



Peter valued information of all kinds. Another by-product of his days in the Army. His fellow taxi drivers called him a news junky. They were probably right. He tuned his TV to FOX News before getting out of bed in the morning, and he often fell asleep to CNN. His phone gave him hourly headline updates.

The morning after his meeting with Snake Eyes, Peter slept in. He woke at nine and clicked the remote.

*“Breaking News: Former defense contractor Lawrence Merton has been shot.”*

He heaved himself upright, his thumb pressing hard on the volume button. A sour taste filled his mouth.

*“It was a grisly scene at a local restaurant in St. Louis this morning as Lawrence Merton was gunned down while eating breakfast before delivering a press conference. A sniper’s bullet punched through the window and into his skull. He was pronounced dead at Barnes-Jewish Hospital. Mr. Merton lost his invalid wife Ethel three months ago. It is unsure why Mr. Merton was holding the press conference, but some speculate he was about to uncover ongoing government fraud.”*

Peter swung his legs out of bed. That’s what Lawrence wanted when he texted last night. *God forgive me.* What a fool

he'd been. If only he'd called him back. Peter sat on the edge of his bed, his elbows on his knees. He buried his face in his hands.

Maybe if he'd returned the text, Lawrence would be alive today. He raised his head and stared at the wall in front of him.

Or Lawrence would still be dead, and he'd be in the middle of an investigation—one that threatened to break his life wide open and endanger those he loved. His mind swirled with images from the past and yesterday. He couldn't think. Maybe food would help.

He switched on the coffeepot and placed wholegrain bread in the toaster. In the living area, he switched to another news channel for their take. The aromas of coffee and toast soon filled the apartment. He chewed absently and paced back and forth.

At the window, he stared in the direction of his cab. The schedule. The asterisk by breakfast. His stomach churned. The itinerary belonged to Lawrence.

Snake Eyes killed Lawrence Merton. The so-called business he had in town.

Why did Peter have to open the stupid envelope? Why hadn't he thrown it in the trash at the car wash? Peter's gaze unfocused as he recalled every detail of the man's face. He'd seen faces like his before.

Men without hearts. Men without souls. Men who killed without remorse.

So what now? If he went to the police, they'd soon figure out he knew Lawrence and find their past connection. He couldn't let that happen. A roar of frustration threatened to erupt from his throat. How could he do nothing knowing who murdered his former friend, a man who reached out to him in the last moments of his life?

But Peter had his grandmother to protect.

And there was something else. He stopped chewing. The assassin couldn't afford to leave Peter breathing.

Not when he realized where he'd lost the file. Too risky.

Once again Peter was forced to leave his life and go to ground. He tossed the remainder of his toast in the trash.

His phone rang.

A number from the Omni Hotel.

Once. Twice. Three rings.

Silence.

Stay cool. He massaged his fist with his left hand. Remember what he was taught. Think. Plan. Execute.

He must vanish. Turning, he kicked the throw rug to one side. In the space below, the manila envelope lay atop two clear bags filled with money and papers.

He made three copies of Merton's schedule. One he prepared to mail to himself at a post office box. The original he folded and stuck in his wallet.

The other two copies went to the two men in this world who Peter trusted with his life. One outside Washington, D.C., and the other in Pleasant Valley, Ohio. Each with a letter of direction.

*To be opened upon notification of my death.*

Peter lifted a blue rag from the bottom of the hole. The bundle contained a Beretta M9. Been a long time since he'd shot a weapon. He'd need some practice. Tonight, he'd head to the gun range.

But first, he needed to convince Grandma Kate to leave town.