a couple of pictures of the crew, me with the goods and the pictures, I ought to be OK. It’s all leverage.”

“OK. You’re calling the shots.”

Chapter Four

Using my cell phone again, I called Anderson exactly fifteen minutes after the first call.

“Fourteen Forty.” The same calm female voice answered.

“Hi. I’m calling back for Anderson to see what he wants to do with Dean. Is he around?”

“Mr. Anderson is right here.”

“I’ll bet.” The Control is always right there. Always.

“This is Mr. Anderson.”

“I called earlier...”

“Your name, please.”

“You have all you need to...”

Very firmly, he interrupted me again, “Your name, please.”

“Listen, Anderson, cut the bullshit. You only need to know what you got off the line a few minutes ago and that I have Dean. If you are trying to string me along to trace the call, I’ll give you a hand. Got a pencil? The number is 503...807...17...13. It’s a cell phone. It’s GPS disabled. The billing is JCS and Associates. 201 South West Morrison, Suite 1204, Portland, Oregon. If I’m giving you the number, you can bet Dean isn’t

there. It's actually my attorney's office. They're paid very well and very protective of me. Shit or get off the pot. Do you want Dean back?"

There was a pause on the other end of the line, then Anderson answered, "We want him back."

"Fine. How long before his back-ups get to Hood River?"

"They are on their way now. Perhaps 45 minutes."

"OK. We'll meet at a place called The Grill. It's on Oak Street between 5th and 6th about halfway down on the left as you're going east. There will be a guy at the bar drinking a tonic and a lime. About 55, in pretty good shape, six-three or so, rugged in a Ralph Lauren sort of way. The Chaps look, but warn your guys, he grew up on a very different block. He'll be wearing a red ball cap. In one hour..."

Anderson interrupted, "I think it might be better if we met at the..."

"Listen, Anderson, I have Dean. I make the rules. You have a problem with that, I'll see the paper gets him first, then the local cops can have round with him, and they'll let you have what's left after they're done. OK? It's my way or my way?"

"Your way."

"In one hour from now, not before, two of your guys walk, understand, walk, down Oak toward the Grill. Don't even think about sending in the troops. OK?"

"Fine. One hour. Two men."

"Right. They get to the Grill. One sits on the bench in front of the little bookstore across the street, the other walks into the bar and asks the guy, the older guy at the bar, "I'm looking for Dean.""

"I'm looking for Dean. Then what?"

"We'll take it from there."

"Now wait a minute..."

"No, you wait a minute. Your guy Dean put one round in the ceiling and was about to take out a customer when I decided enough was enough. We're doing it my way. I can call the newspapers and the cops..."

"I don't have much of a choice."

"Right. Do a good job on this one deal and you may just save your sweet Langley ass. See your guys in an hour."

With the mention of Langley, he hesitated for a moment then replied, "One hour."

"Right. In one hour and ten minutes, Dean will be on the front page of tomorrow's Hood River News, Oregonian and the Seattle Times, so be on time."

"We will be there."

"Bye, Mr. Anderson."

"Good-bye."

I walked down the hall and retrieved my beer from the floor next to John's chair. He sat leaning against the wall with the automatic resting on his thigh.

"So what's the deal?"

"They want him back. In an hour, a couple of guys will be here to pick him up."

"Simple as that?"

Before I could answer, a voice demanded from the bar, "Hey anybody home? How does a guy get a drink? Is it serve yourself day?"

I could hear a fist pounding on the bar top. "Yo, anybody home here?"

John and I walked out to the end of the hall. At the middle of the bar stood a tall well built guy in yellow baggie shorts and faded Mt. Hood Jazz Festival T-Shirt from a decade ago. A red ball cap sat on the mahogany bar top. His hair, mostly gray, was short cropped in a monk's type horseshoe around his head.

Greg saw us, grinned and said, "So, how do you get a beer in this place? Beg?"

"Close." John walked behind the bar, reached into the middle back cooler and pulled out another Pacifico. Presenting it to Greg, as if a bottle of wine, he said stiffly, "Today, sir, in light of the occasion and the presence of our unexpected honored guest, we are drinking Pacificos. Would you care to join us...sir?"

Greg looked keenly at the bottle. "Ah. A vintage bottle. The middle of last week, no doubt. It was a great week, it was. Are we drinking these with a lime or without? With a glass or without?"

"The lime is a matter of personal preference, but we generally consider the fact they travel and arrive in a glass container sufficient for our needs."

"Great. I'll take one," he paused, "With a lime."

"Coming up directly, sir."

Greg watched as John served the beer with embellishments and a lime balanced on the neck. After squeezing the lime down the neck, he took a long pull. "Ah, yes. Last week. That is the week." Then, looking at me, said, "So, you caught yourself a spook. You haven't done that for a long time have you? Thought you'd quit the game."

John glanced at Greg and then at me, quizzically.

"I have," I replied

"So you want to tell me what's going on in this little yuppie micro-brew bar of yours?"

I shrugged my shoulders and started in on the happenings of the last half hour, finishing with the recent conversation with Mr. Anderson.

"I've a brief case the guy leaving dropped. I'm keep as collateral 'til things cool down." Not bothering to detail the contents, I hoped Greg wouldn't pry.

"Not a bad idea." Looking at his watch, Greg asked, "So, when are they going to be here and do you have any thoughts on how we proceed?"

"Fifty-six minutes. It'll be simple. You'll be at the bar. John behind it. I'll be outside. When the one comes inside, I'll pick up the one outside and bring him in. We pat them down. Take their weight. We bring out

Dean, take a roll of happy reunion pictures for old times sake and send them on their way--without their heat and their briefcase.”

“You really think it’s going to be that simple?”

“Yeah. There’s enough open in my file they won’t want to fuck with me. If they start to dig, they are going to get a ton of questions and I don’t think they want that. They want to get in, out and beat feet with Dean. The big problem, after they get out, will be the fact we have a roll of pictures of the three of them in a Hood River bar. That’s going to keep them away. I hope.”

“You’re calling the shots. John?”

“Fine with me. I used to deal with these guys in Baghdad. I always did OK.”

He smiled and shook his head.

Sitting at the bar just before my time to set up outside, the phone rang. I picked it up.

“The Grill.”

“Charlie, you answer your own phone.”

“Joey. How you doing? Long time.”

“Doing great. So you got my message. How ‘bout a game tomorrow? You up for it?”

“Not a chance. It’s a 4-hour shot, one way. It’d have to be for the best game of ball ever. And even then, I’d think twice.”

“I talked to Eddie after I got your message. He’s got a chopper coming up from a re-build at his shop in Aurora. It can land in Hood River in a couple of hours.”

“You’re kidding?”

“Would I kid you? Are you coming or not?”

“Wish I’d known earlier. I dropped Carole off at the airport in Portland this morning. She’s headed back to Chicago. She could have stayed another couple days.”

“Bummer. I didn’t know you guys were still seeing each other.”

“We took a few years off and got back together a couple years ago. Actually, this time we see a lot of each other, between her skiing and my getting back for the Bears’ home games.”

“Shit. A long term deal for you.” Laughing. “Almost married.”

“Stuff it. What’s going on? Bumping numbers and using a different name isn’t for some hot game.”

“Well, it’s a long story and a short one.”

“Let’s hear the short one. I have company coming in a few minutes.”

“I’ll try. Is this phone OK?”

“I’m out, but let me go back to the office.” I put the phone on hold and said to John and Greg, “I’ll be in the office for a couple of minutes.”

Walking back to the office, I wondered what Joey couldn’t handle himself? This day was becoming a very strange day as blasts of the cold past tumbled in hot all around. My edges started to rag out.

I picked up the phone in the office. “OK, I’m back. Let’s hear the short one.”

“Great. You know, I spent years cleaning the stuff Dad left when he died and the Uncles settled with me. I’ve done all right. Most of my investments paid off real well. Made some great pre-IPO angel investments in small technical development companies worth a bundle now. All the bucks Dad left were clean well over 20 years ago. Took a lot of work and trouble on my part, but I’m totally, 100 percent, legit.

“So anyway, about a year ago, I start hearing rumors of some new guy moving into town. Dope. Started into the street scene right off with real clean China White. I still see the Uncles and the Cousins on the holidays and so on.”

“China White?”

Joey's story began to set me on edge. An edge too close to the day and too close to our mutually removed past.

"Yeah. China White. The real stuff. The stuff from the labs in Hong Kong. Sometimes it's delivered in stereo cabinets."

He laughed and paused.

"So, anyway, about a week ago, Peter, you remember Peter from Chicago?"

"Yeah."

"Well he just drops in on me at the Blu and says, 'You should have talked to us, Joey, before coming back in. We could have helped you and would be happy to have you back. Now you've stepped on a lot of toes and the younger cousins are pretty mad.' I tell him I'm not in the market, not even close. He says, 'Sure,' shakes his head and walks out of the club. Doesn't even have a drink and flies back to Chicago."

"He flew out from Chicago just to drop in like that?

"Right."

"And he didn't believe you?"

"No way. So, I go out and do a little checking. Through a couple of friends on the street, I find that I'm back in business in a big way. I have the best and the finest China White. Straight from the source-type pure stuff. All the guys who've been in for a long time with Mexican Brown and the Afghani shit are still holding, 'cause no one is buying anything but the great white stuff."

"Good for you."

"Charlie. I'm not dealing. I'm clean. I don't even do an occasional line any more. Shit, I only drink at special occasions and that I keep to a couple. I'm clean."

"Where do I come in?"

"I want you to find who's putting it out."

"Call the cops."

"Yeah. Right. I have friends there, too, and the word I have is, in a couple of weeks, we ought to have a Joey Rico feeding frenzy simultane-

ously in downtown Seattle and Chicago.”

“Joey, I haven’t been on the Chicago streets for almost 30 years and, even then, I was only a part time player.”

“Maybe part time, but big. Big shots at regular intervals.”

“I’m out and I want to stay out.”

“You’re big on information. I know you are still connected. You never let go of connections. You knew the big shots and ran in the right circles on both sides of the fence. We ran together, only you were a bit higher on the ladder ‘cause neither side could figure you out. No motivation either way.”

“And?”

“And you had an ear to the top long after I was 100 percent legit. I’m stuck. I’m my father’s son, so I can’t go to the cops. I’ve gone straight, so I can’t go to the family. I’m stuck. All I want is a direction. I don’t need the person. I just need to know which way to look.

“So, anyway, there’s more. On a stupid hunch, I called a friend in New York a couple days ago, just to see how things were going. He’s part of the Family. He said not well. Some guy moved in with semi-loads of China White and you can’t give Mexican Brown away. There are some pissed people on street corners in New York. He’d heard it was from Chicago and said if I heard anything to give him a jingle ASAP.

“Charlie, I’m getting set up. Maybe we’re getting set up. I need to know what’s going on. I’m not calling any markers on this. It’s a big one, I know. Just come up here for a couple days, talk and look around. Maybe buzz out to Chicago for a day. If you don’t like it, walk, I’ll understand. You are the only person I could think of who could walk in, get a clue, and walk out without anyone noticing.”

“Thanks for thinking of me.” I shook my head wondering.

“Really. It’s true.”

“Is there a handball game?”

“Yeah. The club Doubles Champs from two years ago.”

“Shit, Joey, all your water’s over my head on this one.”

“If you don’t like it, walk. I mean it.”

“OK. I may walk. Straight info. Nothing but talk.”

“Fine. A car will meet you at Boeing when you land. How ‘bout dinner?”

“Sure. This may be a good time to leave for a few days, anyway.”

“See. It’s a good thing I called.”

“Yeah. Right. This’ll be an in and out deal. I need to keep my distance, same as you.”

“Info. In and out.”

After I hung up the phone, I sat and stared blankly at the cluttered top of my desk. The day turned thick. First the China White in the bar, then Joey calling about the same stuff surfacing, with his name on it, which means our names, in Chicago.

It had to be a coincidence.

I hoped it was a coincidence.