



The car wash vacuum emitted a high-pitched whine. Peter gritted his teeth and pulled the hose from under the seat. He yanked the manila envelope off the intake, and the vacuum's sound settled back to a dull roar. He scanned the front and back before sliding it through the opened shield onto the front seat. Nothing written on the outside of the envelope. He'd finish cleaning his taxi and decide what to do next.

Tired after a long day of hauling people from point A to point B, he rubbed his eyes with the palms of his hands and dropped onto the driver's seat. His gaze drifted to the parcel lying next to him. Had to belong to his last fare. Must have slid from the passenger's briefcase when it fell on the floor. All his other passengers today had been families, older couples, or people he knew. He should deliver it to the hotel. The guy said he was only there for tonight. Probably something he needed tomorrow. But what would Peter say once he got there? Mr. Snake Eyes paid in cash.

*"Hi. I need to get this to a businessman who's staying here. You know, the one who came in wearing a gray suit and carrying a briefcase."*

Right. Not too many of those staying at the Omni tonight.

He shook his head. The place would be full of men fitting that description.

Peter gazed out the window at the full moon. He glanced at the envelope once more. Maybe he should check inside. It might have the guy's name on it. Or it could be empty.

One sheet of paper. No name. A detailed itinerary for tomorrow. If it was his passenger's, he planned to eat every meal on the Hill. He must really like the famed Italian section of St. Louis. And he had a press conference scheduled mid-morning.

Peter scanned the itinerary again.

*\*Breakfast*

But Snake Eyes didn't seem the type to be holding a press conference. Involved with the trip? His gut told him this guy wasn't part of an entourage either—not even security. The silk suit. His watch and ring. All wrong.

Who could the itinerary belong to? Nothing in the news about a visit from someone important. And why would Snake Eyes have this info in his briefcase?

Peter tapped the steering wheel with his fist. Something bad was going down. And once more, he'd been dropped on the front line.

Last time he uncovered something illegal, the crooks threatened his grandparents. Forced him to keep silent, and his life imploded. The same vibe pulsed through him now.

One thing for sure, Peter wasn't going anywhere near the Omni Hotel or the Hill if he went out at all. He shook his head. He'd stay in his little south side neighborhood. No more mister upstanding citizen. He'd tried in the Army and look where that got him.

Banished from a career he loved and driving a cab.

He wrenched the key in the ignition. The cab roared to life and the delicate cross hanging from his mirror swayed. Light filtering through his windshield caught the motion. Peter reached to steady it. Mom's. The only thing he had left. *God, he missed her.* She'd tell him to stop wasting time feeling sorry for

himself and get on with life. Peter drew in a deep breath and let it out. And she'd be right—as always. He drove to his apartment and parked his taxi in the back like usual.

He brushed the photo of the cabin with his fingertips. One day he'd go back. Those were his happiest times, as close to a real home as he'd ever known. He flipped the visor up with a decisive thud.

One leg out of the cab, he stopped. He yanked the visor down and grabbed the picture. Reaching across the dashboard, he removed the necklace and pooled the fine silver chain in his palm. He slammed the door, beeped it locked, and walked away—the worrisome document clutched in his hand.

Inside his apartment, he lay the envelope next to the kitchen sink and retrieved a box of matches. He'd destroy the whole thing and forget he ever saw it. The match flared and fire climbed the slim wooden stick. Pain from the searing heat hit his fingertips before he dropped the match into the sink and ran water on it. Staring at the black mark left on the stainless steel, he knew he couldn't set fire to evidence. Too many years of gathering intel.

One. Two. Three boards from the refrigerator. He slipped a screwdriver under the edge, working it carefully along the seam. The piece of flooring came loose with a soft pop. He opened his hidey-hole, folded the paper into the tight space, and toed the rug back in place.

His body and mind craved sleep. He would think about it tomorrow after he'd rested.