

"Draws you into the seductive and sometimes sinister world of activism and politics."

Shots Magazine



**TRACY
GILPIN**

**BOLD-
FACED**

LIE

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AS DOUBLE CROSS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Dunai Marks's life is shattered when her mentor, a controversial activist, is murdered in a tragic burglary gone wrong. Or is it? Her gut tells her this death was no accident. So she rushes in where the law fears to tread and in her quest for the truth goes head-to-head with a powerful underground organisation and an intelligence agency that will stop at nothing to destroy it.

Nothing is what it at first appears to be in the world of politics and activism in which the fanatical will stop at nothing to gather support for their cause. Dunai peels back the layers of deception to find secrets that hit dangerously close to home.

She will need to be ready for the showdown when it comes. A deadly secret has been kept for 30 years, impacting dozens of people on two continents. And she must master the harshest lesson of all: to unmask the face of a skilful liar before it's too late.

PRAISE FOR BOLD-FACED LIE

Originally published as Double Cross

'Well written; an entertaining example of a genre invented by Stella Rimington, former director of MI5.'

Mail & Guardian

'Intrigue, murder and conspiracy, an excellent sense of place and an all-too believable plot based on human greed and fallibility, plus an unusually competent command of English, make this book a keeper.'

LibraryThing.com

'Double Cross is an intriguing tale of blackmail, divided loyalties and secrets. This is a wonderful tale that not only draws the reader into the seductive and sometimes sinister world of activism and politics but also what they will do to garner support for their ideals. Certainly worth reading if you would like to get a different perspective on South Africa and enjoy a debut crime novel that has a lot to offer.'

Ayo Onatade, Shots Magazine

'Fast-paced, edgy and nail-biting, Double Cross is a debut novel well worth reading.'

Women24

'I am not particularly passionate about crime fiction, but Tracy Gilpin's debut novel was a wonderful experience. It not only has all the ingredients one expects of the genre but also a few extras which make it a fascinating read. Fast-paced, suspenseful, full of intrigue, and led by a fascinating heroine attempting to solve a mysterious murder, Double Cross is an

empowering and cathartic novel as it takes the reader on a moral and ethical journey which is worth travelling.'

Karina Magdalena Szczurek, Itch

'An action-packed spy novel full of surprises.'

Karien Labuschagne, Sarie magazine

'A very exciting read.'

Pretoria News

ALSO BY TRACY GILPIN

The Dunai Marks series:

The Slave Tree (*Marks and Lambrecht are back*)
Rain of Ashes (*Watch that we too do not become monsters*)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tracy Gilpin was born in Cape Town, South Africa, a country rife with material for crime writers and a recent past of state-sanctioned violence and personal daring in which truth really was stranger than fiction.

Tracy says, "I have sat in a comfy chair while a man, who a few years before had served jail time as a terrorist, poured tea for me in his parliamentary office. I've met a young mother who was a gunrunner, middle-aged couples and newlyweds who ran underground cells from home and plotted sabotage around the kitchen table. One woman looked like everyone's favourite granny but broke the law regularly and never once caved in under interrogation or in solitary confinement. She also managed to raise several successful, well-adjusted children in the process. Of course I had to write about some of it."

Her formal training was in journalism and she has worked mainly in communications. She is the author of a non-fiction book, three novels and dozens of works of short fiction published internationally.

The original version of *Bold-Faced Lie* was published in the United Kingdom and translated into German by Random House's Heyne imprint.

Find out more about Tracy Gilpin on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

This eBook is copyright material and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed by the terms and conditions under which it was purchased or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorised distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author's and publisher's rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

Version 1.0

ISBN 978-0-620-60591-5

First published in the United Kingdom in 2008 by Black Star Crime.

Published 2014 by Trebuchet

P O Box 393, Bergvliet, 7864, Cape Town, South Africa

Copyright © Tracy Gilpin 2008

Smashwords Edition

All the characters in this book have no existence outside the imagination of the author, and have no relation whatsoever to anyone bearing the same name or names. They are not even distantly inspired by any individual known or unknown to the author, and all the incidents are pure invention.

All Rights Reserved including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form. The text of this publication or any part thereof may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, storage in an information retrieval system, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the prior consent of the publisher in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Cover design by Ryan Jacobs

eBook conversion and marketing by <http://www.myebook.co.za>

BOLD-FACED LIE

TRACY GILPIN

Trebuchet



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover

About the Book

Praise for *Bold-Faced Lie*

Also by Tracy Gilpin

About the Author

Copyright Page

Title Page

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

Seventeen

Eighteen

Nineteen

Twenty

Twenty-One

Twenty-Two

Twenty-Three

Twenty-Four

Twenty-Five

Twenty-Six

Twenty-Seven

Twenty-Eight

Twenty-Nine

Thirty

Thirty-One

Thirty-Two

Epilogue

Teaser Chapter: *The Slave Tree*

ONE

AT THE TIP of Africa, in a city sometimes called Rape Town, keeping an eye out for violence is first, not second nature. And never more so than on a dark winter morning heavy with fog and that stillness before rush-hour. Even so, she failed to see the legs sticking out of a restaurant doorway and tripped. Every muscle tensed for flight, she turned slowly to peer at the adult-sized bundle; it twitched, squirmed and a head appeared.

'*Shit*, Mr Bojangles man.'

He'd tied plastic in place with string and wriggled under a sodden blanket that smelled of ice and old sweat.

'Ai, Dunai.' He shook his head, gums bared in what was not a smile.

She called him Mr Bojangles because he'd told her his name was a secret. She thought he was schizophrenic; one of the mentally who'd slipped through the cracks and landed on a pavement where nothing seemed real and no one could be trusted.

'Been a crap night,' he said, reclining on an elbow.

'Ja,' Dunai said. 'It's been cold.'

'Yes, yes,' he said, waiving a dismissive hand. 'Cold, sure, but,' and his head poked forward like a tortoise, 'there's been other things happening.'

Dunai had work to catch up with; the reason she'd come in early this morning.

'You should've gone to a shelter. Why didn't you do that?'

The old man sat up with a plastic crackle. 'Now I'm going to tell you something, girly, and you listen to me. The devil come out that-away.' He pointed to Dunai's building. 'Last night I seen him plain as day. All in black with red eyes. It was *horrible*. Horrible like sand in your crack and those fat politicians.'

'Okay. Well, I'm just going to come out and say it, Mr Bojangles. There're things you can do to make yourself more comfort. Siobhan can get you onto medication that'll make you feel better.'

'I seen him, you *silly* girl! I tell you, don't be a dumb-arse. I seen him.' He'd raised his voice. 'And I'll tell you something else for free, you stupid girl; the preacher in this *very* square, says the devil's all around, peering past corners, looking in lunchboxes, poking his head in those fancy doorways.'

'Preacher could do with meds, too,' Dunai said.

'You don't believe me!' he shouted. 'Oh dear, you silly girl, oh dear, oh dear.'

'Okay, don't get so upset.' Her nose was freezing. 'I'm going to tell you something important about the devil, okay? As long as he didn't see *you* you're okay.'

The old man squinted up at her.

'You think he saw you?'

He looked down at the blanket, the plastic; and shook his head.

'Nothing to worry about then, you're fine. You got money for coffee?'

He shook his head.

'Get them to put it on my tab at Food on the Square, then find a place in the sun when this fog clears, okay?'

'You be careful, girly, you hear?'

She looked down at him, vulnerable in the dark under his plastic and soaking blanket. She might have squeezed his shoulder if he hadn't stank so badly.

'You take care yourself, Mr Bojangles.'

She hoisted the heavy tote on her shoulder and started across the cobblestones of Greenmarket Square to the old yellow and white four-storey.

There was a rectangle of chequered marble in front of the door, but the puddle of light, usually spilled by the lantern, had been mopped up by darkness. No light blazed behind the wood and glass doors. Of course she thought then about what Mr Bojangles had said, but it had to be a power cut. 'Hello darkness my old friend,' she said aloud and glanced over her shoulder. The baroque face of the

Old Town House flaunted her lights across the square. That was strange. She stuck her key in the security gate but it refused to budge. She gave the gate a tug and it flew open, clattering against the doorjamb. Taking a moment to recover, she swiped her card key, stepped through, and the door closed behind her with a loud click. She was locked in now with a darkness that had won the battle for the first time she could remember with the old brass chandelier that usually blazed overhead.

She caught her reflection in the mirror beside the staircase; a dense black silhouette of pitch and charcoal, and wondered why Mr Bojangles' fantasy had linked *this* building to the devil. Why not the old Gothic Wesleyan church; that would have been a more logical insanity.

The lift took her to the third floor and she was once again greeted with gloom. There was light coming from under Siobhan's door. This meant she'd got an early start, sitting hunched at her desk over hated paperwork. Lights worked off circuits, Dunai knew. So if there was an electrical fault in the old building, some would work, others would not.

She headed down the passage and stopped at the door to listen. Not a sound inside.

'Siobhan? You in there?'

Nothing. She turned the handle, the door swung open. The office looked empty, toilet door wide open. Strangely, the air smelled of urine. Dunai's eyes swivelled to a splash of orange; the skirt and brown loafers Siobhan had worn the day before sticking out from behind the desk.

She rushed forward only to stop suddenly at what she saw. Siobhan lay on her back, staring at the ceiling with eyes that were the wrong colours. No hazel; but a milky blurring of broken blood vessels instead. Dunai's heart pumped hysteria along a thousand course ways and she tasted vomit at the back of her throat.

Sinking to her knees beside the body she let her bag slide to floor. The biscuit tin landed with a clang and she almost jumped to her feet, eyes scrambling to the darkened doorway. But she was drawn to Siobhan's body; long dark hair spread across the carpet.

The two broad streaks of silver lying limp alongside her head. The strongest of women seemed impossibly fragile now. Dunai raised her hand to stroke back Siobhan's hair but recoiled at the unnatural coolness beneath her fingertips. There were broken capillaries beside the bridge of her nose, along her eyebrows and hairline. Her lips were blue-grey, shrivelled and drawn back tightly against her teeth. Dunai didn't want to look away but there was no part of Siobhan's face that was not horribly altered. Her eyes went to the rigid body, fingernails bloodied, torn almost completely from the middle fingers of her right hand, and her throat a mess of bruises and torn, bloodied skin.

A wave of revulsion swept over Dunai and panic rode that wave like a frothy white cap. She jumped to her feet, stumbled away from the body, fell over her bag and landed hard on her backside. She scrambled back up and rushed around the desk, grabbed the telephone but it dropped from her hand, clattering loudly against the desk. She reached for it with two hands and trembling uncontrollably, carefully took one hand away to dial.

'Hello?'

'Bryan, it's Dunai.' Her voice sounded like she was shivering from cold.

'Hi, Hon.'

'Bryan, something terrible's happened.' She tightened her jaw to keep her teeth from chattering.

'What?'

'Siobhan. She's dead, Bryan. She's dead—'

'Dunai! What's—Where are you?'

'Office. The office. She's dead, Bryan. She's... Somebody's murdered her. She's been murdered.'

'No... My God.' There was silence on the other end.

Dunai's voice rose. 'Bryan?'

'Wait there. Wait for me. Don't touch anything. The police. Have you called the police?' She shook her head then remembered to say no.

'I'll call them. I'm on my way. Is the door locked?' Dunai's brain refused the leap in logic. 'The door, Dunai,' Bryan almost shouted.

'Are you locked in?'

'No.'

'I'm going to ring off. I want you to lock the door. Take the key out so I can get in with mine, and don't open for anyone. You hear me? I'm going to call the police. Now lock the door. I'm on my way.'

She dropped the receiver back into place then stared at the open door that led to a dark passage filled with every monster that had ever haunted her childhood. She had to force herself to move, slam the door, turn the key and slip it into her pocket.

Alone with Siobhan she pressed her back to the wall; its iciness crept through her coat, her short denim dungaree dress and jumper till it touched her skin. It was then her mind began to take it all in, and she was filled with a rage that made her want to bite and claw, hit out at a fucking awful world till she had no more energy left.

Today was her second anniversary at STOP. Two years was a record for Dunai who'd been fired from almost every job she'd had. Then came Siobhan.

She'd met her right after she'd been fired from a department store for calling the wife of a CEO whose company tested cosmetics on animals, "the Eva Braun of the cosmetics world". Ejected from the building by a security guard with fingers like pincers, she'd heard someone call, 'Excuse me. I want to talk to you.' She'd turned to see a woman about her own height – one metre seventy, very thin with angular features. Her hair was almost to her waist, slightly frizzy and brown with a thick streak of silver-white at either temple.

'I want to offer you a job.'

'I just got fired.'

'I know, I saw.'

'Then you know I'm a trouble-maker.'

'That's what I'm looking for.'

'Doing what?'

'As my assistant. Someone who'll be as much at home on a protest march as she'd be in an office.' She stepped forward and Dunai saw her eyes were hazel, penetrating but guarded. 'I'm a social activist and founder of an NGO called STOP: Strategies for

Targeting Over-Population. I'm offering you the job if you want it, Dunai. That is your name?'

'Pronounced d-o-o-n-i-e, but spelled d-u-n-a-i.'

Siobhan nodded. 'Think about it, Dunai spelled d-u-n-a-i. Here's my card.'

'I'll give it a try,' Dunai said, 'but my typing's crap.'

Siobhan shook her head. 'It's your social conscience I'm after. My name's Siobhan Craig.' She stepped forward and shook Dunai's hand.

In the twenty-six years before Dunai had met Siobhan, life had disappointed her and she'd returned the favour. Siobhan had changed that.

Dunai curled her arms around her wellington boots and pulled her thighs to her chest. From here she could see Siobhan's skirt and shoes, but didn't have to look at her face. She would watch over her till Bryan arrived.

The rage she felt was cold and hard enough to have frozen out fear. It had straightened her spine and strengthened her resolve.

'I'm going to make them pay for this, Siobhan, I swear to you. Whoever did this, I'm going to make them pay.'

TWO

IT FELT LIKE ten minutes had passed but it had to be more than that because there was a policeman in the room, helping her to her feet.

'Where's Bryan?' she asked, eyes fixed on Siobhan's skirt, trying hard not to look at her face.

'In the passage; I'll take you to him.'

Bryan Larsen was STOP's American statistician, but he was so much more than that. Dunai rushed to meet him, her eyes fixed on all he represented: strength, reliability. The perfectionist who brought order to Siobhan's brilliance.

But her eyes found an altered Bryan this morning. He looked as if he'd dressed from the laundry basket; one lapel of his corduroy jacket sat higher than the other and a shirt button had come loose on the summit of his small paunch. His light-brown hair that started just beyond the crown stood out at the back of his head as if some furry animal, ever slipping, was holding on for dear life. His pale blue eyes were rimmed with red, and the tip of his nose was a muted shade of raspberry. Any other day they'd have ragged him about the transformation.

'What the hell's going on?' he asked, almost accusingly. Dunai stretched a hand out to him but he ignored it.

'She's dead, Bryan.' The words felt like a lie; something horrible she'd said in the heat of the moment to hurt someone. Bryan looked at the policeman still standing beside her. He nodded.

Bryan held his arms out to her and she tipped towards him, allowing herself to be drawn to his chest, her hair brushed gently the way she'd seen him do with his daughters.

'I can't believe this is happening,' he said, as SA Police Service tape was pulled across the office doorway. 'Siobhan...' He shook his head.

The lift doors opened and light spilled into the passage. Dunai drew away from Bryan as figures in white jumpsuits and blue gloves stepped silently into it and looked around. A man in a blue windbreaker, another with a doctor's bag and a woman carrying a camera glanced their way as they passed, but said nothing, just pulled on foot coverings and ducked under the tape. The remaining white suit unfolded a ladder, rummaged inside his toolbox, climbed up and began inspecting a light bulb as a policeman aimed his torch from below. Dunai jumped at the metallic sound of the closing lift doors and they were once again left in near darkness.

She put her arm around Bryan's waist and steered him towards the office next to Siobhan's. She snapped on the light, left him standing silently in the middle of the room and went to draw back the vertical blinds. The square was still covered by fog, nothing visible except disembodied smudges of light.

She turned away and started for her desk, eyes falling on familiar objects that seemed altered this morning; the old desks painted yellow for herself and blue for Bryan, two steel file cabinets, an old twill sofa and coffee table, and the floor-to-ceiling bookcase with its eclectic collection of books and gifts: red beaded flowers in a blue beaded vase, a bowl made of Lion match boxes and a wire radio that actually worked.

'Here, let me take that,' Bryan said as she reached her desk. She was still clutching the biscuit tin. He pushed a diary out of the way, put the tin on the desk in front of her and guided her into her chair.

The policeman who'd led her from Siobhan's office appeared in the doorway. 'They want you next door, Mr Larsen.'

She still hadn't moved when he returned, pale and shaken, with the man in the blue windbreaker. He was younger than she'd first thought, perhaps in his late twenties, blond and blue-eyed; the boy next door except his eyes were bloodshot and he looked drained, exhausted.

'I'm Detective-Inspector van Reenen. I'm sorry for your loss,' he said with an Afrikaans accent. 'You okay to answer some questions?'

She nodded and indicated a chair.

'You said Ms Craig told you she was working late. She do that often?'

'She usually took work home, but she was working on a presentation to government so there was a lot of reference material. Too much to take home.'

Bryan appeared with a tea tray and she opened the biscuit tin; offered it to the policeman. He took one of the ginger biscuits. She offered them to Bryan but he shook his head.

Dunai stared at the biscuit tin. 'I know why this happened.' She fixed her eyes on the detective's face. 'Siobhan was desperate for people to realise what was going on and she spoke her mind. Some people hated her for that.'

'What was she desperate about?' Van Reenen asked without curiosity. His eyes followed Dunai's to a large poster on the wall: a pressure cooker jammed full of people trying to claw their way out, pushing against a lid that threatened to blow. Beneath the picture was printed, 'Only idiots fill a pot with more than it's able to hold. STOP. Think.'

'Dunai's right,' Bryan said, pulling a chair up to the side of her desk. 'She was guided by her conscience, no matter what it cost. Hate mail and death threats were part of the job.'

'She keep any of it?'

'Not that I know of.'

'What was this presentation she was working on?'

'Seven years ago we started an impact study in Khayelitsha township. Built a centre with eight satellite clinics that offered contraception, abortion services and female empowerment programmes. The effect on population growth and economic growth has been impressive.' Bryan waited for the detective to finish scribbling in his notebook. 'It sounds simple but you have to understand what Siobhan was up against.' He went to a small television on the pine table, selected a DVD, skipped to a point then hit play.

The screen showed a building site. A female voice said, 'The woman was returning home after an abortion at a STOP clinic when she was grabbed by a mob and brought to this building site. A

kangaroo court was held then she was beaten and her genitalia and uterus mutilated with several objects found at the scene.'

There was a long shot of an officer in green forensics vest placing a metal pipe into a plastic bag.

'By the time police and ambulances arrived the woman had died of her injuries. No arrests have been made.' The young Indian reporter stood beside a large pool of blood that had soaked into the soil. 'This is Prim Govender reporting from Khayelitsha.'

'That was two years into the project,' Bryan said. He looked down at his tightly laced fingers then up again and there was the ghost of a smile on his face. 'Siobhan's always been at her most magnificent when provoked. She hired a private investigator who gathered enough evidence to convict the woman's boyfriend and eight others. She got the support of a local struggle hero and the co-operation of community leaders, even managed to shame them into accompanying her to meetings and on house visits.

'That clinic is our biggest success and we make presentation to government in a month. If they like the results a committee will draft legislation for the Population Control Bill based on our model and if passed facilities will be set up across the country. We'd hoped to go sub-Saharan then the rest of the continent but without Siobhan...'

There was silence for a heartbeat before Dunai asked, 'What's going to happen to her now? Her body I mean.'

'The medical officer's confirmed death and we're waiting for the pathologist to give some preliminary info to start with, then her body'll be taken away for post-mortem.' The words, post-mortem, were like a sucker-punch.

'Tell me the last time you saw Ms Craig alive.'

'Dunai and I decided to call it a day just before seven,' Bryan said. 'We locked up here then stopped by Siobhan's office to let her know we were off.'

'She have any more appointments?'

'Not that she mentioned,' Bryan said.

Dunai shook her head. 'In the foyer on my way out I stopped for a chat with someone who works in the building. A man came in and

said something to our guard like, "Just stopping by Siobhan's office." When I turned to see who it was he was waiting at the lift.'

'And?' the detective asked.

'I didn't recognise him.'

'What did he look like?'

'I didn't take note. We work with social workers and volunteers and they often come in without appointments.'

'You, Mr Larsen?'

'I went straight back upstairs to fetch my diary I'd left behind. I was down again in a couple of minutes. I must have missed him.'

'Ethnic group?'

'White,' Dunai said.

'Height?'

'I think about my height; one metre seventy.'

'Clothes?'

'Maybe part of a suit. Trousers; black.' Dunai shrugged. 'A parka, navy or black. I don't remember seeing a tie.' She closed her eyes. 'He had brown hair. I'm almost sure with a receding hairline... or a high forehead. And a broad face, strong bone structure.'

She opened her eyes. DI van Reenen pulled a mobile from his pocket. 'I'm going to get an officer with a Digi-kit.' Before he could punch in the number a uniformed policeman appeared in the doorway, walked over and bent to whisper in his ear. The detective looked annoyed, but got to his feet. 'I'll be back in a minute.'

Dunai took the opportunity to go to the toilet. She was about to open the door at the end of the passage when she saw the flash of a blue windbreaker just before the fire escape door closed with a soft pneumatic whoosh. She remembered the annoyance on Van Reenen's face.

There was no reason to follow. No reason at all to go to the fire escape door, but she did. Her fingers curled around the handle and she slowly pushed the door open. It was the urgent tones, too low to pick out individual words that made her move to the railing. Peering down the stairwell she saw the top of Van Reenen's head; he was saying very little. The talking was being done by a man in a

charcoal suit. Other than his clothing, all she could see was a head of thick, dark brown hair.

Van Reenen began arguing with the man, his voice rising. 'This is a *police* investigation. If the evidence gets us burglary, fine. Turns out to be something else...' He shrugged and shook his head.

The man leaned towards the detective and spoke without raising his voice. She could make out none of his words. Still speaking he tipped his head back, without warning, and she got a glimpse of a good-looking man with fair skin, dark eyes and regular features, before ducking away from the railing.

Heart pounding, she headed for the door, yanked it open, rushed into the passage and into the toilet block. The farthest cubicle felt the safest. Did they think she'd overheard something she shouldn't? Had she? 'If the evidence gets us burglary, fine. Turns out to be something else...' What had the detective meant by, 'This is a *police* investigation.' If not a police officer, who was the man in the charcoal suit?

Dunai waited for the sound of footsteps but they never came. She used the toilet, wandered out of the cubicle and stood at a basin, staring at herself in the mirror, expecting her face to have changed in the past hour in some detectible way.

Her eyes had always dominated her face: they were large and round, black lashed, the colour of slate. Even taking into account the morning's events, she was surprised how wild and desperate she looked. She lowered her lids a little so she looked less like a frightened Bambi. Her skin wasn't usually this pale. She leaned forward. There were two bright splotches of colour on her cheeks. She splashed her face and blotted it with paper towels, smoothed her dark, shoulder-length bob, pressing a hand to her fringe that ended an inch above strong, dark brows.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw it; a shimmering, monochromatic caterpillar crawling across her eyeball. The start of a migraine. Her eyes picked up the flickerings of the florescent lights and she began to feel sick and disorientated. She headed back to her office.

'You okay?' Bryan asked. Van Reenen, back in his seat, looked up at her, watching her closely, Dunai thought. She nodded for his benefit and took her seat. While the men resumed their questions and answers, she rummaged in her bag for the nose spray she used to treat her migraines, and gave a squirt in each nostril.

'The detective says they think it's burglary,' Bryan told her when her head appeared above the desk.

'What?'

'They think it was a burglary,' Bryan repeated. 'Her watch was gone, laptop, mobile. The fax and coffee machine are missing.'

Dunai shook her head. 'Why kill her then?'

'People don't need a reason,' the detective said.

She thought about the words she'd heard on the fire escape. Tried to focus on the detective but it was like seeing him through thick fog. 'I don't believe for a minute Siobhan died for a coffee machine.'

'The unlocked doors,' Bryan said. 'How would...? D'you think somebody who works in the building arranged it?'

The detective finished chewing, nodded. 'Somebody leaves the door open, or passes the keys to their friends who come in and burgle the place. Easy for someone to walk into the building during the day and steal a set of keys.' The detective shrugged and that infuriated Dunai.

'Then they'd have broken into other offices in the building,' Bryan said.

'No, they could've started next door. The top floor is closed off for renovations so Ms Craig's is the first office on the highest occupied floor and there's no security gate.'

'Maybe somebody killed Siobhan for a reason and made it look like burglary,' Dunai suggested.

There was silence. Van Reenen swiped a hand across his mouth. 'This is the seventh capital crime on my shift. Got eighty open dockets; been doing this seven years. Most crimes are pretty much what they first appear to be.'

Dunai resisted the urge to come out with what she'd heard on the stairwell; she'd have to admit to eavesdropping and he'd

probably deny it anyway.

'But you are going to look at other possibilities. What about the man on his way up to Siobhan when Bryan and I were leaving?'

'An officer'll work with you on a Digi-kit then I'll look at it. For now what I know points to burglary and my enquiries'll be directed that way.' He put his notebook into his pocket.

Dunai fought the need to put her head down till the medication kicked in. 'I know something more is going on here. At least question the people who hated her. We can give you a list of individuals and organisations.'

'Okay,' the detective said, getting to his feet.

'I know she was killed by someone who wanted to stop *her*, not steal the fax machine. You agree, Bryan.'

He looked at her; curiously she thought.

'When I called you, you told me to lock the door, not open it to anyone except you or the police. You must have thought we were all in danger.'

Bryan ran a hand over his face.

'You agree?' The detective sounded even wearier.

'Before I knew it was burglary, that was my first thought.'

'So you'll look at other possibilities?' Dunai's head felt like a lead ball, she longed to close her eyes.

'Let's see what the evidence says. I'm waiting for the pathologist to arrive. When I've got his findings I'll finish my shift, but you can speak to one of my colleagues if you think of anything, otherwise get hold of me tomorrow.'

When he'd left, Dunai turned to Bryan. 'It wasn't a burglary. There's more to this than that policeman's letting on. I heard him talking to someone in the stairwell who seemed to be trying to get him to look at it as a burglary.'

'What exactly did they say?' Bryan asked, frowning.

Dunai repeated what she'd heard.

Bryan shook his head. 'Listen, Hon. This has been one hell of a shock, but we have to let the police take care of it. We need to carry on here; don't forget that in all this. This is such a cliché, but I know it's what Siobhan would've wanted us to do. We're so close to

getting everything we've worked so hard for. We need to do this now more than ever.'

Dunai nodded because she wasn't capable of arguing anymore. 'I've got a migraine.'

'Okay, let's get you onto the couch.'

She didn't get migraines often but when she did they knew the drill. She lay on the old brown twill sofa while Bryan went off to fetch a blanket. He covered her, then crouched down and patted her head. 'She was like a mother to you, wasn't she?' He shook his head and looked as if he might burst into tears. 'You must feel abandoned all over again, poor thing.'

Dunai thought he was probably trying, diplomatically, to draw a parallel to her abandonment at St Mark's Home for Children, about a month old as far as anyone could tell, a scrap of paper with the word 'Dunai' scrawled on it pinned to her jumper. A word that had caused some debate among the devote Dominican sisters because a dunai, pronounced doonie, was the 'physical embodiment' – Sister Finbar's words – 'of the pagan Earth Mother'. Probably on Sister Raymunda's insistence they'd let her keep the only thing that connected her to her origins, once she'd outgrown the baby-grow and jumper. That's how she'd come to be baptised Dunai Marks.

SHE WOKE WITH a start and looked around. The office was empty; it was the sounds coming from the passage that had woken her. The migraine was gone but she felt groggy and her stomach grumbled. She sat up and pushed the blanket aside.

Outside in the passage the scenes-of-crime officers were packing up and the lights blazed overhead again. A moment later a stretcher carrying Siobhan's body, zipped into a body bag, was wheeled towards the lift.

And that's when Dunai heard the first snarls of grief, sensed it crouch and pounce a second before it slammed into her body. And then she wasn't sure if she was up or down, standing or lying prone on the floor. She felt its weight on her chest, its breath against her face. She had the urge to tip forward, wrap her arms around her

middle, clasp something without knowing what because everything hurt. But the words she'd spoken only hours before echoed inside her head; 'I'm going to make them pay for this, Siobhan. I swear to you, I'm going to make whoever did this pay.'

The lift doors began to close on the tableau of officers and stretcher and Dunai swallowed; there was a taste in her mouth of acid eating metal. 'I promise, Siobhan,' she said again. 'Whoever did this, I'll find them,' and the monster's teeth loosened their grip of her throat, the weight on her chest lifted and she was aware again of her feet connected to the carpet. She knew how she would begin to search for Siobhan's killer. Although it would depend on someone she disliked and hated the thought of approaching, but a little lost pride was a small price to pay.

THREE

BRYAN TOOK MOST of the calls: fending off the media and telling the story over and over again to the people who'd known Siobhan. Dunai worked with a police officer on the Digi-fit that would hopefully reveal the identity of the last person to see Siobhan alive. Then she called Barbara, her next-door-neighbour who cared for her son during the day. She usually went home for lunch and a nap with her son. Today of course she wouldn't make it.

She spent the rest of the afternoon sending out e-mails, making cups of coffee and going out to buy lunch, which neither ate. Siobhan's husband, environmental activist, Philippe Baobi, returned their call from France later in the day and she watched as Bryan stuttered over the horror of it as he tried to explain to the African expatriate what had happened to his wife. Dunai left her desk and went to perch on the arm of Bryan's chair, her arm around his shoulders. He broke down for the first time when the call ended but Dunai refused to open the floodgates of her own grief just yet.

Bryan left soon after four, having told her how much he needed to be with his family. As much as Dunai longed to go home too, she stayed on for another half hour. She knew Bryan would not approve of what she was about to do.

Instead of leaving the building she climbed one floor down and walked to the end of the passage, stopping at a glass door fronted by a thick, wrought iron safety gate that hadn't been closed properly. Next to it was a buzzer. She pressed it. No answer. She pulled open the security gate and tried the handle. The door swung open. No attempt had been made to light or warm the small reception area. One inadequate florescent tube buzzed overhead. What was probably meant to be a receptionist's desk was empty except for a telephone and fax machine, there were four chairs with

green upholstered seats and aluminium arms. A steel-legged coffee table and three magazines were the only attempts at hospitality.

Dunai strode across the room to the open doorway of the interleading office where she found him at his desk, turned sideways, feet up, drink in hand. In jeans and a brown t-shirt beneath a suede jacket.

The comfort of the room surprised her. A large bookcase covered an entire wall, a TV cabinet another; its shelves filled with ceramics and carved masks. A suede sofa: plush, chocolate brown and scattered with raffia and ochre-coloured cushions was pushed against a wall and there were two cream upholstered chairs facing an oak desk that was cluttered with manila folders and loose pages. A holstered handgun lay within arm's reach.

Carl Lambrecht was an ex police detective whom she'd heard whispered about in lifts and stairwells; mainly by women. Sifting through all the talk of his height and tight backside, the facts seemed to be: he was in his mid-thirties, divorced, and had turned to private investigating after leaving the police service. Dunai wasn't sure she thought he was good-looking. He probably had been at some stage, but his nose looked as if it had been broken and he hadn't bothered to fix it, and his grey eyes were anything but friendly. Thick, light brown hair hadn't seen a brush all day, nor had he bothered to shave.

She glanced again at the room of creams, browns and ochres; Afro-chic, masculine and tasteful, looked back at Carl Lambrecht and shook her head. Even Siobhan had been affected by him; taking extra care with her appearance whenever they'd met to discuss the investigative work he'd carried out for her from time to time. Dunai wondered if his ego matched his impressive size.

'Show's one floor down,' he said, without looking up at her.

'It's a case,' she blurted, and hated herself for it.

'What's a case?'

'I want to talk to you about a case.'

'I'm closed.' He still hadn't bothered to turn his head.

'Siobhan was murdered today.' The raw emotion in her voice was obvious.

Carl swivelled to face her, eyes a little bleary but still cold and intimidating. 'Ja, I know. You want a drink?'

She shook her head, frowned at him.

His eyes travelled over her. They reached her face. 'Dunai. That spelt d-o-o-n-i-e?'

'No.' She didn't bother to spell it for him.

'Never heard it before.'

'I want to talk to you about Siobhan.'

He got to his feet, bowed from the waist and indicated a chair. She ignored the mockery in the gesture and sat down.

'I'm almost sure Siobhan was murdered by one of her enemies, but I also think the police are going to say she was killed accidentally in a burglary.'

'Murdered by her enemies.'

His tone told her he wasn't taking her seriously. She couldn't think what it would take to shock a man like this. For now she could only play him at his own game. So she remained silent until he opened his mouth to speak, then raised her hand to silence him.

'Look, I know this sounds dramatic, but when you get past falling into the trap of trying to find an easy solution, anyone who knew Siobhan would have no problem believing there were a lot of people who hated her enough to do something about it.'

Carl was slumped back in his chair, watching her while he tapped two fingers on the desk. 'Go on,' he said.

'In case you think I'm on some naïve crusade to avenge Siobhan's death, there's another aspect to this that nobody's brought up today. If Siobhan was killed because of the work she was doing, then Bryan and I could be in danger.'

His eyes narrowed but he said nothing.

'Well?' she demanded with more force than she'd intended.

He sighed and shook his head. 'I spoke to some of the people on the scene today and I don't think you have a case. It'd be pointless hiring—'

'I'm not hiring you,' she snapped. 'You don't have to do a thing. I'm asking you to give me some tips on how I can investigate it myself.'

'Tips.'

'I'll do it with or without your help, but I know Siobhan hired you a few times and I also know she liked you.' Dunai realised doubt must have shown all over her face because it provoked a smile that transformed his features. 'I'm not asking for myself. I'm asking you to give me a few pointers for Siobhan's sake.'

He said nothing, just stared at her. She stared back. She couldn't leave yet, not without his help because she couldn't think of anywhere else to go. He was being a hard-arse; it was nothing less than she'd expected. But she still had an ace up her sleeve.

'There's something else you should know.'

She told him about the detective's meeting on the fire escape with the man in the charcoal suit, and although Carl's body seemed relaxed still, his eyes were alert now and she knew he was listening.

When she'd finished he sat forward and this time there wasn't a trace of mockery in his voice when he said, 'You need to think about this carefully, Dunai. Ask yourself how far you'd be willing to take an investigation like this.'

'How far I'd...' She swallowed, dropped her voice. 'Siobhan was like a mother to me; how far do you think I'd go?'

Carl looked at her intently then sighed and nodded his head. 'Okay. The guy your detective was meeting on the fire escape was probably NIA. One of the uniforms I spoke to seemed to think they'd stopped by.'

'But why would the National Intelligence Agency come to the scene of Siobhan's murder?'

'Something she was working on?'

'It's possible; the government was interested in her work, but still... national intelligence.' Dunai couldn't quite believe it. 'And then there's the guy who was on his way up to see Siobhan when Bryan and I were leaving. He was more than likely the last person to see her alive. I don't understand why the police aren't making that the focus of their investigation.'

'Probably because the pathologist's preliminary finding is that time of death was between ten and midnight. Your mystery visitor

arrived at seven, which means he had a lot of time to kill before getting to Siobhan.'

Dunai grimaced. Carl kept tapping his fingers on the desktop looking thoughtfully at a spot past her shoulder. When she couldn't take it any more, she said, 'So you going to help me or not?'

'Tell you what, Dunai,' he said, leaning his forearms on the desk. 'You bring me proof of motive, or something close, and you've got a deal.'

'I've started making a list of people she's had run-ins with.'

'Not enough. Proof of motive or no deal.'

'Shit. Okay, deal.'

Dunai jumped to her feet and stuck her hand out. Carl looked at it then shook. She could tell he was trying not to smile.

'You an alcoholic, Mr Lambrecht?'

'Get out before I change my mind.'

She turned to go.

'One other thing. You ever call me Mr Lambrecht again, the deal's off.'

IT WAS AS she emerged into the square she remembered Siobhan's cat hadn't eaten if Siobhan had failed to make it home last night. So she headed for the flat in Queen Victoria Street. Grief would have to wait another hour.

FOUR

DUNAI WAS SURE she was being followed by an olive green Valiant right out of the seventies. She'd seen it idling on the Longmarket Street side of the square. It arrived at the Church Street intersection then appeared again at the corner of Burg and Wale. Any other day she'd have put it down to coincidence, but not today. And there was something familiar about the car but at dusk with headlights blazing it was impossible to see inside.

Without waiting for the lights to change, she leapt off the pavement, dodging bumpers and blaring horns. Instead of turning right into Queen Victoria Street, she went along Wale Street passed St George's Cathedral, moving towards the Slave Lodge, then veering suddenly right into Government Avenue; a pedestrian walkway that ran through the Company Gardens. If she were being followed, her stalker would have to follow her on foot.

The Company Gardens had started life as a humble vegetable patch planted by the Dutch East India Company in the seventeenth century. It had become what some claimed was one of the world's most attractive city parks. It was also dangerous after dark. But it was still dusk and Dunai was forced to make a choice between what might or might not be Siobhan's killer behind her, and the deepening danger of the gardens ahead. She started down Government Avenue, passing the red brick walls, Corinthian columns and pavilions of the Houses of Parliament on her left.

She was halfway along the avenue when she slowed to a brisk walk and looked behind. There was a figure moving towards her in a dark coat, too far away to see any detail and she couldn't wait until he passed under a lamp-post.

Gunning long legs into action, she started to jog again, doing her best with the heavy tote over her shoulder and muscles back-

chatting at every step. She thought about a hiding place, but instinct told her to get out. But first the path would take her deeper into the gardens.

She knew she'd reached the centre of the park when she saw the sundial up ahead and the statue of the Virgin on a marble basin and plinth luminous white in the deepening shadows. The temperature was dropping and the air smelled of damp foliage.

There was a rustling just off to her right. She stayed stock-still, praying she'd been mistaken, but it came again. Louder this time as if someone was moving through the undergrowth. An owl hooted; the hair stood up on the back of her neck. In African folklore an owl announces death, and you can never be sure if it is your name he calls. Then again were there owls in the city centre or was it a signal from a human in a dark coat?

Dunai took off past the aviaries, jogged towards the statue of Cecil John Rhodes pointing north to the endless potential of the hinterland, but these days everyone was rushing south.

As she rounded the statue, a dark figure stepped into her path. She instinctively flung up her arm. Her wrist was caught in a strong grip.

'I'm not going to hurt you, Dunai,' a woman's voice said. But Dunai yanked wildly against the restraining hand. 'I've been sent to talk to you. That's all I'm going to do.'

Her voice was low and calm. Dunai stopped struggling; it wouldn't do much good anyway. The woman's jeans and leather duster coat held within their seams a six-foot frame of muscle and strength that kept Dunai rooted to the spot with no effort at all. Her eyes were dark in the fading light. Thick brown hair was pulled tightly off her face, accentuating a strong, almost masculine bone structure. A gold pendant of two crosses melded together glinted against the black of her polo neck jumper.

The woman let go of her arm. 'You need to know Siobhan was not killed in a burglary.'

Dunai was stunned. 'Who killed her then?'

'We don't know yet.'

'How d'you know what you do know? What's your connection to Siobhan?'

'It's not up to me to answer those questions.'

Frustration, and anger, made Dunai insist. 'I want to know.'

The woman's eyes never left her face. 'Siobhan kept meticulous records but her documents have been removed for safekeeping. There's nothing that'll incriminate her.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'You will,' the woman said with absolute certainty. 'We'll do everything we can to protect you but with focus on the situation there's only so much we can do to intervene.'

'Who is *we*?'

'I have no directive to give you that information. You must be patient. Find who murdered Siobhan. The task is daunting but there is help available and it'll be extended when absolutely necessary. The purpose of this meeting has been to tell you this.' She nodded once. 'Good luck, Dunai.' Then turned and strode towards the aviaries.

'Hold on.' Dunai went after her. 'Please just *wait*. I need to know what the hell's going on.'

The woman lengthened her stride and disappeared around one of the cages. Dunai rounded the corner just seconds later but the avenue was empty. Grief and fear threatened to overwhelm her as surely as the darkness that hung overhead in the trees and crouched behind hedges. She walked quickly, past the towering aloes and African Flame trees, and smelled the sod before she reached the rose garden. The South African Museum stood to her left behind a procession of statues and war memorials marching forever towards the National Gallery. She went quickly to the exit into Queen Victoria Street, pausing behind the pillars and conifers. There was no sign of the Valiant.

She darted across the street, glancing over her shoulder as she unlocked the gate into the garden that fronted Siobhan's block of flats. When she got to Siobhan's flat, she opened the door quickly and locked it behind her.

She turned on lights as she went: passage, kitchen, study then lounge. She drew the curtains and touched the head of the dunai that stood in the corner: a foot-long wooden statue; breasts and belly enormous, face smooth, feet not important enough to carve.

Siobhan had bought it long before she'd met her. Dunai would get a soft cloth and linseed oil when she visited, sit crossed legged on the carpet and polish while they talked. Her son had taken his first steps on a Saturday afternoon using the statue for support. She remembered, that afternoon Siobhan had said, 'If anything happens to me, take it, it's yours.'

'El Nino?' Dunai called. No answer. She tried again, nothing. That was odd.

She went to the bedroom and flicked the switch. The room remained in darkness. She peered around the room, making out the mosquito net above the queen-sized bed, the old battered wooden chest at its foot, the dressing table and chair. She rushed to the nearest bedside lamp, found the switch and let out a breath as light filled the room.

Siobhan's slippers lay close to Dunai's feet. A t-shirt thrown across the unmade bed. The chest was piled with folded laundry, books, hand cream and notepad. Each item seemed poised, waiting for their owner's return. Impossibly painful to look at. Dunai's body began to tremble from head to toe. She fought it. There were still things that needed doing before she went to pieces.

Those who grew up without parents often battled to make attachments. Those they did make were sometimes tinged with obsession. For two years, Dunai had been desperate for Siobhan's approval, clung almost childishly to her every word and opinion. Beside her childhood obsession with the literary character of Pippi Longstocking and her impossible adventures, Siobhan had been her hero. She was everything in Dunai's character she'd grown up being mildly embarrassed about. Siobhan had taught her to prize these aspects of herself. All the things people had told her to quash, temper, Siobhan had encouraged her to cultivate, live out. Now what? The whole concept of death seemed too ridiculous to grasp; especially the forever part.

Dunai stopped suddenly. She thought she'd heard a muted meow. It came again, from the direction of the cupboard. She rushed across the room and yanked open the first door. Nothing. She opened the second door and the cat's silver-grey body flew passed her and landed on the carpet. Dunai pressed a hand to her heart. 'Enough for one day,' she said, letting out a ragged breath.

He stopped in the middle of the room and let out a wail. Dunai withdrew the hand she'd extended. He wailed a second time, then again. He couldn't possibly sense Siobhan was never coming home could he? Superstition, Dunai, she heard Siobhan say. He was just hungry, probably thought he'd been abandoned. She couldn't understand why he'd been in the cupboard though. Last thing Siobhan did every morning before leaving was fill his bowls and make sure he was settled for the day.

Dunai stuck her head inside the cupboard. No mess, no smell of urine so he couldn't have been in there long. But then how had he gotten in after Siobhan had left the flat? Perhaps she'd forgotten to close the cupboard door and he'd climbed in and been trapped when the door blew shut behind him. Dunai looked at the bedroom windows; they were closed.

She turned again towards the cupboard. It was obvious he'd made himself comfortable on top of a parcel wrapped in tissue paper. Something glinting on the shelf caught her eye and she reached up and pulled it out. It was a long, heavy gold chain and crucifix pendant of yellow gold with a second crucifix in white gold melded just to the right of the crossbar. It was the second time in half an hour she'd seen this pendant. She remembered it around the neck of the woman she'd just run into in the gardens.

She went to the bed, sat on its edge and stared at the pendant lying on her open palm. The cat's cries eventually penetrated the fog and she went to the kitchen and opened a tin of food.

Back in the bedroom she put the pendant in the cupboard, and left the lamp burning in the bedroom and kitchen. After spending a minute petting the cat and assuring him someone would pop in everyday until Siobhan's husband arrived from France, she let herself out; the statue of the dunai tucked under her arm.

FIVE

IT TOOK FIFTEEN minutes to reach the outskirts of Bo-Kaap, tucked into a fold of Signal Hill above the City of Cape Town. Brightly painted cube houses on narrow cobblestone streets swept steeply up the hill where even the trees grew at an angle. Between the houses of pink, tangerine and mint green, were spice shops, corner grocers and home industries that filled the streets with the smells of samoosas and chicken pies. There were almost a dozen mosques. Weathered fish mongers still blew copper horns in the streets, hawking their wares of snoek, kingklip and yellowtail, fresh off the boats at Table Bay Harbour not a stone's throw away. And at twelve on the dot every day except Sundays, the old cannon boomed from the top of Signal Hill, even though the glorious ships of the past no longer shifted at anchor below. Three hundred years ago the area had been home to skilled and educated slaves deported from the Indonesian archipelago who'd eventually been freed. Their descendants had stayed on and over the centuries made the twelve blocks peculiarly theirs.

The area was no stranger to controversy. Now more than ever tensions ran high with foreigners and the affluent buying up homes and businesses, pushing up property prices and bringing their alternative lifestyles into a place that had always been deeply religious and conservative.

Dunai had just crossed Buitengragt when she noticed the Valiant approaching the Wale Street intersection. She fumbled in her bag for her phone. If she never made it home, it was important she tell someone about the car. Bryan picked up.

'There isn't time to explain. I'm being followed by an olive green Valiant just past the Wale and Buitengragt intersection. Its lights are

on so I can't see the registration or who's inside but it's an olive green Valiant.'

'What the hell's—?

'I've got to go.'

'Okay, okay, I'm on my way. I'll call the police. I'll get my cell. Call you back. But don't wait. Get home, Dunai... Shit. Okay—.' Dunai rang off.

The light turned green and the Valiant started up Wale Street. She had to get off the street. It was too easy to pull up, drag her inside and drive off. Taking a back way would make it almost impossible to follow by car.

Few houses in Bo-Kaap had gardens. Some backed onto alleyways or shared a courtyard or small paved area where adults parked their cars at night and children played soccer or cricket in the day.

Dunai passed one of these squares on her left. It was dark with not a soul out in the cold; it was suppertime. Lights showed in windows and glowed from street lamps in golden puddles on the paving.

Just beyond the square a steep stairway was bordered on the right by the blank wall of a mint-green double-storey house, and a couple of meters on, a house the colour of candyfloss straddled the walkway, a section of its lower storey creating an arched walk-through to the street on the other side; Chiappini Street and home. A nearby streetlight lent some faint illumination to the interior of the tunnel.

She hoisted her bag higher on her shoulder, tucked the statue against her chest, and descended the stairs at a trot, picking up pace as she stepped passed the arches into the walk-through.

Something hit her between her shoulder blades and she went down on all fours, pain shooting through her knees. The statue clattered against the bricks. Another weight landed in the middle of her back, forcing her flat against the ground. Her attacker grabbed her hair and ground her cheek against the paving.

'Don't you fuckin' *move*. You look at me, I'll kill you.'

She didn't move. Her lungs felt crushed; it was hard to breathe. She tried not to panic. The voice was male, young. A voice from these parts. Her assailant, still with a foot on her back, began to tug at her coat. She was going to be raped. Surely not me, Dunai thought. There had to be something she could do. Not just lie here like this.

'Your turn now, *bitch*,' her attacker growled and bent forward to get a better grip on her coat.

Dunai let out a bellow and in one motion heaved to the side and grabbed the dunai as she went. She threw her arm out sideways in an arc and felt wood connect with bone. Her assailant howled, let go of her. She twisted on the ground, got a glimpse of a black glove clutching the side of a balaclavaed head.

He came for her again before she could scramble to her feet. There was a shout and a car door slammed.

'*Bryan!*' Dunai screamed, scrambling to her feet. His name choked off as she saw the green Valiant and a man running towards her. They had her cornered; she couldn't fight them all. They'd drag her into the car, do god-only-knows-what to her then kill her like they'd killed Siobhan.

She jumped back as her original attacker grabbed her bag and ran for the stairway. She felt dizzy and began to tremble, but steadied herself for the attack, holding the dunai in front of her like a weapon as the man from the Valiant came rushing towards her. He wasn't at all what she'd expected being middle-aged and wearing a white crocheted skull cap and grey beard.

The Valiant's passenger door opened, but she kept her eyes on the man coming towards her. Let them come. She'd damage every fucking one of them.

'You okay?' the man said, stopping a couple of feet from her. The words refused to compute. 'We saw that *skollie* attack you. My wife's calling the police. You hurt? You want us to call a doctor?'

Dunai shook her head.

'My goodness,' the man said, tugging his beard, 'what is this neighbourhood coming to?'

A woman's scarfed head appeared on the passenger side of the Valiant lit by the car's interior light. 'Police are on their way,' she called, one plump leg still in the car, her hand clutching the doorframe.

'That's it,' Dunai said into the darkness. 'No more.' She noticed a strange look pass between the couple.

'Let us help you,' the man said, holding a hand out to her.

She avoided him, stepped into Chiappini Street and started walking, the statue cradled in her arms. The couple got back into their car and cruised slowly behind her, passed the mint green house, yellow, baby blue, lavender and her own turquoise. Her bag was gone along with her keys.

She stopped when she got to the pink house next door to her own and knocked. There was no answer. She hammered her fist against the wood.

'All right, all right,' she heard from inside.

The door opened and Gavin stared at her in horror. 'Oh-my... What *happened*? Rory!' he shouted. 'Something's happened to Dunai.'

'I've been attacked,' she blurted out. 'Siobhan's dead and I've got no idea how her cat got in the cupboard. I can't fetch Jesse like this.'

Gavin tucked his chin in, half turned. Rory's wiry frame dressed in psychedelic golf trousers, came down the passage towards her. He was wiping his paint-covered fingers on a rag. 'What's going on?'

'She's had a breakdown or something,' Gavin said.

'Oh-my...' Rory said as he took in her dishevelled clothes, mussed hair and bleeding cheek. He opened his arms to her and she flew into them.

'We saw what happened,' the man from the Valiant said. He and the woman stood on the stoep.

They all turned at the sound of brakes, as Bryan's blue Citroën and a police car came screeching to a halt at the pavement.

'That's it,' Bryan shouted, rushing towards the group. 'That's the car. Olive green Valiant.'

Two policemen climbed out of their vehicle and walked cautiously towards the car that stood with its doors open. The group on the

stoep looked from the policemen to Bryan as he stopped in front of Dunai and stared at her in horror. 'Who the hell did this to you?'

'I was attacked.'

'I can see that, but who did this? Who owns that Valiant?'

'I do,' the bearded man said.

'You did this to her?'

'No, that was a mistake,' Dunai said. 'He tried to help me.'

The policemen joined them on the crowded stoep.

'But why was he following you?' Bryan asked.

Dunai was too confused to even hazard a guess. The accused man's head whipped in Bryan's direction and he pointed to his chest. 'Me? No. I wasn't following her.'

'I've seen your car before,' she said, trying to make sense of it. 'Then tonight in Longmarket Street, Church, Burg and Wale, now Chiappini.'

'What're you talking about? Following you,' the woman said, angrily. 'He was coming to fetch me.'

'My wife works in Greenmarket Square,' he explained. 'After I picked her up we went to her sister's flat in Kloof Street to fetch curtains. She makes curtains.'

'We've got them in the car,' the woman said, triumphantly.

Her husband pulled at his beard and turned to the policemen. 'We were on our way home. We live further up in Stadzicht Street. Then we saw her being attacked in the walkway.'

'I thought you were...' Dunai said slowly. 'I'm so sorry.'

She sat down heavily on the step. Gavin came out of the house and pressed a tumbler of brandy into her hand, tissues into the other.

'I need you to go next door,' she told Gavin, 'and tell Barbara what's happened. I'll fetch Jesse as soon as I can.'

Gavin nodded and headed for the lavender house two doors down.

It took another ten minutes of explanations and apologies before the misunderstood couple drove away in their Valiant.

Rory, who worked from home as an artist, kept a spare key to Dunai's house. Once he'd fetched the key, they all moved next door

to Dunai's turquoise house. Gavin, who'd just returned from his errand to Barbara, went to the spare room to babysit the animals.

One of the policemen stood in Dunai's living room looking aghast at all the second-hand paraphernalia she collected to sell at her Greenmarket Square stall every second Saturday. The other policeman went over to her small half-moon table, looked undecided for a minute then sat at the straight end.

'All this stuff yours?' the standing policeman asked.

'I didn't steal it,' Dunai said and took another gulp of brandy. She coughed, felt embarrassed but didn't put the tumbler down.

'What happened?' the seated policeman asked, his pen poised above a form.

'Why don't you sit first,' Rory suggested from the old wrought-iron garden chair she'd picked up on municipal refuse day. She went to her favourite seat: a garden bench found discarded near a children's park. Painted pale pink and a few cushions later, it was good as new. Bryan sat beside her.

The only relatively new piece of furniture was a cream sofa Siobhan had given her because she'd said she was sick of sitting on the wooden bench with its flaking paint whenever she came to visit. Dunai tried not to look at it as she recounted the events of the evening. The seated policeman never once looked her way, filling in the form and firing questions over his shoulder.

He did look up when she said, 'I think this might have something to do with my friend who was murdered last night.' Even the standing policeman managed to tear his eyes from her bric-a-brac.

She told them about Siobhan, but left out DI van Reenen's argument on the fire escape with the man in the charcoal suit and her visit to Carl Lambrecht. She also said nothing about the woman in the Company Gardens and the necklace she'd found in Siobhan's flat. She concluded, 'So it's obvious what he meant by, "It's your turn now, bitch."'

'Maybe not,' the seated policeman said. 'Seems like more of the same we've been seeing hereabouts lately.'

Dunai tried to sound as rational as possible. 'Look I know all this sounds crazy but today hasn't been a sane day. The person who

attacked me could be the person who murdered Siobhan. You must call DI van Reenen straight away.'

The policeman stared at her. 'We'll let Van Reenen know.' He pursed his lips, collected his forms, managed a muttered 'night' and headed for the door. The officer who'd stood throughout the interview asked, 'You buy all this stuff, then do it up and sell it, right?' Dunai nodded. 'You make good money?'

'Some.'

'Hmm,' he said thoughtfully as he left.

Dunai's legs felt as if they'd had their bones removed. Never in her life had she been so utterly drained. She watched as Rory opened the door of the second bedroom. There were the sounds of a brief scuffle before Gavin came bounding down the passage sneezing. The cats, Tommy and Annika, made for the living room with Mr Nelson, an African grey parrot, waddling behind them. Her dog, Horse, a *Bouvier des Flandres* who was as big as a pony, rushed past Mr Nelson, who shouted, 'Bosh!' as he tottered dangerously in the dog's slipstream. All four animals headed for Dunai who sat a little straighter, ready to give out greetings, pats and scratches with nothing less than the usual enthusiasm they'd expect of her.

SIX

A STRONG WIND blew in from the northwest. It howled at the front door of the turquoise house and hurled needles of rain against the windowpanes.

She'd cancelled her stolen cards while Bryan got a locksmith to change the locks, then he'd gone to the chemist for painkillers and ointment while Dunai got Jesse ready for bed. Somewhere in her exhausted body she'd found the reserves to behave as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened that day. But all the while she was thinking about the woman in the gardens who had said she'd removed documents that might incriminate Siobhan, and the NIA man in the charcoal suit who wanted the murder treated as a botched burglary. Again she heard Lambrecht's words, 'You bring me proof of motive, or something close, and you've got a deal.' She forced herself to concentrate on Jesse.

He stood beside her bed, bare-bottomed in a pyjama top and Winnie the Pooh beanie, tufts of dark hair sticking out the bottom. He was due for a hair cut. She sat on the edge of her bed, so tired her voice seemed to stretch and drag. 'Let me put the nappy on, Jesse.'

'I big boy now.'

'I know, but it's just for tonight.'

'I fine,' he said, beginning to inch away from her.

'We're both tired, Jess. We need to sleep through the night, but we won't if we have to get up to go to the toilet.'

Jesse shook his head. '*I fine*,' he shouted and rushed from the room.

She went after him. 'Don't do this tonight, Jesse. Just put the nappy on, okay?'

'No!' he shouted back, flinging a look over his shoulder as he hurtled down the passage. When she got to his bedroom the beanie was off and he was sitting on his heels in the middle of the bed, coiled and ready to spring.

'It's just a nappy, for heaven's sake. Now you let me put it on, okay?'

'No nappy,' Jesse shouted. '*I big boy!*'

Dunai plonked herself down on the bed and felt a prickling behind her eyes. 'I'm too tired to take you to the toilet tonight. If you don't put the nappy on you're going to wet the bed then I'm going to have to get up anyway and clean everything up.'

The toddler stuck out his bottom lip, clenched his jaw and Dunai knew what that meant. The plan had been to feed, bath and settle him quickly for the night. Bryan would come back with the pain tablets, she'd thank him, see him off, lock the door and run a bath.

Now looking at her son's face she felt all the day's gashes and tears she'd kept so carefully tacked together, begin to pull apart. She put the nappy in her lap and buried her face in her hands; pain ground along her back where it had been stood on. Jesse put his stubby arms around her neck. 'I put nappy on now, okay?' he whispered against her hair.

'Okay,' she said, pulling herself together, feeling a little ashamed as she raised her head and swiped at the tears on her cheeks.

Jesse sat back on his heels in the middle of the bed and contemplated her with large, slate-coloured eyes, very like his mother's. 'I terrible twos, hey?'

'Yes, you are,' she said, reaching out, hugging him tightly. 'But you'll be three soon and then you won't be anymore.' Jesse grinned and Dunai's heart melted. 'Any case, I'm fine. Everything's going to be fine.'

'Sing Jesse,' he said, once the nappy was on and she'd tucked him in.

She began, 'You've got to wash with the crocodile in the river, swim with the sharks in the sea, live with the crooked politician, trust those things that you can never see...'

He fell asleep quickly and she found Bryan in the kitchen whisking a bowl of eggs. He gave her the painkillers and rubbed ointment between her shoulder blades then, despite her protests, insisted on staying to finish dinner for her. She left him to it, went to the lounge where she curled up on an oversized beanbag that smelled of buttermilk rusks and Jesse.

Horse plodded across the room and began to fuss over her, sniffing her face and hands. She stroked his rough grey coat. He stood utterly still for a full minute, then went back to the kitchen only to return moments later; loyalties divided between Dunai and the cooking smells. She forced herself to eat the omelette and tried to ignore Bryan's look of deepening concern every time the wind rattled the old sash windows and made her flinch.

'Something is so wrong, Bryan, I wish I could put my finger on it.'

'You could get into trouble for interfering with a police investigation.'

'There's stuff going on beneath the surface we don't know about. I'm not just going to leave it to the police who we all know are over worked and under paid. If there is something going on, maybe something that caused Siobhan's death, you and I could be in danger. What about our children?'

Bryan shook his head sadly.

'You're not taking me seriously.'

'Dunai, all I'm asking is that you try to see this from the police's point of view. The evidence points to the fact that Siobhan was killed in a burglary that went horribly wrong and the logical explanation is that the attack on you tonight is part of a bigoted campaign to get rid of outsiders in the area. Think about it, Hon. It's pretty damn obvious actually.'

'But there're too many coincidences and what if you're wrong? We could wind up dead.'

He seemed to think about this for a moment then shook his head. Dunai felt anger bubble in her chest. 'Guy in the balaclava wasn't the first person to jump me tonight.'

The comment had the desired effect. 'What are you talking about?'

She told him about the woman who'd accosted her in the Company Gardens. She also told him where she'd found Siobhan's cat and described the pendant, identical to the one worn by the amazon.

Bryan was silent for a moment, then ran a hand over his face. 'Siobhan's murder's been all over the news, Dunai. That woman could have been any crackpot. As for the pendant...' he shrugged. 'When things have settled I'll clear it with her lawyer and get someone to take a look at it.' Again he ran a hand over his face, the gesture more agitated this time. 'Right now I just don't know.'

Dunai had never heard him sound so weary and she felt a little guilty. He'd been dealing with lawyers, the media and STOP associates all day. He too had been close to Siobhan; had known her a lot longer than Dunai and was having to deal with his own grief.

'We can talk about this some other time,' she said, leaning over and squeezing his hand. 'Why don't you go home and get some sleep.'

'I still think you need to speak to someone. Belle has a friend who's a grief counsellor—'

'Bryan.'

'No, I want you to hear me out. Siobhan had this enormous life force.' The last two words caught in his throat. 'And when someone like that dies we desperately want to find some meaning in it; a reason. But sometimes there just isn't one.'

Dunai gritted her teeth.

'What I'm saying is there're better ways to deal with grief. I'm worried about you in this state. Matter of fact I want you to pack a bag for yourself and Jesse and come spend some time with Belle and me.'

'I've got my animals to think about.'

'Rory can keep an eye on them.'

'I won't leave them, Bryan.' Dunai shook her head and he knew better than to argue.

'Yeah, okay. You want me to stay?'

'Thanks, but I'll be okay.'

'You need anything you call. And I mean that, Dunai. I can be pretty mean when one of my girls is threatened; so you call, you hear?'

'I hear.'

'Good. And stick to well-lit streets from now on. No more gardens or tunnels. And get home before dark or get someone to drive you. And let this thing go, Dunai. Give the police time to get on with the investigation. You and I already have our work cut out for us.'

Dunai nodded. Yes, she'd give the police all the space they needed. She had her own investigation to get on with because she had every intention of finding a motive for Carl Lambrecht even though she had absolutely no idea how to go about it. Thing was, from now on she'd keep developments to herself.

It was almost ten o'clock when she finally got to take a bath. She ran the water too hot, took the clothes off she'd never wear again and lay down in the water. Rivulets of sweat ran down her face and she let the tears come. This time there was no reason to hold them back, no time limit and no one to be strong for.

SEVEN

SIOBHAN IS DEAD. Siobhan is dead. The phrase looped through her mind as she woke. It was dark outside; not a sound in the house. She peered at the clock; almost half an hour before she had to get up. The dunai sat on the bedside table. The sight of it made her feel as if something vast and empty had opened up inside her.

Her cheek hurt, so did her back, but she took no more painkillers. Jesse and the animals had breakfast; she managed only a couple of mouthfuls.

She wanted to be late for work this morning, alter her routine, so she dropped Jesse off with Barbara at a quarter to eight. Never a day went by that she wasn't grateful for the advent of Barbara in her life. The ex-kindergarten teacher made do with her husband's social worker salary so she could stay at home with their son who was almost three. The mothers had become friends soon after Dunai moved in and it wasn't long before Barbara offered to look after Jesse during the day for a reasonable fee. And since they shared a tiny courtyard, the back doors of both houses were left open so the animals had companionship and extra space during the day.

Barbara had lived almost all of her forty years in Bo-Kaap. During apartheid she'd been classified Coloured, which could mean any combination of black and white, Khoi-San or Indonesian. Whatever Barbara's ancestry, her tiny frame was wired with energy; even her mop of dark, curly hair had a tendency to stand up on her head like an electric arc. On most days she managed to get both boys into a stroller and take Horse and the cats for a walk. Dunai was always willing to return the favour whenever Barbara and her husband needed time away from parenting.

Once Dunai had taken Jesse next door, she took a longer route to work, arriving in Greenmarket Square at a quarter past eight when

vendors were setting up their stalls, filling the area with the snap of tarpaulin, clang of metal poles, shouted greetings and Mafikizolo's kwaito dance beat blaring from a radio somewhere.

But the third floor of the office block was silent. She braced herself for the walk past Siobhan's office and deliberately thought of how she was going to find a motive for Carl Lambrecht. She wasn't sure if he'd meant motive as in having pretty good grounds for suspecting someone, or whether 'proof of motive' meant something that would prove someone's guilt in a court of law. If he'd meant the latter, she may as well track down the killer herself.

There were fifty-two messages on the answering machine. She wiped off those from the media and people who said they wished they'd done it, that Siobhan's murder was God's retribution, and the person who'd clapped and laughed on the other end.

By the time Bryan arrived at nine from a meeting with Siobhan's lawyer, she was busy with a grocery list for Philippe, who was on his way from France and would stay at Siobhan's flat. Although the pair had loved each other for fifteen years, their devotion to their work had led them along divergent paths. Eight months apart every year would signal the death knell for most marriages but for Siobhan and Philippe it suited their independent natures, their rejection of societal convention and their belief that their lives had a higher calling. If anything it seemed to have only deepened their relationship over the years.

Bryan was on the phone taking down Philippe's flight details and Dunai had just crossed out croissants and written bagels when the word Bojangles popped into her head. Her gasp was audible. Bryan shot her a worried look. 'Just remembered something,' she said, pretending to go back to the list, but Mr Bojangles's voice was an accusation in her ears. 'There's been other things happening. The devil come out there. Last night I seen him... She tried to remember the exact words but couldn't. He'd told her to be careful.

More delusions, more voices she'd thought, and she'd been impatient, turning her back and walking away. Now she realised Mr Bojangles just might have seen the person who murdered Siobhan.

It took an enormous effort to stay in her seat, keep her pen hovering above the grocery list.

As soon as Bryan left the office, she rushed to the window. It was miserable down there with stall owners huddled beneath colourful squares of tarpaulin. She strained to see Mr Bojangles's navy cap, but the distance was too great and there were too many trees.

At midday, DI van Reenen stopped by the office.

'We've identified the man who came to see Ms Craig the evening she was murdered,' he said. 'His name's Dan Cowley.' He waited for a reaction, but got none. 'He's a property developer. Built the chain of Millennium Malls across the country, owns The Cowley Building on the foreshore.'

'What did he have to do with Siobhan?' Bryan asked.

'He heads up the South African chapter of Men of The Covenant.' Again Bryan and Dunai shook their heads. 'It's a Christian men's group,' Van Reenen said. 'They packed out Newlands Rugby Stadium last month.'

'I don't see what business he'd have with Siobhan,' Bryan said. 'She was an atheist. As far as I know she had nothing to do with religious groups.'

'And a *men's* religious group...' Dunai shook her head.

'He came to see Siobhan,' the detective said, 'because he'd heard about her work with abused women. He offered the counselling services of Men of The Covenant to men who abuse their partners.'

'To which Siobhan said no,' Dunai stated with certainty.

'Seems that way,' Van Reenen said, consulting his notebook. 'She thanked him for his concern but said she avoided affiliation with religious groups because her programmes were about female empowerment and she didn't want the women who came to her for help to feel they had to adopt a certain ideology to get it. Mr Cowley told Ms Craig the offer stood if she changed her mind. He left around seven-thirty.'

'A dead end then,' Dunai said.

'Hm,' Van Reenen agreed. 'Post mortem's being done today, but I don't think time of death will change much. Mr Cowley says the

security guard had left for the day when he tried to leave the building but a tenant remembers him because she was on her way out when she found him standing in the foyer, doors locked. She confirms she let Mr Cowley out at seven-thirty and locked up after him. Ms Craig's time of death was about two and half hours later.'

'So we're back to the burglary scenario,' Bryan said.

Van Reenen nodded. 'Seemed that way from the beginning.'

It was then Dunai almost told him about Mr Bojangles but all she really had was a gut feeling that he'd seen the person who'd killed Siobhan. She'd find the vagrant herself, try to get a description then take it to the police. Or it might be better to go to Carl Lambrecht first.

Once the detective had left, she grabbed her coat and bag and told Bryan she was popping home for lunch.

'Just a minute, Dunai,' he said. 'I want you to know you can take time off whenever you need to. We've got the presentation to prepare but Philippe will help with that. It's not like we can go on as if nothing's happened.'

'How are you doing?' Dunai asked.

'I've got Belle and the girls.' He shook his head. 'They're amazing. Sometimes I can't believe I had anything to do with producing such smart girls.' Dunai watched his Adam's apple bob. 'I didn't think I was going to get to have a family, you know. Thought I'd die a lonely old man so not a day goes by I'm not grateful for them.' He shook his head. 'But you don't want to hear my ramblings. Off you go. Go home and feed your family.'

Dunai turned at the door. 'D'you know what's going to happen with the house in Chiappini Street? I've always paid my rent to Siobhan, but I don't know the owner. Lives overseas, Siobhan said. I don't even know who'll be administering the property now she's... You don't think we'll have to move do you?'

'I honestly don't know,' he said. 'I'll look into it.'

Dunai was worried. The rent on the house was low; the owner didn't really need the money and wanted a tenant who'd look after the place. She'd never be able to afford another property in the city. She'd have to move into the suburbs. She didn't have a car and

she'd lose Barbara, and Rory and Gavin. She'd have to find day care for Jesse with some stranger... One step at time, she told herself. The next was to find Mr Bojangles.

The heart of the cobblestone square was clogged with arts and crafts stalls; she was unlikely to find him there since vendors chased vagrants who got too close. She began her search, left to right: coffee shops, jewellers, hair salons, curio shops, even asking the security guards in the foyers of surrounding office blocks. Most had no idea who she was talking about even though they must have walked past the old man hundreds of times. The clock on the Park Inn Hotel showed ten to one. Rain fell steadily against her umbrella and the cold had seeped through her clothes. Despondent, she carried on up Shortmarket Street towards Bo-Kaap with two questions on her mind: how would one know if a vagrant were missing, and if he was, how would one go about finding him? The only answer she could come up with was; ask another vagrant.

If Mr Bojangles had seen the killer he might be in danger. She thought about going to the police but dismissed the idea. It'd be daft pitching up at the station with a tale about a vagrant called Mr Bojangles who had told her he'd seen the devil come out of a building on Greenmarket Square. She'd have to find him on her own. He'd lived on the streets for who knows how long. His survival skills just might be enough to outwit the devil.

After lunch, she went back to the turquoise house, took the painkillers Bryan had bought the night before, went to her bedroom, drew the curtains and climbed under the duvet with Jesse. Determined to ignore her throbbing head, she closed her eyes and felt the animals creep onto the bed and settle.

She dreamt she was in the Company Gardens, crouched behind the statue of the Virgin. Siobhan and the amazon were fighting, blood poured from the larger woman's head. Siobhan was bleeding from the nose. She wanted to scream at them to stop, but she stayed down, hating her own cowardice. It was the dunai they were fighting over. Siobhan clutched it tightly to her chest and screamed 'Back up!' as the amazon came towards her. Neither woman had noticed that the carving had changed from wood to cold, black

stone. She heard herself scream as the statue's eyes began to glow red.

Dunai woke to a loud thud, a shriek of surprise from one of the cats, a shout of 'Bosh!' and Horse's deep, warning rumble. She sat up, heart hurling itself all over her chest.

The thud had been the dunai hitting the floor; it lay at Jesse's feet. The cats who'd probably climbed onto her bedside table and drawn his attention to it, turned their backs on the scene and sauntered from the room.

She'd taken Tommy in two years ago when he'd arrived at her door. From his battle-scars and the mean look in his eye, she'd been sure the ginger was hungry, homeless and the cause of many unintended pregnancies. She'd had him neutered. Annika she'd stolen. The small black and white cat had been living in filthy conditions in the backyard of a house next to a home used by some of the older orphans from St Mark's. Dunai and the man who would become Jesse's father had broken into the yard and taken the bundle of skin and bones to the vet. He thought she'd probably had several litters of kittens despite her young age. Annika never left the house now except when they went for walks, secure on her harness.

'Vaughn,' Jesse said, struggling to scoop the statue into his arms. Vaughn was the best he could do with Siobhan's name. 'Where Vaughn?' he asked tottering towards the bed.

Dunai swallowed. 'She's gone away, Jess.'

He hoisted the dunai onto the bed then scrambled up after it. He reached for the statue and turned it upside down.

'I don't want you playing with this, Jesse. It isn't a toy and you might break it.' She reached for the dunai but Jesse pulled back with a sharp, 'No!'

Something clicked in Dunai's brain.

'Back up,' she mumbled. 'Oh my...'

She leapt off the bed and ran to what should have been the dining room but was a study, animal and storage room. There were two boxes on the table beside the computer. One with back up tapes labelled according to the days of the week – copies of STOP's

computer files kept off site – but it was the larger box Dunai unlocked.

About a month ago Siobhan had asked her to store a flash drive with the back up tapes. It was the only time she'd ever done this and Dunai had failed at the time to wonder why Siobhan needed reports stored off site when they'd already been copied to the back up tapes.

She inserted the flash drive; there was only one Word folder called 'reports' which prompted her for a password. She tried the obvious names and dates but nothing worked. It was twenty minutes before two.

She went back to her bedroom where Jesse was putting the dunai to bed, scooped him up and rushed next door to the pink house. Rory answered wearing a white poet's shirt splattered with paint, and trousers of thin yellow and green stripes.

'You look like a gherkin,' Dunai said as he stepped back into the passage to allow them to pass.

'I do?' he said, bending forward dramatically at the waist to look at his trousers. 'Oh my gosh, I do, don't I?'

'Pickle-impersonation is not a crime. Please tell me Gavin's still here.'

'Your lucky day,' Rory said. 'How're you, big boy?' he said to Jesse.

'I *am* big boy,' Jesse said proudly.

'You're the man.' Jesse high-fived him. To Dunai he said, 'Hold on a sec, I'll get Gavin.'

Gavin was not only Rory's lover, he owned an IT consultancy and since he worked in the city, he usually came home for lunch.

'You feeling better today?' he asked, stepping into the living room.

Not knowing what to say, Dunai simply cocked her head.

'Suppose not,' Gavin said. 'I'm terrible in situations like these. Never know what to say.'

'Don't worry about it,' she said. 'I need your help.'

A wary look crossed his face.

'With an IT problem.'

Gavin relaxed. 'What can I do?'

'How difficult is it to get into a password protected Word document?'

'Easy.'

'I need to access one of Siobhan's folders. D'you think you could get me in?'

'Sure.'

It took him less than ten minutes to tell her, 'Password's *Ubuntu*,' before he returned to the pink house to finish lunch.

There were thirteen files inside the folder. A surname had been used to name each file. Dunai recognised 'Cowley,' the man who'd come to see Siobhan the night she was murdered. She began to read. Her hand trembled on the mouse as she opened another file, then another and read the list of transgressions, followed by what looked like passwords to computer files and a log of dates, digits and telephone numbers.

It took her a while to realise she was reading carefully documented blackmail records. It didn't mean Siobhan had collected the information; she might have stumbled onto the records. But the dates didn't lie. Too many coincided with co-operation Siobhan had managed to pull out of the hat at the last minute or the inexplicable backing down of powerful opposition to some aspect of STOP's pilot project. She recognised the large cash injection they'd received from a wealthy supporter and plans that had been passed unexpectedly by local government.

But why give Dunai such incriminating information? Perhaps she'd thought her life was in danger and she'd wanted her to know who had motive. Or she might simply have wanted somewhere safe to keep the files, never expecting Dunai to disregard the password.

The file name, *Ubuntu*, showed a level of cynicism Dunai had never encountered in Siobhan. The word meant 'humanity' in Xhosa and represented an ancient African principle of individuals working together harmoniously for the good of the whole: 'I am because we are'.

'Mommy, I firsty.'

Dunai rocked back and forth in her chair; stunned beyond belief. Siobhan had done this. There was no getting away from it.

'Mom-yyyy.'

'Okay, okay, I'm coming.'

She printed out the password pages, put the flash drive back in the box, the box in the desk drawer, locked it and slipped the key into her pocket.

When Jesse'd had a drink she took him next door to Barbara, rushed back, threw on her coat, tucked the password sheets into a pocket of her jeans and went again to the pink house. Gavin was reluctant to go to Siobhan's flat, insisting that since Dunai had the passwords she didn't need him.

'Trust me,' she said. *'Nothing since yesterday's turned out right. I might still need you.'*

The second bedroom in Siobhan's flat was used as a study with barely enough room to move between the bookcases and cluttered desk where her computer was kept. A file fell to the floor as Gavin sat at the desk. He shot up again. *'Shit! You sure we're meant to be here?'* He looked at the door as if expecting a couple of keystone cops to burst in.

'What do you mean?' Dunai sat and put the cat on her lap.

'Aren't the police meant to go through her stuff or something?'

'It's not a murder scene, Gavin. Anyway the police are convinced she surprised a burglar in her office. Sit,' she instructed.

His fingers flew over the keyboard, not letting up even as he muttered to himself and tipped forward from time to time to peer at the screen.

'What?' she said, when she couldn't stand it any longer.

Gavin slumped back in the chair. *'Computer's been wiped.'*

'What do you mean wiped?'

'It's all gone, Dunai. Every last shred of data. Usually when files are deleted they're no longer visible to the user but remain on the hard drive and that data takes a long time to overwrite. You can't even wipe a hard drive by submerging it in water; you'd have to physically destroy it. I bet if we opened her up we'd find she's been toasted. Whoever did this knew their stuff.'

Gavin sounded impressed; Dunai was not.

'What about external drives?' She pulled open the top desk drawer: empty except for a few items of stationery. 'This is where she kept discs and flash drives. I saw them here.'

She put the purring cat on the ground and searched the rest of the study but came up empty-handed. 'There was nothing wrong with this computer couple of days ago and her back ups were in that drawer.'

'She have a laptop?'

'Yes, but it was stolen in the burglary, or whatever it was.'

'Then I'm fresh out of suggestions. Late for a meeting.'

Gavin got to his feet. The cat brushed against his leg.

'Thanks for helping,' Dunai said.

'You want a lift back?'

'No, you're late. Go on. I'll see you later.'

She went back to the study and stared at the computer. 'Siobhan was a meticulous record-keeper but her documents have been removed for safe-keeping.' That's what the amazon had told her in the gardens. 'There's nothing to incriminate her,' she'd said.

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'You will,' the woman had said with certainty. They'd erased all trace of files on Siobhan's computer and taken her back ups, which is probably when the cat had been closed in the cupboard. Only they didn't know Siobhan had given Dunai a back up.

She fed the cat and sat on the living room carpet with him dozing on her lap. She could almost see Siobhan on the sofa, legs drawn up, so real it made tears slide down her cheeks. Just days before they'd sat here chatting; no, talking, because Siobhan rarely chatted, never sweated the small stuff. 'Life's too big and too short to talk about things that don't matter,' she'd once said. Now Dunai sat here alone, wondering who Siobhan had really been, and more pressingly, what life-threatening activity she'd been mixed up in.

EIGHT

DUNAI'S ARM WAS twisted into staying for dinner by Bryan's wife, Belle. A woman who barely reached five feet and looked like the universal stereotype of her profession – a librarian – in sensible shoes, a calf-length skirt, brown ponytail and black rimmed spectacles. A diamond sparkled in her nostril.

Dunai watched with fascination, as she always did, a world she'd never been part of. Bryan's expressions as his daughters, named Amy and May in honour of their mother's triumph over dyslexia, recounted their day. The degree of synchronicity in the family's speech and humour. The way Belle took off her specs half way through dinner and gazed short-sightedly at her family around the dining room table, a small smile on her lips.

Dunai looked over at Jesse, propped up on cushions, spooning mashed potato into his mouth. At his age she had no idea what it was like to sit at a family dinner table like this and she felt a sense of achievement that, even though she'd failed to create a nuclear family of her own, Jesse was at least experiencing it on a regular basis. It was unfortunate that tonight she had more on her mind than the pleasures of family.

It was eight when Belle finally took the girls off to bed. Dunai told Bryan she needed to speak to him on his own. She tucked a blanket around Jesse who'd fallen asleep on the sofa and went to Bryan's study. The room showed nothing of his American heritage. Zulu pot lamps, the chiwara: a stylised antelope head symbolising agricultural prosperity, and Mbali cushions and woven throws covering chairs and sofa, were proof of roots planted deeply in African soil now. The only décor of a global nature were the numerous family photographs and children's artworks on walls, desk, bookcase and cabinet.

'Don't you miss your own country?' Dunai asked him.

'This is my home country.'

'Still...'

'The poverty's greater here, Dunai, but so's the honesty.'

'Honesty.' Dunai repeated the word with a twinge of nostalgia.

'Forty percent of American children live below the poverty line, there's racial segregation in schools and half the country's wealth is owned by less than two percent of the population. You wouldn't think it looking from the outside in but that's how it is.'

'But if your parents were still alive you'd want to go back to visit them.'

Bryan shook his head. 'You grew up without parents. I only wish I had.'

Dunai frowned.

'My mother did her best, but my father,' he shook his head. 'Always quick with the strap. I swore I'd never lose it with my kids and I haven't. I don't think you can ever give too much encouragement or compassion...' He looked over at a photograph of his daughters and his face softened, lost some of its tension. Dunai let the moment sink in; soothe the edges of her nerves before telling him her reason for coming here tonight. Even to her own ears her words about murder, blackmail documents and missing computer files sounded melodramatic and surreal amidst all the homeliness. Bryan said nothing when she finished. She waited, sitting on the edge of an armchair, forearms resting on her thighs, hands held out to him palms facing upward.

'Say something,' she finally said. 'Just don't tell me you already knew about this.'

Bryan, who'd been sitting with his legs crossed, leaned forward suddenly. 'Of course I didn't.'

Dunai didn't believe him. 'Then why aren't you shocked? You don't even look surprised.'

He fixed her with a sad stare. 'That's because I'm not.' He sighed. 'I've always suspected Siobhan didn't play by the rules. There were too many things that didn't add up. Times we should've been

completely derailed but she managed to keep us on track; strengthen our position even.'

'But you said nothing.' Dunai didn't want to sound angry but she did.

Bryan held up a placating hand. 'No, I didn't keep quiet. I tried to bring it up on several occasions but you know Siobhan. She didn't like being questioned. I tried to speak to her... it must have been six months ago, but she questioned my loyalty to STOP. There was an argument. I didn't bring it up again. I suppose after that, every time something went inexplicably right for us, I convinced myself it was Siobhan magic.'

'Who the hell was she, Bryan? Can you tell me that?' Dunai swiped angry tears from her cheeks.

Bryan got to his feet, went to sit on the arm of her chair and put an arm around her shoulders. 'This changes nothing,' he said, vehemently. 'Siobhan was everything you knew her to be. Now you find out there's more, so what? How many people d'you know personally who'd sacrifice everything to fight for people they don't even know. Siobhan did that. Everyday of her life. It was never about money or personal recognition for her. That's a rare gem, Dunai.'

But she felt deeply disappointed. Bryan had a strict code of ethics and she'd never known him to compromise.

'Do you really believe that because you're fighting the good fight you can resort to blackmail?'

'If you look at it from Siobhan's point of view, how long d'you watch people self-destruct before at least feeling the need to do something drastic? No, she shouldn't have broken the law but I understand why she did it. You know she had no compartments in her life; she was always an activist. Never switched off. It's why she accomplished so much, and probably what pushed her to the point she thought blackmail was the only way she could move the project forward and make a difference.

'The last time I tried to get her to tell me what she was up to she asked if I'd intervene if Amy or May tried to commit suicide. I said, of course I would. She said society had decided it had the right to

intervene in such cases, whether it meant drugging the suicidal or incarcerating them in institutions. So why were people like herself expected to stand by while humanity slowly but surely committed mass suicide?’

‘Intellectually I understand the argument, Bryan, but I can’t believe her actions were justified under any circumstances. It begins with blackmail then where is the line eventually drawn? And who decides?’ She shook her head, trying to dislodge the overwhelming feeling of disorientation that had settled around her that afternoon on Siobhan’s living room carpet. ‘All this time I thought I knew who she was, what she stood for...’

‘She loved you, Dunai. She admired the woman you are and the woman she knew you’d become; you can be absolutely sure of that. She did what she had to do and that was between herself and her conscience, but it changes nothing about your relationship with her.’

Dunai felt his arm around her shoulders tense. ‘You aren’t going to the police with this?’

She said nothing.

‘Dunai?’

‘What if she was murdered by one of the people blackmailing her, like Dan Cowley? He was there the night she was killed.’

‘I want you to think very carefully about what you’re going to do,’ Bryan said, and Dunai recognised the slow, patient tone he’d use when teaching her the more complicated aspects of her job, or explaining some statistical axiom.

‘Going to the police will destroy Siobhan’s reputation and it’ll have serious repercussions for STOP. More than likely shut us down. Everything we’ve worked for, gone. Nothing we do can bring her back, but think about what she would have wanted us to do: go to the police with information about someone who might have murdered her, an action that will most definitely destroy her life’s work, or use our energy getting government to adopt the STOP model and bring her life’s work to fruition?’

‘I know, I know, Bryan. Believe me, I’ve gone over it again and again; all the scenarios, all the possibilities. It’s just all so damn *crazy. Shit!*’

He nodded. 'We're all flawed, Dunai. I've felt driven to do things I'm not proud of, you probably will too one day, but despite this our lives can count for something. We still can make a difference. Siobhan believed this. I believe it. So think long and hard before you potentially destroy all the good we've done to right this wrong. If going to the police is eventually what your conscience dictates, I'll be right next to you in that charge desk. Just give me some warning, okay?'

'Of course I will,' Dunai said and reached for his hand.

She tried to think what Siobhan would say if she were here with them. She willed herself to hear her voice in the small room, 'Always plan for first prize, Dunai.' No, Bryan was right, she couldn't go to the police. She had to work for first prize, which was finding Siobhan's murderer while keeping her work and reputation intact. After all it was nothing short of the way her mentor had lived every one of her forty-eight years.

NINE

IT WAS DARK when Dunai set out at six the next morning as if even the moon, disapproving of her plan, had turned her face away. It wasn't that she was unaware of how risky her actions were. She'd questioned her sanity every time she'd woken during the night, but she couldn't think of another way to find Mr Bojangles other than to mount a search before the streets began to stir.

Her preparation included jeans, running shoes and a meat mallet in her coat pocket. It wasn't comfortable; it weighted her down on one side, but it was comforting. She'd first reached for a knife then discarded it. She didn't have what it takes to stab someone. Bludgeoning she'd already tried and it seemed okay to her as a means of self-defence.

Greenmarket Square was the starting point, torch in one hand, mallet in the other. Street sleepers were rolled into blankets, plastic, cardboard and newspaper like garbage in a city trash can.

She passed the torch beam over one group then another, her calls and nudges ignored or met with curses, and a couple of growls from sleepy dogs. If a bundle ignored her, she'd lift the edge of a blanket with her torch or nudge the mass with her shoe until she got a reaction. Mr Bojangles was nowhere to be found.

Almost every weekday for two years she'd come across the old man in the square, ready to remind her of morning coffee. Was it coincidence she couldn't find him the day after he might have seen Siobhan's killer? But there was no reason to harm him no matter what he'd seen. Nobody would believe him anyway. She'd keep searching.

She left Greenmarket Square and began combing the surrounding streets, shocked at the number of people sleeping outside. They were dotted all over the place during the day but in

the dark some areas looked like refugee camps as they huddled together for safety and warmth.

With still no sign of Mr Bojangles she headed for Cape Town Railway Station where she knew many of the homeless slept at night. She'd seen them hanging around in the evenings; waiting to claim back their spot.

During the day the Strand Street side of Cape Town Station was a grassroots version of the African Union. About twenty meters of sandwiched-together stalls sold everything from clothes and hair braiding to illegal telephone calls in English, Xhosa, French, Portuguese, Hausa and Shona. Soldiers of the Salvation Army offered prayers and blessings while volunteers from one charity or another gave out aid from trays piled high with sandwiches. At this time of morning the bustling stalls had vanished and the bodies of men, women and children filled the ramp to Strand Street.

Carefully, she picked her way through them, trying not to stand on limbs or shine the torch into anyone's eyes. Half way down the ramp she felt eyes boring into her back, turned slowly and shone her torch in that direction. She was being watched by a young man who had raised himself on an elbow. His dark face showed only the whites of his eyes. She saw the flash of white teeth and her heart froze, fingers tightening around the mallet, slick against the smooth metal. She gripped it tighter, slowly drawing it from her pocket. Shaking almost uncontrollably, she let the beam of light play over the metal. The show of weaponry seemed to work. He kept watching her, but made no move to get to his feet. She backed away and began to move towards the underground mall beneath Adderley and Strand.

Dunai had deliberately avoided the underground, keeping to the open, lit streets. Now the further down the ramp she moved, the more hemmed-in she felt. The public toilets and a fish and chips shop rose to her left and an eight-meter-high rockery soared to her right, blocking out the sky and any hope of being heard if she got into trouble. The smell of urine and burning plastic seared her nostrils, and behind the rocks and shrubs, flickering flames of at least a half dozen fires gave no comfort at all.

She was at the bottom of the ramp when something slithered into her path. Dunai stared in horror at the woman whose legs were missing below the knee, stumps covered with plastic bags.

'You give me money. Give me, give me,' the woman said, wagging one of her stumps at her.

'I'm looking for Mr Bojangles. He wears a navy blue cap with "I love Cape Town" in red,' she blurted.

The legless woman threw back her head and laughed, mouth wide-open, teeth rotten, breath heavy with alcohol. The laugh cut off suddenly as she slithered forward with remarkable speed. Dunai jumped back and turned to run. A voice said, 'This way. To the right.'

The words were sober, rational, so she obeyed. As she rounded the corner of the rockery, she came across a woman of about her own age wearing a dark turban, an infant sucking at her breast. This section of ramp in front of the lawns of Cape Town Station wasn't nearly as crowded. There were more children here and many couples, as if this had become a family quarters. Dunai stopped in front of the woman just long enough to thank her.

'Wait,' the woman said. Dunai turned but made no move forward.

'I haven't seen the man you call Mr Bojangles since yesterday.'

Dunai stepped closer, lowered her voice. 'D'you know where I could look for him?'

The woman shrugged. 'Shelters, day clinics, the chop shop.'

'Chop shop?'

'The morgue. 'specially this time of year.'

Dunai nodded, thanked the woman, started to leave then turned back. 'I wish I had something to give you but I left all my valuables at home.'

The woman nodded, then turned her attention to her infant; detaching the small mouth from her nipple and shifting the baby to her other breast.

The sky over Greenmarket Square began to lighten at seven-thirty. She'd been walking the streets for an hour and a half, her feet hurt and she was hungry. She did one more circuit of the square before heading for the office.

CARL LAMBRECHT HAD another irritating habit: he was a late-riser. Dunai, who had never slept past eight in her life, found this widespread habit inexplicable. It was just after ten when she finally found the safety gate unlocked and Carl in his office.

'What are your hours?' she demanded.

Carl looked up from where he'd been draping his jacket over the back of the chair. 'What can I do for you, Dunai?'

'I've been waiting all morning to show you something.'

'Ja,' he said, without any interest at all.

He watched her take the folded pages from the pockets of her jeans; the right then the left, and spread them on the desk. She reached for the rest under her body-warmer.

'Looks like it's going to take a while,' Carl said. 'I'll get us coffee,' and he left the office.

By the time he came back with two steaming cups, she'd smoothed out the pages and placed thirteen neat piles on the desk in front of his chair. She accepted the coffee with a tense, 'Thanks,' and sat down as he took his seat. She leaned forward when he picked up his mug. Their eyes met over the rim. Dunai stared back, this time with confidence. Unlike their previous encounter, this morning she had the upper hand. She'd swear there was no way he'd expected her to come up with any motive at all, never mind thirteen in two days.

Carl seemed to sense her excitement. He frowned slightly, placed his mug on the desk and began to read the sheets in front of him. She was almost finished her coffee when he said, 'Shit,' and sat back in his chair.

'There's more.' She told him about the missing computer files and Mr Bojangles, but kept her encounter with the amazon to herself until she had some idea of what Siobhan had been involved in.

He picked up one of the sheets. 'Gives Cowley motive and places him at the scene.'

'Except he'd left the building by seven-thirty while Siobhan was still alive.'

'He could've come back,' Carl mused.

'But why draw attention to himself by coming to see her if he intended killing her?'

'If he didn't intend killing her. His earlier visit could've been an attempt to get her to stop blackmailing him. When she refuses he feels he has no choice but to kill her. Since he's been seen entering the building he can't do it then, so leaves, makes sure somebody witnesses him leaving, then comes back later. Maybe Siobhan told him to get out, she had a lot of work to do, and he guessed she'd be working late.'

'The police believe him,' Dunai said. 'He's a religious man, pillar of the community. Without this motive,' she said, motioning towards the stack of papers, 'they have no reason to doubt his story.'

'So,' Carl said, tapping the desk, 'you need to decide if you want to take all this to the police.'

Dunai said nothing. Her reasoning and resolve after the conversation with Bryan the night before were still fresh in her mind. If she took the blackmail notes to the police it would ruin Siobhan's reputation and kill every goal she'd worked towards, and they were so close.

Carl sipped his coffee, watching her over the rim.

'It seems the National Intelligence Agency are encouraging the police to treat Siobhan's murder as a burglary gone wrong,' Dunai reasoned, 'and we still have no idea why that is. What if we rush off to the police with the blackmail motive only to have them believe Cowley's story anyway? This doesn't change the fact that he was seen leaving the building; the door was locked behind him while Siobhan was still alive.'

'He could've got hold of a key,' Carl said, 'but waited downstairs for someone to let him out so he'd be seen leaving the building.'

Dunai shrugged. 'Maybe we should find that out before we go to the police. Gather more information so we have something concrete. If we find some definite way of linking him to the crime we might not have to bring out all the blackmail documents and ruin Siobhan's reputation in the process.'

Carl's smile annoyed her. She was probably being too touchy but now was as good a time as any to clear the air.

'Just so you know, when you grin like that it comes across as condescending. I might be using clichés, but all I have right now to draw on are TV shows and detective novels.'

Carl held up his hands in a don't-shoot gesture.

'Does this mean you'll help me?'

'That was the deal.'

Dunai smiled with relief; Carl did not return the gesture.

'Don't get too happy,' he said. 'We're not even close. This could take months of hard work and it would have to be handled carefully. As you pointed out, we're dealing with pillars of the community. And Cowley might have been telling the truth.'

'Each one of these people had motive.'

'But you have no evidence linking them to the crime.'

'So where do we start?' she asked with genuine humility.

'Post-mortem. You can't take anything for granted till you know exactly how she was killed and time of death has been confirmed. I'll find out if it's been done,' he said, his voice gentler now, 'and what's in the report. I don't expect you to do that. We'll start when the memorial's over.'

'It's tomorrow,' Dunai said.

He nodded. 'I've been asking some questions and it seems the NIA is unofficially involved.'

'What does that mean; unofficially?'

He massaged his unshaven jaw. 'Usually means their involvement is part of an ongoing operation; a delicate one.'

'I still don't understand what that means,' she said. 'For all we know it could be nothing more than something that overlaps one of Siobhan's projects or one of her contacts. It might have nothing to do with her.'

'First tip, Dunai; this is a line of work that demands enormous patience.'

'You be patient, I'll move things along.'

Carl looked at her; there was no challenge in his gaze. He was assessing her.

'About twenty percent of murder cases are referred to court,' he said. 'That means out of the average 19,000 murders in this country

each year, around 4,000 get to court while 15,000 go unsolved. Another thing; keep looking for Mr Bojangles, but take someone with you next time you decide to do it in the dark. Just keep in mind that although he might be able to give you some information, he'd be crap as a witness.

'Our job is to gather enough evidence for the police to do their job; to catch the perpetrator and send him to court with solid, backing evidence that'll lead to a conviction. That isn't going to include a schizophrenic vagrant called Mr Bojangles.'

'Point taken,' Dunai said.

'We'll start contacting these suspects day after tomorrow. I'll make copies of these.' He began to collect the sheets.

'I already have,' Dunai said. 'They're in a safe place, separate from the flash drive.'

Carl smiled slightly as he finished putting the sheets into a pile. 'I think you're catching on.' And this time she decided to take it as a compliment.

TEN

SIOBHAN'S MEMORIAL SERVICE was held in Silvermine Nature Reserve the morning Philippe arrived from France. Siobhan had never spoken of family and Dunai had known better than to ask, so it was Philippe who carefully cradled the wooden box of ashes in his arms.

Many activists, and some friends, gathered on the banks of a small stream, to pay tribute to her courage, altruism and honesty. Dunai noticed Carl Lambrecht standing at the edge of the crowd.

Once, after a brainstorming session in the forest, Siobhan had grabbed Dunai's hand once Bryan had left and pulled her to her feet. 'I want to show you something,' she'd said, and she'd brought her to this small stream.

'When I was a child we tucked our skirts into our panties and caught tadpoles we had to put back before we left. I was happy here.' Siobhan said, a sad smile on her face; and the wind had tugged at her hair as if exhorting her to wade once more into the stream and lose herself in play.

Now her body had been brought back to where she had once been innocent and happy and Dunai's heart surged with the rightness of it despite all her doubts and unanswered questions.

They read the poems of Ingrid Jonker, Mongane Serote and Tatamkhulu Africa, while Dunai looked at the faces in the crowd. Was she the only one in this gathering who knew there was another side to Siobhan: of secrecy and deception?

She found herself unable to cry. Even when Philippe stepped to the water's edge and opened the wooden box, she was strangely unmoved at the tears spilling down his cheeks as he tipped the box over the stream and the powdery remains were caught by the breeze and scattered, coming to settle on the water's smooth surface.

Along with this knowledge of Siobhan, had come a new burden of responsibility, now settled on her shoulders. Whatever Siobhan had been, whatever she'd struggled with, Dunai had loved her, and she felt certain that it was not over yet. Their relationship was as it had always been; Siobhan would continue to lead and Dunai would for now follow wherever that took her.

THE WILL WAS read by Siobhan's lawyer, Graham Shapiro, at his office in the city centre. He wore his usual chinos, open-necked shirt and corduroy jacket, and had made only one concession to the formality of the occasion: his thick, dark shoulder-length hair was pulled into a ponytail.

Graham had been one of Siobhan's closest friends on whom she'd relied enormously; his advice and intervention had got her out of trouble, jail cells and other tight spots over the years. Perhaps because of their long friendship he'd chosen to read the will in his cluttered office rather than one of the formal interview rooms.

Warm afternoon sun streamed in between the vertical blinds and turned strips of the tan carpet gold. Graham's voice was deep and melodious. Dunai fixed her eyes on his face, watched his mouth move, tried to concentrate on what he was saying.

The running and directorship of STOP was now in Bryan's and Philippe's hands. The legalities seemed endless. What little cash she'd had was left to various charities. She had given her flat to Philippe, its furniture, appliances and artworks, except the dunai, which was to go to its namesake along with the contents of Siobhan's cupboards and her personal effects. 'Title Deed to the house in Chiappini Street,' Graham continued, 'is to be transferred to Dunai Marks.'

Dunai felt as if she'd been jabbed with a cattle prod. 'But I...' she began, then stopped. Again, this was all wrong. 'The house in Chiappini Street doesn't belong to Siobhan; it's owned by a friend overseas who charged low rent for a trustworthy tenant. She told me that.'

They were all looking at her. She looked to Bryan who also seemed confused but shook his head and shrugged at her unasked question.

'The house has been Siobhan's since,' Graham rifled through papers on his desk. 'Since '94.' He smiled at her, mistaking her turmoil for surprise at becoming the owner of a house in one of Cape Town's most sought-after areas.

As soon as Graham finished the reading, she excused herself and rushed out of the building, walking aimlessly through the streets, mind stumbling through the last two years of her life, searching for something, anything that would make sense of it all.

Of course she was surprised the house had been left to her, but more surprised Siobhan had lied to her, made up a story about the overseas owner. Siobhan had deliberately downplayed her involvement in Dunai's life. And what of their meeting? Had that been the happy coincidence she'd thought it to be? Now as she ran through it again it seemed ludicrous that having witnessed her sacking, a complete stranger would rush after her and offer her a job as her assistant; a position that demanded enormous sensitivity and discretion.

The more she thought about the last two years, the more she was pulled back into the past; to the very beginning. She had been abandoned at St Mark's when she was about a month old. It had been October 1977. Siobhan would have been twenty-one then; young, desperate and on the run from the apartheid security police. Dunai knew she'd slipped out of the country and gone into exile in late '77. Perhaps she'd dumped her baby at St Mark's before taking off and the statue of the dunai she'd had all those years before they'd met had been kept as a reminder of the baby she'd left at an orphanage with nothing but a scrap of paper and the word 'Dunai' scrawled across it.

She couldn't believe she'd never seen it before. It seemed so damned obvious now.

Dunai hurried across Greenmarket Square; into the building and up the stairs. Philippe was in Siobhan's office, her diary spread out in front of him. Large black hands caressed the pages covered in her

handwriting as if he could in this way make contact with the woman he'd loved most of his adult life who was now out of reach forever. He looked up as Dunai rushed in.

'You, okay?' He rose from the chair.

'No, I'm not, Philippe.'

He came round the desk and pushed her gently into one of the visitor's chairs, sat and took her hands in his. 'This is not easy to deal with,' he said, eyes gleaming with unshed tears.

Dunai pulled her hands from his. 'Oh, dealing with it is bad enough. But what I can't cope with is the aftermath; the fallout of Siobhan's life.'

'Tell me,' he said, and the command reminded Dunai she sat beside one of the world's most formidable environmental activists.

'The house, her personal effects; she had other female friends but she left it to me, and she lied about the house. I don't believe our meeting was coincidence either. I think she was keeping an eye on me then intervened just at the right time; when I'd lost my job and had a three-month-old baby to look after.'

Philippe nodded, patted her hand, then sat back in the chair, raising his arms above his head and flexing biceps then triceps. 'Hmm,' he said.

'So you've also wondered.'

'Not until you said this. There is so much to be dealt with.' He waved his hand towards the desk strewn with administrative detritus.

Dunai felt a moment's guilt but pushed it aside. 'What about her background, Philippe? Her family. Everyone has family. So where are they and why did she refuse to talk about them? She must have told you something.'

Philippe shrugged then shook his head. 'No, Dunai. We saw so little of each other. When we were together... It was a passionate liaison, and there was always so much to talk about; our work, so important to us.'

'But didn't you find it strange that you knew nothing about her family? She was your wife, Philippe.'

'Let me explain,' he said. 'When I was a baby my mother left Benin for Marseilles. Life was hard and it was common for people to lose family they left behind. I went back to West Africa in my twenties. Found my mother's father, an old man, but my father was gone a long time and I have never found him. I do not even know what he looks like or if he is alive.'

'I'm sorry, Philippe,' she said, 'but South Africa isn't West Africa. People don't just lose their families here.'

'Not anymore,' he said, reminding her of apartheid. 'But you must believe me, she said nothing about them; only that she had changed her family name.'

Dunai shook her head; her hands were bunched into fists. 'What do I do now? I can't ask her. All I want is to know if she was my mother.'

'You are the same height, have the same build,' Philippe said. 'It is possible. Those were troubled times, Dunai; the seventies in South Africa. She has spoken of them to me, but not of her family and not of a baby. I am sorry. I don't know.'

They were silent for a while, then Philippe said, 'But of course you can have a DNA test.'

Dunai took a moment to digest this then nodded. 'Where do they do those?'

'Here? Sorry, don't know,' he said, shrugging massive shoulders.

'I think I know who to ask,' she said, jumping to her feet. She took Philippe's face in her hands and kissed his forehead. 'Thank you,' she said. 'I'm so sorry I've dumped all this on top of your grief.'

CARL WAS SLIPPING a file into a drawer of the fitment in his office, his back to the door when she rushed in.

'I need some advice.'

'Come right in,' he said, without turning.

'I need to know where a person can have a DNA test.'

Carl said nothing but his grey eyes contemplated her; she hated that. It made her uncomfortable.

'Well?'

'That depends.'

'What do you mean, "that depends"?'

'Who wants the test done?'

'Me.'

Carl was all business when he said, 'Take a seat.'

Thankfully he asked no further questions. 'I've got a contact at Wynberg Military Base.' He scribbled a name on a piece of paper and handed it to her. 'He's a pathologist. Ask for him at Two Military Hospital. He'll get you the results quickly.'

Dunai's shoulders sagged with relief. 'Thank you, Carl, I appreciate this. And thanks for coming to Siobhan's memorial. I'll see you tomorrow morning at eight,' she said, jumping to her feet and rushing from the office.

ELEVEN

SHE'D THROWN A Punky Fish cardigan over a long-sleeved t-shirt after Jesse had wiped his porridge-mouth on her in Barbara's kitchen. She was too late to go home to change so it was the best she could do. The scrapes and bruises on her cheek had dulled to a yellow-beige that almost matched her camo pants.

'Next time,' Carl said, as she climbed into his four-wheel drive, 'don't be so obvious.'

He turned in his seat, looked pointedly at her trousers and touched a fingertip to her jaw below the scrapes and bruises, drawing it slowly to her chin. Her body reacted as if he'd lit a fuse in the pit of her stomach.

'Looks like you're ready to beat the shit out of the next person.'

Dunai jerked her head away. There was the insult about her budget-item clothing that stung, yes, but it was the way she'd physically reacted to him that had knocked her off balance for a moment. Carl Lambrecht was not her type, and she was sure she was not his either.

'We're here to find who murdered Siobhan. Other stuff doesn't come into it.' She turned her face away from him and fastened her seatbelt.

'Ever heard of a guy called Freud?'

'Skinny guy, glasses,' she nodded. 'Gets beaten up all the time by cousins, Chaos and Complexity.'

She turned her head just in time to catch a hint of amusement in his eyes but there wasn't a trace of humour in his voice when he said, 'We might have to interview suspects today and you never wear anything resembling combat gear to interviews.'

Dunai didn't tell him what a struggle it was to keep herself and a toddler in clothes on her salary, or that she'd put on the camo

trousers because they made her feel comfortable and all the pockets meant she didn't have to cart a handbag into interviews with suspects.

Carl spoke again for the first time when they'd cleared the parking garage. 'I've got the results of the post mortem.'

Her head turned in his direction.

'There's nothing in it that'll help us.'

'Can you tell me anyway?'

'Okay. Siobhan died as a result of asphyxia caused by manual strangulation. From bruising of the soft tissue the assailant wore gloves and from the position of the bruises, he was probably male.'

'There were gouges all over her neck.'

'They were downward wounds made by her own nails when she tried to relieve the pressure around her throat.'

Don't think about Siobhan, Dunai told herself, concentrate on the facts. 'What about other evidence? They dusted light bulbs and everything else.'

They'd stopped at a traffic light. Street children, aged maybe four to ten, appeared at the window with Coke cans held out for spare change. Carl ferreted under the dashboard, wound down his window and dropped a few coins into the nearest can. The light changed and they drove on.

'Forensic investigation doesn't happen the way you see it on TV,' he said. 'There's a shortage of forensic scientists and equipment, labs take an average six months to analyse DNA, evidence corrupts easily and even when it doesn't, results can be inconclusive or open to interpretation.'

'So you're saying all that prodding and poking was useless. Why send in those people then?'

'Because it can be effective in some circumstances,' Carl said. 'And victims' families can pay for private forensic analysis if they can afford it.'

'But it's useless in our case.'

'I'm afraid so. They collected a large number of samples from an office that hadn't been cleaned in a while.'

'Siobhan was busy preparing the presentation to government,' Dunai said. 'She didn't want to be disturbed other than to empty her bin.'

'Since the person wore gloves and there were no prints on the passage light bulbs that had been tampered with, they'll run the samples but don't expect to find anything. They're not even going to try to process the DNA samples.'

'I still don't understand why,' Dunai said. 'Even if he wore gloves, what about hair and stuff?'

'There's nothing to compare the hundreds of DNA samples to other than Siobhan, you, Bryan and your cleaning lady so analysis and cataloguing would take hundreds of hours, cost the taxpayer a bomb and probably cough up nothing. The reason we're off to do some solid detective work.'

'D'you think Van Reenen's going to be any help?'

'He's a good detective.' Carl sounded defensive. 'But he probably has upwards of forty open murder dockets on his desk at any given time; it's almost impossible to work effectively with more than four. And he works alone; not like in other countries where an entire team is appointed to a murder.'

'I'm surprised they solve anything then.'

'That's where dedication comes in,' Carl said as they turned onto the N2 and headed away from Cape Town's CBD towards Khayelitsha.

The single largest township in the country covered forty-seven square kilometres; a montage of squalid shacks, suburban homes, shopping centres, clinics and brightly painted recreation centres. New fire and police stations, churches and post offices popped up all the time to serve the fastest growing township in the country. Its mostly tarred roads were clogged with mini-bus taxis, tour buses, rattletrap cars held together with rope and tape, fresh-off-the-showroom-floor sedans, and exhausted ponies pulling heavy loads. Most residents had access to electricity, toilets and fresh water, though not all, and goats, sheep, chickens, pigs and cows foraged on rubbish dumps before they were slaughtered roadside or in back yards.

Khayelitsha – Xhosa for ‘new home’ – housed one and half million residents. It was home to half the city’s unemployed and had a notoriously high crime rate. Born of a colonial society’s desire for cheap black labour, it had re-defined itself in a democracy as a place of artists, craftspeople, actors and musicians, criminals, gangs, syndicates and all the people who fitted somewhere in between: the housewives, artisans, blue collar and office workers, students, company directors and entrepreneurial millionaires.

The township had been a second home to Siobhan and it was here Dunai sensed her, even more than in her flat in Queen Victoria Street.

Ten minutes after entering Khayelitsha they stopped at a large intersection and kept their windows rolled up against the steady stream of begging children, sellers of refuse bags, coat hangers, finely crafted beadwork and photocopied ‘jokes for change’. They turned left just beyond the new HIV clinic that had been set up by *Médecins Sans Frontières* to serve more than a thousand residents a day.

‘This is it.’ She indicated a large three-storey golden face-brick building behind a pre-cast wall topped with electric fencing and CCTVs.

Siobhan had got local graffiti artists to decorate the walls with colourful images and the words, ‘LESS CHILDREN MEANS MORE WEALTH. STOP poverty STOP illiteracy STOP crime STOP women and child abuse STOP destruction of the environment.’ Some of the images had been painted over in black with ‘STOP ABORTION’ and ‘STOP THE BITCH’. Although it happened regularly, the original artists were always happy to change and update their work.

Carl pulled up in front of the wrought-iron gates and swiped Dunai’s card through a slot beneath the intercom. The gates opened and they drove into the small parking area in front of the building.

Dunai had a brief chat to the security guard while they waited at the steel security door. There was a loud click, it swung open and they stepped inside.

Although the building was large, Siobhan had instructed that all rooms were kept small and intimate. The reception area was

furnished very much like a middle-class township living room with pink upholstered Imbuia chairs and sofas, crocheted and beaded cloths on coffee and side tables and idealistic pictures of rural Africa: trees, huts and grazing cattle, women draped in colourful cloth and plump, laughing children.

There were two women seated on chairs in the reception area; one crying softly, the other with a recently stitched gash across her forehead and an eye swollen shut. A third woman, on a sofa, had a toddler sleeping on her lap and a young boy pressed to her side, sucking his thumb and staring dead ahead without blinking.

Women were usually never kept waiting at reception but Monday was a busy day. Rapes and beatings tended to go through the roof at weekends.

Dunai spoke briefly to staff that could spare a few moments then led Carl along a passage and unlocked the door to Siobhan's office. It was cramped and messy, stuffed with chairs, books and periodicals, files, folders, a fire extinguisher and first aid kit, and handmade gifts of every description.

'And I thought I was challenged in the housekeeping department,' Carl said, looking around him. 'You take the computer. I'll start with the desk. You got keys for those cabinets?'

Dunai gave them to him. She moved a life-size rooster made of plastic bags off the seat then turned on the computer.

Just as Siobhan rarely threw anything away, she hardly ever deleted anything from her computer. Dunai restricted herself to emails received in the last month, keeping an eye out for any of their suspects' names. There was nothing. Next she did a network search of folders, files and content containing the word *Ubuntu*. There was one folder of that name and it contained a single email, subject, 'Shame on you.' Dunai opened it.

It was an electronic card featuring Itchy and Scratchy from *The Simpsons*. It said, 'Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice... watch out for my tool.' And the demented cat began stabbing the mouse in the eyes then hacking at his chest with a butcher's knife.

'Shit,' Dunai said.

Carl bent over her shoulder. 'We can rule out poets.'

'This is a death threat.'

'Who's it from?'

'Info@wcpa.gov.za.'

'Western Cape Provincial Administration,' Carl said, snatching the blackmail list from the desk and searching through the names. 'Wayne Daniels, Western Cape Provincial Administration.'

'Sending something like this is a bit stupid, isn't it?'

Carl shrugged. 'It would be difficult to prove it came from him – it isn't sent from a personal account and even though it looks like he was threatening her, Siobhan was blackmailing him so I don't think she'd have shown it to anyone.'

'Still; why risk something like this when you're planning to murder someone?'

'If at the time you're not planning to murder them. From the wording it looks as if he was trying to warn her off blackmailing him a second time, which from her records we know she had no intention of doing. Or if the murder's made to look like a burglary so there's no call for the police to spend hours trawling through someone's computer.'

'So Wayne Daniels joins Dan Cowley on the list of people we definitely want to speak to.' Dunai kept her voice light but she was sickened by the implicit violence aimed at Siobhan.

'First we call everyone on the list; get alibis, confirm them then interview the people who don't check out. I'll set up interviews with Daniels and Cowley then do a couple of calls so you get a feel for how it's done.'

Dunai bombed out on her first call, getting far too heated when Siobhan's name met with abuse. Carl was obviously annoyed with her.

'You wanted to learn so here's a lesson,' he said as she replaced the receiver. 'Self-control in a situation like that is not optional.' He collected the list and headed for the door. Dunai took her time turning off the computer, locking the office and saying good-bye to staff.

The lesson continued in the car. 'There's a difference between an interview and interrogation. Gently does it in an interview. You're

after information and to learn as much about the subject as you can. So you listen and let them do the talking.'

'You were aggressive with one of the people you called.'

'Even if I hadn't known courtesy of Siobhan that the person I was speaking to was from a privileged background, I picked it up from her speech and accent. Someone from an affluent background is usually sheltered and less likely to be able to handle social aggression. Sure, sometimes it's good to shake things up, but it's not the same as alienating the subject.'

Dunai said nothing. As much as she hated to admit it she was impressed.

'Here's a list of reading I want you to do,' he said, coming to a stop at a traffic light and pulling a piece of paper from his pocket.

'First I want you to read is *Interview & Interrogation Techniques*.'

Dunai looked away from the sheet to his hands on the steering wheel. Long fingers with a fine covering of light-brown hair, short nails showing a few white specks. She imagined them on her body, cupping her breasts, a thumb across her nipple. Shit! She tore her eyes from the steering wheel and stared out the window.

'Don't ever do that again,' Carl said and for one horrible moment she thought he'd read her mind. 'If you want to learn, keep quiet, observe and listen,' he said, oblivious to what was going on in the seat beside him.

Dunai let out a slow breath, said nothing. She felt a little chastened, probably because she'd never been very good at self-delusion and she did think she'd treated Carl harshly. He wasn't charging for his help and advice and he was taking his role as teacher seriously. Perhaps there was more to learn from Carl Lambrecht than she'd originally thought.

When she arrived at the office, she asked Philippe if he'd call the police for an update, but his conversation with Van Reenen was depressingly brief and he shook his head as he replaced the receiver.

'There is nothing new to report. He says evidence is pointing to burglary. In six months two people in this building have lost their keys and another one mugged; so it was not difficult to get inside,' he said sadly.

Dunai glanced over at Bryan who shook his head, guessing no doubt that she was about to tell Philippe about the blackmail documents. She was also dying to tell them both about Carl's investigation. She felt guilty keeping something so important to herself but she didn't want to worry them and she didn't want anyone trying to talk her out of it either. She'd leave them to concentrate on STOP and the presentation to government then let them know about the investigation when she and Carl made a breakthrough.

TWELVE

CARL CAME TO fetch Dunai at seven-fifteen the next morning. She was waiting on the stoep wrapped in her dark-blue duffel coat. It was cold but clear with blue sky and no sign of rain.

Carl's four-wheel drive smelled of fast food and Dunai noticed a wrapper on the dashboard. 'You shouldn't eat that stuff,' she said. 'Even Jesse knows that.'

'I'm a big boy, I can handle it.'

'Those white specks on your nails? Zinc deficiency. You tried pumpkin seeds?'

'Yugh,' Carl said, pulling a face. 'But that's a good observation, Detective Marks, and thank you for your concern.'

'You do know that fast food companies torture and kill billions of animals every year and enormous herds fart methane gas into the atmosphere, literally blowing a hole in the ozone. Natural habitats are destroyed to produce protein in the most inefficient way possible while global hunger worsens because poor countries use their land to grow fodder to feed the meat-eating habits of those who have more than enough to eat already.'

Carl frowned at her. 'I ever tell you the story about Mr Fourie's hot air balloon? No? Well. It was attacked by two Black Eagles over my uncle's farm in Matroosberg. The old man actually survived the fall but the balloon didn't. I never heard so much hot air expelled in one go until now.'

'That's rude, you know.'

'So is criticising someone's eating habits.'

Carl seemed genuinely disgusted with her, which didn't faze her at all. He didn't say another word till they'd left the city and harbour behind them and were speeding along the incline of the N2. Only then did he bring up the reason for this morning's excursion.

'What's your research turned up on our primary suspect?'

'He's a sick bastard.'

'Facts, Dunai.'

'Okay. Dan Cowley's a sick bastard and that's a fact.'

Carl's expression was indecipherable, before he turned back to the road.

She pulled a notebook from her pocket, turned back a few pages and read. 'Son of a prominent apartheid judge. Went to two of the most expensive public schools in the country. Was an average student but excelled at team sports. Graduated from the University of Cape Town with a degree in commerce. Made a fortune in property development. Married; two children, a boy and girl, and head of the South African chapter of Men of The Covenant.'

'So what makes him a sick bastard?'

'How much d'you know about Men of The Covenant?'

'A bunch of men who meet in stadiums and hug and kiss a lot.'

'Yet remain resolutely homophobic,' Dunai added. She flipped another page. 'Men of The Covenant is an American organisation that promotes a particularly nasty brand of bigotry with an annual income of about 500-million dollars and some 10 million members worldwide.'

Carl moved into the right lane that took them onto the M3 just beyond what locals called 'hospital bend' that ran alongside Groote Schuur Hospital. There was a spot along the freeway where the metal barrier had always been buckled and scraped before they'd widened the freeway and improved the barrier in time for the FIFA World Cup.

Beside this curve of road was one of the most beautiful scenes in the world: a wide, shallow valley covered by long grass the colour of gold in summer, short and green in winter. Copses of umbrella pines dotted the landscape which drew the eyes upward to the towering summit of Devil's Peak framed more often than not by an impossibly blue sky. The peak was joined to Table Mountain, which boasted more plant species than the entire British Isles. Metres from the freeway fence a herd of quasi-quaggas, part of a programme to re-breed the extinct cousin of the zebra, grazed in the morning

sunshine. Two Cape Grysbok sprinted close to the fence and a herd of wildebeest grazed further up the valley. It was probably the last thing tourists expected to see just around the bend from the city.

'Anything else?' Carl asked.

Dunai tore her eyes from the scenery and took a thick square of paper from her pocket. 'Men of the Covenant is built on the belief that chaos in society is caused by rejecting traditional gender roles. They believe women are being allowed to influence men, turning them into sissies and throwing households, communities and entire nations into crisis. Why are you smiling?'

'I can't believe anyone would take this crap seriously.'

'They even encourage men,' Dunai went on, 'to take back their place as leader of their families.'

She glanced up at the mountain as they went by, to the Grecian temple-like structure built in memory of Cecil John Rhodes who'd once owned this land that was now part of the Table Mountain National Park stretching sixty kilometres from Signal Hill in the city to Cape Point in the south. She remembered from school trips that the lion sculptures on the memorial were exact copies of those in Trafalgar Square and she thought she could just make out the horse statue 'energy', created by Isaac Watts as a copy of a statue in London's Hyde Park.

Dunai went back to her notepad. 'Consensus is the organisation teaches men to honour their wives and children but uses its narrow interpretation of the Bible to promote racism, homophobia, patriarchalism and misogyny. They publicly state that women were created for men, gays are stark, raving mad and abortion is a second Civil War and listen to this: "Slavery was redemptive because it taught black people to be slaves of God." That's a direct quote.'

'Bunch of kooks.'

'Dangerous bunch of kooks,' Dunai said. 'In the US, a leader shouted to a stadium packed with men about to march to Washington, "We will confront those who undermine God's truth whether in schools or legislatures. We will not restrain ourselves when it comes to public policy." It's been reported that men have been organised into about ten thousand small squads, some of them

inside the US Armed Forces, for what they refer to as “war” and they’ve stated that they will fulfil the Bible’s prophecy of a great force that will destroy sinners and infidels in the period preceding Armageddon.’

‘Siobhan must have loved busting this guy’s balls,’ Carl said as he took the Bishops court turnoff.

‘And I’d like to bust what’s left of them.’

‘Which you will not do under any circumstances.’

Like hell, Dunai thought, but she said nothing.

‘Dunai?’

She realised she was clenching her jaw and tried to relax.

‘I want you to promise you’ll let me handle this; that you’ll say or do nothing to jeopardise this interview. Give me your word or I’ll leave you in the car.’

‘Shit! Why don’t you join Men of The Covenant while you’re at it.’

Carl said nothing. Dunai sighed. ‘Okay, I promise.’

‘Thank you. So to sum up, we know the guy has a need to control and manipulate, and he uses institutionalised rules and regulations to do this. He’s fearful, intolerant and more than likely has a lifelong pattern of refusing to take responsibility for his actions.

‘If he was involved in Siobhan’s death, we’re going to have to stay calm and non-confrontational to get him to slip up. You’re doing this for Siobhan; keep that in mind.’

Dunai had never thought the day would come when she was impressed with Carl Lambrecht, but here it was, and so soon.

Cowley’s home was a three-storey mansion of cream paint, stone quoins and Corinthian columns.

‘The man’s built a bloody temple to himself,’ she observed.

They were met at the door by a painfully thin woman who introduced herself as Annette Cowley. Blonde puffed up and blow-dried hair, and thick carefully applied make-up gave her the appearance of an American soap star.

‘Let me take your coats,’ she said reaching for Dunai’s.

‘It’s fine, Mrs Cowley, I’ll keep mine on.’

Carl said he’d do the same.

'Well, come through this way then,' she said, tapping across the hall in ridiculously high heels. 'Mr Cowley's going to see you in his study.'

As she led them down a wide passageway lined with family photographs – all posed, studio-portraits – she glanced over her shoulder. 'Can I get you guys something to drink? What would you like? Tea, coffee? Something hot. I don't think you'd want anything cold this morning. Am I right?'

Dunai and Carl glanced at each other and Dunai made big, startled eyes. Carl shook his head and turned his gaze once more to Annette Cowley's back.

'Coffee would be fine, Mrs Cowley,' he said.

'Oh, please! Call me Annette.'

'Annette it is,' Carl said.

'Whenever I hear Mrs Cowley I think of Mr Cowley's mother. That's my husband Mr Cowley, not his father of course. Ah, here we are.' She stopped at a carved oak door, knocked and waited. There was a cheerful call of, 'Come in.' She opened the door and poked her head inside. 'Dan, honey, Mr Lambrecht's here to see you.'

'Thanks, sweetness. Show him in.'

They stepped into Dan Cowley's study. Two of its walls, left and right, were covered in stone cladding and dotted with a row of brass candle sconces that reminded Dunai of the walls of a church. An enormous brass chandelier blazed from an unusually high ceiling even though heavy red drapes had been pulled either side French doors leading to a sunlit terrace.

Dan Cowley came towards them with outstretched hand. He was slightly shorter than Dunai, thin and wiry with brown hair that had begun to recede. His face was broad and strongly boned. A sudden image flashed into her mind of this man in the foyer of their building the night Siobhan was murdered. His palm was moist when he shook her hand and she pulled away as quickly as she could, fighting the urge to spit on her palm and rub it against her coat.

'Thank you for coming to see me,' he said, taking his seat behind an oversized cherry wood desk. 'Please have a seat.'

Cowley's figure was a silhouette against the light radiating off the white tiles of the terrace and Dunai's eyes watered as sunlight flashed across the surface of the highly polished desk. She wondered if he was trying to wrestle control of the meeting at the outset, not only by placing himself so it was difficult to see his facial expressions, but by inferring that it had been his idea to meet.

Carl was having none of it. 'I don't know how pleased you'll be at the end of the interview,' he said, lowering himself onto a red cushion on one of the ornately carved chairs. 'I've got some difficult questions to ask.'

Cowley nodded. 'I've already spoken to the police; a Detective-Inspector van Reenen if I remember correctly. I told him everything I know which I'm afraid is precious little.' He shifted in his seat and looked at Dunai. 'So how are you involved in all this, Miss...?'

'Ms Marks. I'm Siobhan Craig's protégé.'

Cowley stopped smiling and Carl jumped in. 'For clarity's sake, Mr Cowley, I am correct in assuming you didn't tell the police you were being blackmailed by Siobhan Craig?'

A moment of stunned silence. 'I really didn't see the necessity.'

'Well, you see, Mr Cowley,' Carl's voice sounded almost lazy and his accent was more pronounced. 'That's the thing about police work. When you're the last person to see a victim alive it really isn't up to you to decide what is and isn't necessary; that's the investigating officer's job.'

'Of course,' Cowley conceded, 'but something you must realise is this whole business came as an enormous shock to me. I had to make a split-second judgement call and since there were several reputations at stake I decided to keep my own council. It was never my intention to deceive.'

'But you do realise, Mr Cowley, you had motive to kill Siobhan?'

'Although provoked I didn't respond, Mr Lambrecht, I do assure you.'

'Despite the fact that you must have really hated her for what she put you through?'

Cowley smiled sadly. 'Hate, no. Pity, yes. You see, Mr Lambrecht, I believe that feminists are just frustrated women unable to find the

proper male leadership. If a woman were receiving the right kind of attention and leadership she wouldn't want to be liberated.'

Still smiling, he looked over at Dunai as if he actually expected her to agree with him. She opened her mouth but Carl grabbed her hand behind the desk and laced his fingers through hers. She was so taken aback by the feel of his digits sliding between her fingers that she clamped her mouth shut.

'So you claim to have harboured no ill feelings towards Siobhan.'

Cowley sat back in his chair. 'The Bible warns, Mr Lambrecht, that the evil among us will be cast down and shattered at the feet of the righteous.'

Carl still held Dunai's hand. She tried to pull away, but he squeezed it gently.

'Mr Cowley, we know that Siobhan was blackmailing you, but we're not sure what she was getting you to do.'

Cowley winced. 'All our activities throughout Khayelitsha had to stop immediately. She told me that if she so much as heard a whisper about Men of The Covenant she'd go public.'

'And if Siobhan went public your reputation would be destroyed wouldn't it, Mr Cowley? Not to mention what it would do to your father.'

'Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say destroyed. Damaged maybe, but not destroyed.'

Carl said nothing. He waited. And Dunai watched the man behind the desk squirm. She slipped her free hand across her lap to give a congratulatory pat to the back of Carl's hand and felt a fraction of tension leave her body for the first time since she'd walked into this house.

'I...,' Dan Cowley said. 'Men of The Covenant would understand that a son should not be held accountable for the sins of the father.'

'They might,' Carl conceded. 'But what about all those still to be converted? And can you imagine what feminist organisations would do with ammunition like that?'

'It was an accident,' Cowley blurted.

The sun had become less fierce outside thanks to a bit of cloud cover and Dunai watched his face redden.

'She was a prostitute. My father thought she was a decent woman. It was raining. He stopped to offer her a lift. She got into his car then started clawing at him, propositioning him. He tried to get her out of the car—'

'She was beaten to death.' Carl's voice was like ice. 'I remember the case, Mr Cowley. I'd just joined the force. The woman turned out to be a domestic worker on her way home from work, not a prostitute. She had four children waiting for her at home.'

'That was a lie!'

Carl raised his voice. 'Your father was a prominent apartheid judge. He had a nickname. What was it? "The hanging judge?" The crime was simple enough, but the case never got to court. General consensus was the security police hushed it—'

'She attacked him! All he did was defend himself—'

'Ah,' Carl said, his voice softening. 'But how would it look to others if it got out? You know what the media's like. They wouldn't stop till every skeleton had been dug up and every bone picked clean. Your father's still alive, isn't he? Who knows what retribution there'd be.'

The rise and fall of Cowley's chest had quickened. 'I didn't kill Siobhan Craig. As God is my witness, I didn't kill her.'

'Why did you go to see her the night she was killed?'

'You ever been blackmailed, Mr Lambrecht? I can tell you it isn't a pleasant experience. Khayelitsha's the country's fastest growing township. Questions were being asked. Members and committee wanting to know why Men of the Covenant wasn't trying to reach people there.'

'I went to ask Siobhan Craig to stop what she was doing. Tried to appeal to her sense of decency, but she said she was forced to keep people like myself away from communities where the uneducated and poverty-stricken were vulnerable to organisations that handed out money and promises in exchange for adherence to some or other poisoned doctrine that furthered the aims of a select group of individuals. That's how she described – no degraded – the good we were trying to do.'

'That must have been very difficult for you to hear.'

'Yes, it was,' he said. 'But I didn't kill her if that's what you're thinking.'

'Where were you the night of the fifteenth, after you'd been to see Siobhan?'

'I went straight to seven o'clock prayer meeting. I was a little late, must have got there round seven-thirty. I was home by ten-thirty.'

'Do prayer meetings usually go on for three and half hours?'

'It was over at about eight-thirty, but I stayed to discuss business matters with our leaders.'

'Til what time exactly?'

'I'd have left just after ten if I arrived home around ten-thirty.'

'We'll need to verify all this of course,' Carl said. He let go of Dunai's hand and pulled a notepad from his pocket. 'I'll need contact numbers for your secretary, the person who ran the prayer meeting and the leaders you met with afterwards. We'll also need to speak to your wife about your movements that day.'

'There's no need for her to know,' he snapped. Then he brought his voice under control. 'She'd only make herself sick with worry.'

'The numbers,' Carl prompted.

As soon as he'd finished, Carl stood. 'Thank you, Mr Cowley. If we have anymore questions we'll call you.'

'You have my numbers,' he said, and there was despondency in his voice.

Just before opening the door, Dunai turned back. 'By the way, Mr Cowley, the reason for your all-male conclaves is that not one of your arguments for male supremacy possesses even a modicum of intelligence, wisdom or compassion, and that makes you no different to any other despot that's ever existed.'

She yanked the door open, stepped into the passage and let out a sigh; boy that felt good! Even so, she avoided eye contact with Carl as they made their way along the passage.

They met Annette Cowley in the hall and she confirmed what her husband had told them but Dunai noticed as they questioned her, that she began to wring her hands, although she asked no questions.

Once they were in the car Carl repeated Dunai's parting salvo. 'And that makes you no different to any other despot that's ever existed,' and he shook his head.

'I know I promised not to say anything, but I promised not to say anything in the interview and the interview was over. You can't honestly have expected me to walk out of there without saying a thing.'

Dunai was startled as Carl smiled broadly at her. 'You have the gift of oration, Dunai Marks. You almost had me in tears there.'

'I was that good, hey?' She grinned back.

'You were that good.'

'Well, never mind me,' Dunai said. 'I thought you were going to have *him* in tears, and that's a sight I'd have given my annual leave to see.'

She glanced over at Carl and it struck her that he was really quite good-looking when he smiled.

THIRTEEN

DUNAI WAS LATE. Jesse had refused to get up this morning; wailing that she was trying to pull him out of bed in the middle of the night and he didn't understand why. In tears he'd drawn back the curtain to show her the darkness outside, pointing an accusing finger at her and shaking his head.

She slid a little on the kelim in the outer office of the Right Reverend Richard Helmsley of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa in a rush to make her appointment. Carl tipped his head back and raised eyes to the ceiling.

'You're late,' he said, scowling at her as she took a seat beside him.

'You've shaved this morning,' she countered.

The door to the inner office opened and the bishop of the diocese of Cape Town stood in the doorway dressed in his uniform of grey trousers, maroon shirt and dog collar. He was a tall, thin man with pale skin and luminous white hair.

'Mr Lambrecht, Ms Marks, please come through.'

Dunai passed him and he smiled at her; a gesture that seemed genuine and gentle and made her like him straight away.

He closed the door behind them then took his seat at the desk, which was about a quarter of the size of Dan Cowley's. All the wall space was taken up by bookcases, except for a large oil painting Dunai guessed was of the Karoo's Valley of Desolation, and two leaded windows that looked out onto another wing of the grey stone building.

'Thank you for seeing us, Bishop Helmsley,' Carl began. 'I need to start by asking you why Siobhan chose to blackmail you.'

There was to be no small talk then, none of the games he'd played with Cowley.

The bishop paused for a moment. 'Expediency, I think. We met in the mid seventies. I was young and out of my depth trying to find shelter for families who'd had their shacks bulldozed, or encouraging victims of poverty and torture, and there were constant visits from the security police. Siobhan was different, a freedom fighter. She always seemed so sure of what she was doing. It was she who helped me through many a crisis.'

'So it was an amicable relationship.'

'I had to turn her down when she wanted to use church grounds to hide items intended for violent ends. I don't think she ever forgave me for that. And she knew of course what I'd been at pains to hide for so long. We discussed it once before she went into exile then I didn't see her for more than a decade. She came to see me when a woman was murdered after an abortion at her clinic. I could see age had done nothing to mellow her.

'She wanted me to instruct parishes in the area that no one was to persecute women visiting her clinics. I would have done this anyway. But she wanted me to instruct our priests to stop speaking out against abortion and that is something my conscience would not allow. It was then she said she'd go public with what I'd been at pains to keep to myself. The decision to instruct our priests' silence was not an easy one, but it was one I made quickly.'

Carl nodded. 'How far would you go, Bishop Helmsley, to keep your homosexuality a secret?'

'As far as my conscience would allow, Mr Lambrecht; no further.'

The bishop's shoulders lifted then dropped in a heavy sigh. 'I am a celibate homosexual. I spent much of my energy well into my twenties denying my sexual orientation. When I did accept it, I isolated myself from others as much as I possibly could, physically and emotionally.'

'Why don't you just come out?' Dunai asked, unable to keep quiet any longer. 'The good work you've done is legendary. Let people deal with their own bigotry.'

The bishop smiled. 'Thank you for your compassion, Ms Marks. But there are 75-million Anglicans my decision would affect. The issue of homosexuality is causing the church to teeter on the brink

of a major schism. Bishop is turning against bishop; it's tearing families apart. I've spent years weighing up the pros and cons and each time I come to the same conclusion; I must remain silent.'

'And what about Siobhan's silence?' Carl asked. 'You have no alibi for the night she was killed.'

The bishop nodded. 'Siobhan, no less than I, had her struggles, Mr Lambrecht. I saw that the last time we met. It's my hope she's at last found some peace. She spent so much of her life fighting battles that hadn't been hers to fight in the first place. Her courage and determination were at times super-human. Despite her fire, or perhaps because of it, I loved and admired Siobhan. As far as her tragic death is concerned; if I'd been involved in anyway, you'd be looking at a man who'd gained the world but lost his soul.'

Dunai waited for Carl's next question. It never came. 'Thank you for your time, Bishop,' he said, standing suddenly.

The bishop nodded and stood up. Dunai got reluctantly to her feet as they started for the door. But before he could open it she asked a question that had been lodged in her throat throughout the interview.

'You said you worked with Siobhan in the late seventies, she wasn't by any chance pregnant at some point?'

Bishop Helmsley looked surprised, then was silent for a moment. 'There were long months I had no contact with her.' He shook his head. 'No, not that I remember.'

Dunai tried not to let the disappointment show as the bishop said good-bye then disappeared inside.

Carl drove to Greenmarket Square without saying a word. Dunai was grateful for his silence, concentrating all her energy on keeping the gathering storm at bay. As the lift reached Carl's floor he took her arm and steered her towards his office. She stood silently as he pushed the safety gate aside and unlocked the door.

'I'll put on coffee,' he said once inside and disappeared. She made her way to his office and stood stock-still in the centre of the room, seeing nothing, yet strangely aware of a minute tautness in every muscle.

Carl came back in, stood in front of her. 'Okay, Dunai, what is it?'

She didn't answer.

'That last question; what was that about?'

She made a last-ditch grab for control, wanting desperately to keep it together, especially in front of this man; but he kept prodding and poking, his voice barely above a whisper. 'I can't help if you won't tell me what's going on.'

She knew it was useless trying to contain it so she gave up the struggle and felt her defences crumble like muddy banks before floodwater.

'I think Siobhan was my mother. I think she left me at St Mark's when I was a month old. I was late this morning because I went for a DNA test.' She was trembling and tears started down her cheeks.

'I knew she could be hard as nails for a righteous cause but not this. Maybe she convinced herself she was saving the world so anything was justified. I spent almost every day of the last two years with her and here I am, a week after I spoke to her last, trying to come to terms with a different Siobhan. Now I know all the battles she fought left scar after scar till they twisted her; changed her, and I was completely unaware of it.'

Dunai took a deep breath. 'I hate it that she's less than the hero I thought she was, but I also feel guilty because that's probably the reason she felt she couldn't share this with me. She didn't want to destroy my faith in her.'

Dunai was relieved that he offered no pat answers. He put his arms around her and drew her against his chest. She had no idea how long she stood there, but eventually her tears subsided and she became aware of the strength of his arms, the warmth of his body and a need in her own, something close to craving. She lifted her head and rested her forehead against his chest, pressed herself against the length of him, tentatively at first, then with more urgency as she felt his erection against her hip. She was aware of every nuance of his response; the changing tension in his arms, his breath against her hair. His chest pressed against her as he drew in a deep breath, then she felt his hands slide along her arms and he pushed her away.

'Sit,' he said gruffly and strode from the room.

Dunai walked to one of the visitor's chairs, sat down and gripped its arms. So Siobhan was a blackmailer and she was attracted to Carl Lambrecht. A week ago she'd have bet her life on Siobhan's moral code and sworn that Carl was a brainless, macho stereotype. She didn't think that anymore. He was intelligent, kind, perceptive... 'Oh-god,' Dunai said. 'I'm in a state; it's understandable.'

'Who're you talking to?' Carl had come back into the room carrying steaming cups of coffee.

'No one; myself,' she mumbled.

Carl looked down at her; although the word look didn't really cover it. She felt herself redden. He handed her the mug and she kept her eyes fixed on its contents. Carl said nothing, walked around the desk, sat and launched into an analysis of the interview with Bishop Helmsley. Dunai jumped gratefully into the conversation.

When she left his office half an hour later, she'd made up her mind that a little delusion wasn't always a bad thing. She was going to pretend that nothing had happened between them; only she had a sneaking suspicion it wasn't going to be as easy as all that.

FOURTEEN

THANDIWE DINGAKE HAD refused to meet them until Carl had given her an ultimatum: it's us or the police. So she agreed to one o'clock near the fishpond in front of the National Gallery in the Company Gardens.

As they waited, Dunai plied Carl with questions inspired by her steady progress through his list of recommended reading for aspirant private investigators. Neither made any mention of the incident the day before although it sat between them in the awkward silences.

She wasn't sure how she felt about it. She had put on make-up this morning; because grief, loss of appetite and lack of sleep had caught up with her, she told herself. But she couldn't pretend she'd taken more care with her clothes for the same reason. She had actually spent ten minutes picking out the pink jumper, smart black trousers and black jacket.

She would never let herself get involved with Carl on a personal level; for many reasons. Knowing nothing about him was a serious set back for the mother of a young child. And it was the worst possible timing. Siobhan had been dead little over a week and the idea of sex or falling in love seemed a terrible betrayal. Then there was the usual fear of being hurt. She also thought it was unlikely he was interested in getting into anything with her either; erections were not like hen's teeth.

'Dunai!'

She looked up, startled.

Carl was frowning at her. 'I hate to interrupt whatever's going in that head of yours, but I think we should take a seat near the pond. We'll be able to spot her from there.'

At a quarter past one they were beginning to think Ms Dingake had changed her mind when a petite woman in her early thirties came into view in a dark green, short-skirted business suit that showed off a pair of gym-toned legs.

Carl signalled to her with a nod of his head as her eyes swept over them, but she made no move to approach, walking instead slowly around the pond eating a sandwich. As she passed, Carl said, 'Ms Dingake?' She said nothing, but went to throw her sandwich wrapper in a bin, leisurely wiped her hands on a serviette, threw that away too, then came to sit at the end of the bench.

'Why the need for cloak-and-dagger, Ms Dingake?' Carl asked, bringing his ankle to rest on his knee and draping his arm over the back of the bench.

'Politics is a watchful game, Mr Lambrecht,' she said, staring straight ahead. Her voice was surprisingly strong and husky for so small a woman. It was inflected with just a trace of Xhosa accent. 'One can never be too careful about the people with whom one is seen.'

'Like Siobhan Craig?'

'Siobhan and I had a deal which anyone in public life knows is utterly essential for survival. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, as the cliché goes.'

'Why did you offer to help Siobhan blackmail Wayne Daniels?'

'He needed to be taught a lesson while Siobhan needed local government support.'

'So you helped Siobhan set him up.'

'No, I did not, Mr Lambrecht. Wayne Daniels has climbed the political ladder from abject poverty and from every rung dangles a traumatised woman. His reputation for being ruthless means nobody's been willing to touch him. He needed to be taught to keep his hands to himself and Siobhan was willing to give that lesson while getting a little something out for herself.'

'And you were able to record the incident when he sexually molested you.'

'That's right, Mr Lambrecht.' She tipped forward slightly and small gold earrings caught the sun and glinted against her dark skin.

'Wayne Daniels always talks about "reeling people in". It's a verbal mannerism he's well known for. Now he's acquired a lesson all fishermen learn at one time or another: certain fish can turn on you, as you reel them in, and take off a finger or two.'

'Why not bring disciplinary action against him?'

'Like most abusers, he goes to work on his victim till she's too intimidated to do anything. Systematic verbal abuse, a hand shoved up a skirt or down a blouse, threats of redundancy and violence can be a potent combination. And like most abusers he has a sixth sense about his victims' vulnerabilities. You get away with it continuously and what incentive is there to change your technique?'

'There's just one thing that doesn't sit right with me,' Carl said. 'This particular sexual predator just happens to be the Superintendent-General of Social Services and Poverty Alleviation, probably the best person to help along Siobhan's pilot project. Correct me if I'm wrong but his department is responsible for welfare services, grants, education and training, not to mention establishing shelters for abused women in partnership with local authorities, private welfare agencies and NGOs like STOP.'

'No need to correct you, Mr Lambrecht.'

'So Wayne Daniels who heads up the department most useful to Siobhan just happens to be a sexual pervert and open to blackmail?'

She did not respond.

'So who was next on Siobhan's list? The minister of health?'

'Siobhan already had her co-operation.'

'And if she hadn't?'

'You're asking me to speculate. I don't know what Siobhan had in mind.'

'But you do admit to deliberately going after Wayne Daniels.'

'I admit nothing, Mr Lambrecht. But I am dying for you to ask me the most obvious question about him.'

Carl waited a full ten seconds before saying, 'Do you believe he was capable of murdering Siobhan?'

'Was and is,' was her quick response. 'I've been in local politics for twelve years and the corridors of power are crawling with sexist bastards. But I've never seen ruthless ambition in any pervert like

I've seen it in Daniels. In fact, for him, Siobhan's murder would be combining business with pleasure.'

'How did you meet, Siobhan?' Carl asked.

'That I will not tell you. It's been an experience but lunch break's over.' She got to her feet, ran both hands over her skirt and a gold ring on her wedding finger caught the wintry sun: a double cross.

Dunai was on her feet. 'Where did you get that ring?'

Dingake turned her back and walked away. Dunai went after her, caught her arm. 'I need to know who gave you that ring. Why do you wear it? What's its significance?'

Dingake brought her face close to Dunai's. 'Get your hand off me right now, Ms Marks. I'm going to walk away without a word from you or you'll never get another thing from me, ever.'

Carl was beside Dunai, his voice barely above a whisper. 'Let her go.' She had no choice. She had to drop her hand and watch as another clue slipped from her fingers.

'*Shit,*' she said, turning her back on the woman's fleeing figure. 'I'm going to start *beating* the truth out of people.'

If Dingake's eyes had been hostile, Carl's were gunmetal grey. 'We've got fifteen minutes to make our next interview,' he said, and began to walk towards Wale Street. Dunai rushed to keep up with him.

'You going to tell me what that was about?' he asked without looking in her direction.

'Nothing. I thought I'd seen that ring before.'

Carl's head swivelled in her direction. 'Let me get this straight. You physically manhandle, in public, someone we've identified as a valuable source of information because you think you've seen her ring before?'

'I identified her as a source.'

'*Shit.*'

Dunai wanted to argue with him, start a fight. What else was she to do with all the anger that built up inside her a little more each day. But she didn't want his sympathy or worse; pity. And she had no idea how high or low his tolerance threshold was. He didn't look

like a person who put up with a lot and she couldn't afford to have him walk away. So she held her tongue.

Carl slowed his pace as they came to the end of Government Avenue. They crossed Wale Street and started down St George's Mall, once one of the city's main streets stretching northeast towards Table Bay Harbour. It was paved now and filled with stalls selling every imaginable object of ethnic theme; a new homogenised and bastardised cultural iconology catering to a tourist population.

Carl and Dunai avoided a group of Zulu dancers gyrating to a synthesised drumbeat and weaved their way between suits and secretaries, buskers and tourists. They stopped at a café, took a table outside and ordered coffee as they'd been instructed to do.

A small, middle-aged man in a Fabiani suit took the table next to theirs. Wayne Daniels, or Mr Itchy and Scratchy as they'd started calling him, had agreed to meet so long as no one could connect him to the detective.

The Superintendent-General of Social Services and Poverty Alleviation ordered an espresso, and Dunai took the opportunity to cast furtive glances his way: His yellow-brown skin, high cheekbones and almond-shaped eyes marked his Khoi-San ancestry. Several thin scars criss-crossing his cheeks were evidence of a childhood spent in one of Cape Town's worst ganglands. The neatly plucked brows, polished skin and manicured nails proof of a more recent climb in local politics.

'So you've spoken to Thandiwe Dingake,' he began, watching casually as a street artist laid out sketches on the walkway. There was barely a trace left in his voice of the distinct Cape Coloured accent he'd grown up with on the Cape Flats.

'Did you murder Siobhan Craig?' was Carl's response.

Daniels's head moved an inch in their direction, then back to the artist. 'I had nothing to do with it.'

'You have your eye on the provincial premiership. You're an ambitious man, and Siobhan had the power to destroy you. You telling me you didn't have the urge to do something about that?'

'I was born in the worst years of apartheid,' Daniels said, his face and body betraying not the slightest agitation. 'By the time I could

walk I'd learned the only real truth about my life; that I was going to have to fight or be killed. There is no middle ground in the Cape Flats' ganglands. That woman,' and he actually snorted, 'didn't come close to being the first person to try destroy me.'

'And how did you deal with those gang threats on the Cape Flats?'

The Superintendent-General smiled. 'My weaponry's a little more sophisticated these days.'

'So what do you use these days instead of guns and knives?' Carl asked.

'Ah, that I can't tell you. Trade secret.'

A woman approached the street artist and bent over to look at a sketch. Daniels cocked his head in her direction and Dunai was sure she hadn't imagined a sudden alertness, a narrowing of the eyes. She turned her head for a better view as he fixed on the woman's backside as she bent lower. Dunai saw him bite down hard on his lower lip. She had to stop herself throwing her hot coffee in his face and crowning him with the cup. He made her want to take a shower with disinfectant and wire brush.

'Where were you on the night of the fifteenth?' There was ice in Carl's voice.

'At an HIV AIDS charity dinner given by my department.'

'You have a good memory of the night in question.'

'Your questions are predictable. Now it's my turn. What do you intend doing with the information that woman left you?'

Carl made him wait twenty seconds before answering. 'If you're innocent of Siobhan's murder, your other crimes will probably never come to light. But if you did kill her, I'll hand everything over to the police then put a copy in the mail to every major newspaper in the country.'

'Well then I have nothing to worry about,' Daniels said. He took a bill from his wallet and placed it beneath his coffee cup.

'I'm not finished with you,' Carl said, leaning back in his seat. His Afrikaans accent was strong.

Daniels glanced at his watch. 'Make it quick, Mr Lambrecht, or I'll have you arrested for attempted murder; you're boring me to death.'

Carl leaned forward, took a sip of coffee, put the mug down, leaned back in his chair while Dunai's stomach tied itself in all sorts of knots.

'So you're an Itchy and Scratchy fan,' Carl said. 'Why doesn't that surprise me?'

'I'm not a detective, Mr Lambrecht, but I'd think if you want information from people you need to be a bit clearer.'

'How's this for clear. Wayne Daniels is a sleazy sexual predator who was being badly screwed over by a woman who wore tasselled skirts and loafers. You send her a card from a WCPA address; "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice... watch out for my tool," which far from intimidating her into never blackmailing you again, probably gave her a good laugh. So you had her killed. That clear enough for you?'

Daniels smiled. 'Western Cape Provincial Administration has thousands of employees. I'd think a good percentage of those feel very strongly against abortion. So good luck with that.'

He got to his feet.

'You make all your own cards, Daniels? Maybe send your mother something special for her birthday, Mothers' Day? You think she'd like to know about the cards you send to other women?'

Daniels' face went deep pink in an instant and he leaned over Carl. 'Go *fuck* yourself,' and he turned and strode up the mall.

'Well,' Dunai said, 'you two really bonded, didn't you?'

'At least you didn't butt in.'

'I'd have been killed in the crossfire.' She tilted her chin towards the warm, wintry sun.

'Dingake was right,' Carl said. 'He is capable of strangling someone. His reaction to that last comment makes me think he's got a problem with impulse control; number one requisite for aspirant criminals.'

Carl stopped as their waitress approached with bill in hand. He paid for the coffee and when she'd gone, said, 'As a matter of fact, I have an urge to go over every detail of that man's life.'

'What can I do?' she asked, following as he got to his feet.

'You can find out exactly how long he was at that dinner, when he left, if he stopped anywhere on his way home. I'll show you how to draw up a timeline, who to ask and how to ask without being obvious.'

He rubbed a hand over his stubble. They began to walk along the mall.

'But if Daniels did do it,' Dunai reasoned, 'wouldn't he be taking one hell of a risk? He seems to get his face on TV a lot these days.'

'He would,' Carl agreed. 'So what would be a logical course of action for someone in his position who wants to commit murder?'

'Hire one of his old gangster friends?'

'That's why we look at the alibi and if it squares up, which it probably will, we use our contacts on the flats.'

'We have contacts there?'

'Dunai, on the Cape Flats if you're not an ordinary person trying to get on with your life then you're one of two things; a gangster or an informant.'

She was filled with a sudden sense of foreboding. 'Be careful, okay?'

Carl looked down at her and grinned, and in that moment if she'd had anything sharp on her person she'd have cut out her tongue. Instead she had to go for diversion. 'D'you know your Afrikaans accent gets stronger when you interview certain people? Not always though.'

He stopped smiling.

'Is that a stress thing? You did it with Cowley and Daniels.'

Carl hesitated, and when he did speak it was with obvious reluctance. 'I do it deliberately. It's a throw back to apartheid. The average person's still intimidated when they're questioned by an Afrikaans authority figure in a hostile environment.'

'That's cold,' Dunai said.

'Welcome to the world of crime investigation,' Carl said, grimly.

DUNAI WAS EXHAUSTED. Apart from the Dingake and Daniels interviews, she had spent every moment of the day running between STOP's

offices and Carl's. It was well after six when she headed home. She was passing the trendy Soviet nightclub when her name was called softly from the almost dark doorway by a tall, slim woman in a white stole, very short black skirt and white thigh-high boots. Dunai hesitated. She had no mallet to protect herself.

'It's okay, Dunai. I've got information for you. Come closer so I don't have to raise my voice.'

Like hell, Dunai thought.

'I'm here to help you,' the woman encouraged.

Dunai stepped forward but stayed out of reach. All she could see in the dim light, in addition to her first impressions, was a long platinum blonde wig, glittery-blue eye shadow and thick black liner around the eyes. With a swirl of her hand she was beckoned closer; again she hesitated until she saw a ring on the woman's wedding finger of what she guessed was a variation of the double cross: two x's instead of the traditional crucifixes. Dunai stepped closer.

'You're looking for the vagrant, Mr Bojangles. Go to Professor Anna Cooper at Valkenberg Hospital; she'll be able to help you.'

The woman turned towards the door.

'Wait.' Dunai put a hand out to her. 'Tell me what that ring means.'

'Not now,' she said, stepping inside the club and closing the door behind her.

Dunai tried to go after her but the door wouldn't budge. She hammered her fist against it, waited ten minutes, raising her fist again, hoping someone would open. When they didn't, and she began to shiver, she was forced to head home, once again frustrated but with a spark of hope ignited. Professor Anna Cooper, whoever she was, might be able to help.

FIFTEEN

VALKENBERG HOSPITAL IS Cape Town's main state-run mental health facility. Set against a backdrop of fynbos-covered mountains, its once well-tended buildings, lawns and swimming pools were mostly in a state of disrepair. Dunai made her way past boarded-up wards and shivered to think how many desperate or dangerously unstable people had been forced onto the streets.

Following the directions she'd been given, she entered a building that looked as if it still had a pulse. A young, smiling secretary immediately ushered her into a large, cluttered office full of books, pot plants and sunshine.

Professor Anna Cooper was tall and slim with fine blonde hair in a ponytail. The sharpness of her nose and jaw were belied by merry blue eyes that settled comfortably into crinkles whenever she smiled. She came striding across the room, hand extended, dodging piles of books stacked on the carpet.

'Welcome, Dunai,' she said, shaking hands. 'Please come in. Just watch your step; bit of a minefield, I'm afraid. I keep telling myself to clean up but it's been like this for so long.'

As she led Dunai towards a chair she put an arm around her shoulders and gave them a squeeze. 'I was so sorry to hear about Siobhan. What incredible energy. Not only a personal blow to everyone who loved her, but society in general's poorer for it. We so desperately need women like her. Sit here,' she said, letting go of Dunai who sank into a comfortable visitor's chair of plush russet upholstery; the pair looked as if they were the only items of furniture that had been purchased in the last two decades.

The professor was none of the things Dunai had expected. Her internet research told her that Anna Cooper had been awarded her PhD in her late twenties, was on almost every psychiatry board in

the country and had headed a UN commission on mental health in war-torn African countries. She was recognised for her ongoing work for the World Health Organisation studying mental disease in developing nations and had recently been appointed advisor to the Minister of Health.

Dunai had expected an arrogant woman who'd resent her time wasted in search of a vagrant, or just a brilliantly distracted scientific type. Not this warm, smiling woman who was behaving as if this meeting was the most important on her agenda that day.

'Thank you for seeing me, Professor Cooper.'

'Not at all. Call me Anna. What can I do for you, Dunai?'

'This is going to sound strange—'

'Oh, good,' she said. 'Would you like a stress ball?'

'Ah... no,' Dunai said eyeing the proffered blue ball Anna had plucked from the selection of toy-like objects on her desk.

'Okay. Go on,' she said, placing the ball on the desk in front of her guest.

Dunai told her about Mr Bojangles and his schizophrenia; how she thought he might have seen Siobhan's murderer and that he'd disappeared. She even told her about the legless woman and the mother and infant who lived on the street.

Anna sat forward, legs crossed, throughout the tale, concentrating on Dunai's face, nodding with absolute seriousness at the mention of Mr Bojangles and her admission that she'd run from a legless woman. Never once did a look of disbelief cross her face and Dunai found herself saying more than she'd intended.

At the end of the tale Anna sat back in her chair, a look of deep compassion on her face. 'Well, Dunai, you've been through a lot, haven't you? My goodness but you've held up tremendously under terrible trauma; well done. Of course we'll help you. I'm going to put word out about Mr Bojangles. If he's passed through any mental health facility we'll find him, and soon. That's very important.'

'Thank you, Anna, I really appreciate it.'

'Please, not at all. I always get a buzz helping others. It's my thing.'

'How did you meet Siobhan?' Dunai asked.

'Oh! Um... She came looking for someone... very much like you are.'

'When was that?'

'Let me see... ' Anna reached absentmindedly for the first in a row of steel balls suspended on a small metal frame. She pulled the first back, let it go and the office was filled with a rhythmic clicking as the balls collided repeatedly with each other. 'Must have been right after she came back from exile. So would have been early nineties.'

'Who was she looking for?'

'I really wish I could tell you, but I can't. Her visit was confidential. I gave her my word.'

'Is that the only time you saw her?'

'No. Our work brought us into contact from time to time. What a terrible loss...' She shook her head then clapped her hands once. 'But I don't want you to worry, Dunai. I'm going to do everything I can to help you find Mr Bojangles.'

She sprang to her feet and came around the desk. Dunai stood up. The clicking balls were beginning to irritate her. She wished Anna would be as generous with information about Siobhan as she was with warmth and friendliness. But the busy women had assured her she'd help with Mr Bojangles. That's more than she'd started out with this morning and she had no intention of antagonising Anna and forfeiting her help. So she smiled and thanked her.

'I want you to talk to me about how you're coping with Siobhan's death anytime you need to. Don't even make an appointment. Just pick up the phone and I'll always take your call if I can or I'll get back to you pronto.'

'I was stopped in the street yesterday by a woman I've never seen before. She said you'd be able to help find Mr Bojangles. Do you know who she was?'

'How extraordinary,' Anna said. 'No, I have no idea.' She took Dunai's hand, patted it. 'I wouldn't tell anyone about her though. They might think you're crazy.'

Dunai looked quickly at Anna but her pale blue eyes were merry as usual.

Halfway across the room she stopped suddenly and dropped Dunai's hand. 'I want to give you something.'

She strode across the room between piles of books till she got to a collection that looked as if it had been stacked on the floor beside a ceramic pot plant for a hundred years. She bent to retrieve a book from the pile and a gold pendant slipped out of her shirt. Its two melded crosses seemed to wink at Dunai in the weak sunlight coming in through the window.

Dunai felt a particular alertness then, as if she could hear the stillness in the room, taste the dust motes and feel air currents quiver at the tip of every hair on her body. Anna came striding back, looked down quickly when she saw Dunai's stare and slipped the pendant back inside her shirt.

'Where did you get that?' Dunai asked very quietly.

'Oh, it's just something I was given a long time ago. Here, I want to give you this,' she said, handing her a very old brown book with faded gilt edges. 'It's the works of Marcus Aurelius. I think it'll be a great comfort to you.'

Dunai was led from the room before she could ask any more questions, hugged then left in the outer office with Anna's assurance of assistance and a growing sense of confusion.

SHE FETCHED JESSE just before one and took him home for lunch, intending just for an hour to give her son her full attention. They were half way through their sandwiches when there was a knock at the door of the turquoise house.

'No, you stay,' she said as Jesse began to scramble from his chair. As usual he ignored her and by the time she opened the door he was standing in front of her, back pressed to her legs.

'Hi,' Carl said, his bulk filling the doorway.

'D'you want to come in?' Hands on Jesse's shoulders, she moved them back so he could step inside.

'Who's this?' he asked, looking down at the round-faced boy with the thatch of dark hair and spattering of freckles across his nose.

'This is my son, Jesse.' She felt his head press against her thighs as he peered up at the man who must seem like a giant to him.

'Hi Jesse,' Carl said casually. She wondered if he was surprised she had a child. His face gave nothing away.

Jesse smiled shyly but turned away from the stranger and pressed his face to his mother's jeans. Dunai picked him up and he hid his face against her neck.

'I've just spoken to Cowley's prayer meeting leader and his alibi doesn't add up.'

Dunai held her breath. Jesse swivelled his head to peer at Carl.

'Seems he left the meeting at nine, not after ten as he claimed. Since he arrived home around ten-thirty, there's a missing hour and a half that matches time of death. I think we should pay him a visit.'

'When?'

'He's at his office if we go now.'

Dunai saw her hour with Jesse evaporate and felt guilt and regret.

'I'll take Jesse next door; my neighbour looks after him during the day.'

'I go too,' Jesse said, rearing up and looking at his mother excitedly.

'Not this time, Jess. It's work stuff so you need to stay with Barbara.'

'No I go too.'

'No arguments, Jess; you're going next door for a nap.'

'Dammit,' the toddler said.

'You shouldn't say that word.'

'Why?'

'It's a shouting word.'

'*Dammit!*' he shouted at the top of his voice.

'Jesse, that's enough,' Dunai warned, setting him on the ground.

He looked up at her slyly. 'I no say it if I go wiff you.'

'No deal, Jess; you're going next door for a nap *and* you're not saying that word again.' Dunai watched with trepidation as his bottom lip began to quiver.

'Jesse,' Carl said, hunkering down in front of him. 'You know that when you nap time goes away; it disappears, just like that?' Carl snapped his fingers.

Jesse looked from the fingers to Carl's face. His eyes narrowed and he cocked his head to the side. 'Where it go?'

'Nobody knows,' Carl said. 'It's magic. You close your eyes, go to sleep and when you open them again, time's gone and your mom's back.'

'And then we'll play some games,' Dunai said, sensing Carl was onto something.

Jesse looked at his mother. 'You read story?'

'You bet.'

'Two,' Jesse bargained.

'Deal,' Dunai said.

'Okay,' Jesse conceded, reaching up and placing a hand on Carl's shoulder. 'I go next door now.'

'Good man,' Carl said, getting to his feet.

She took him next door while Carl waited in the car.

'You handled Jesse like a pro,' she said, climbing in beside him. 'Where did you learn your technique?'

It was meant as a light-hearted question but Carl didn't answer and she sensed a sudden tension in the car. She glanced sideways and saw the muscles of his jaw bunch.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'I didn't mean to pry. I was just grateful—'

'I have a daughter,' he said, stunning her. For some reason she'd never thought of him as a father. She'd heard he was divorced but the information might not have been accurate. The idea was like a kick in the stomach.

'I hadn't thought... I didn't... I thought I'd heard you were divorced,' Dunai stammered.

'I am,' Carl said, looking sideways at her.

She nodded and looked out the window, up at the monochrome sky. Carl started the engine and pulled into the street. A couple of minutes passed before he said, 'Charmaine lives with her mother in KwaZulu-Natal.'

Dunai nodded but sensed he'd given her this information only to avoid offending her so she got off the topic. 'So we're interviewing him at work?'

'Ja, I think it's time to make Mr Cowley sweat.'

They passed the entrance to the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront, a tourist mecca of hotels, marina apartments, restaurants and hundreds of shops built around a working harbour.

Traffic was heavy this time of day and they crawled along Coen Steytler past the hulking, yet strangely unobtrusive Cape Town International Convention Centre and headed north up Heerengracht towards the harbour, Table Bay Boulevard and The Cowley Building.

Dunai found herself battling to keep up as he headed across the large reception area towards a row of lifts. He punched the twelfth floor button and in the silence Dunai tried to anticipate her reaction when Dan Cowley, whom she already despised, confessed to throttling the life out of Siobhan. She tried to imagine his hands around her throat; they were small hands, soft she remembered from his handshake, with pointy tips and groomed nails. Siobhan's grotesquely altered face crept into sight, this time coupled with anger rather than pain.

The lift doors opened. Carl strode into the open area of the executive suite. Dunai had no problem keeping up with him this time as she crushed the plush cream carpet with her boots.

She barely noticed the harbour scenes in watercolours on the walls, or the blue brocade-covered sofas and standing lamps that spilled golden pools of light onto the carpet. Her eyes were fixed on Carl's leather jacket as he reached a desk just off to the left of a set of double doors. He reached the receptionist, rested his knuckles on her desk and leaned towards her. 'I'm Carl Lambrecht; I have business with Mr Cowley. I don't have an appointment but I know he'll want to see me straight away.'

The pretty blonde receptionist half rose then sat down again, and reached for the telephone without taking her eyes off Carl. It took ten seconds for a corpulent, middle-aged woman in a navy suit, to appear at the reception desk.

'Mr Lambrecht, we've spoken on the phone. I'm Joyce, Mr Cowley's secretary. Please follow me.'

She led them into a small office with cream walls, oak furniture and an interleading door, asked them to take a seat then slipped through the door to the inner sanctum.

'You're very quiet,' Carl said to Dunai after a moment's silence.

'Ten minutes ago I was trying to get Jesse to eat a sandwich instead of Coco Pops, now we're about to confront someone who might confess to Siobhan's murder.'

'Bewildering,' Carl said with no conviction at all.

She looked straight ahead at the double doors and kept her voice steady, 'I'm trying to talk myself out of killing him if he confesses.'

Carl's head swivelled towards her. He raised an eyebrow. 'Nice,' he said. 'But I doubt we'll get a confession today, he's got too much to lose.'

The door opened and Joyce ushered them into Cowley's office. Here there were no stone walls, red curtains, carved chairs or chandeliers as there'd been in his home study. The image he presented to the world was lighter, softer. The walls cream, carpet golden beige. Recessed bookshelves, a modest desk, cabinet and small conference table were of matching oak. Curtains and upholstery were golden beige with flecks of pale blue and, as in the reception area, the walls were decorated with gentle harbour scenes.

Dan Cowley stood behind his desk. This time there was no smile, no handshake. He greeted Carl, ignored Dunai, offered neither a seat. 'What can I do for you, Mr Lambrecht?' He looked at his watch, glanced at his diary, straightened his tie.

'Your timing of events on the night of the fifteenth doesn't add up.'

'What do you mean?'

Carl moved to within a foot of the desk, forcing Cowley to tilt his head back and look up at him. He sighed as he pulled a notepad from his pocket. 'You told us the prayer meeting ended at about eight-thirty, you stayed on to discuss business till just after ten then

arrived home ten-thirty.' His accent was pronounced. Dunai's gaze slid to his face; his eyes narrowed. 'You lied to us; why's that?'

Cowley snatched up a pen and rapped it against his diary. 'I've had enough of this. I've already answered your questions, now I have a business to run.'

'You see, I not only spoke to the prayer meeting leader, who it seems you got to lie for you,' Carl said, ignoring him. 'I also spoke to two others who were at that meeting and both say they saw you drive off just after nine. Since you arrived home around ten-thirty that leaves you with no alibi from nine till ten-thirty. Ms Craig's time of death was around ten.'

Dunai chose that moment to step up beside Carl.

Cowley's colour deepened. 'I'm going to call a guard'.

'You can phone a friend for all I care, Mr Cowley, but I would advise you to co-operate with us. The alternative is an interrogation room at a police station.' The accent was now as thick as *konfyt*. 'So I'll ask you one more time. Where were you between nine and ten-thirty the night of the fifteenth?'

Cowley's chest heaved, his eyes skittered across the room. 'I want her out of here.' He jabbed a finger at Dunai.

'She stays.'

Dunai smiled at the man with as much venom as she could muster. She'd never had a physical fight in her life but she remembered how some of the orphans had to be prised apart before doing real damage to each other. She fantasised about launching herself at Cowley and smashing her fists into his face.

Cowley threw his pen onto the desk; it shot across and landed on the floor.

Carl took a step forward, towering over him. Suddenly the smaller man's shoulders sagged and he dropped his eyes to the desk.

'I was driving around okay? Just driving. I didn't know what to do about her. I didn't know how to handle it.'

'How *did* you handle it?'

'I didn't kill her. I told you that. I decided to go to the leadership of Men of the Covenant and tell them about the blackmail. I was

nowhere near the city centre and I can prove it.'

He tossed his head and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

'Ten o'clock I stopped at a chemist on Kenilworth Main Road; the one across from the Seven Eleven. I bought headache tablets. The sales girl will remember me. There was a security guard; he would also remember.'

'Don't you keep headache tablets at home?' Carl asked.

'What?'

'Ten o'clock you were on your way home. Most households have pain tablets so why not go straight home, take them and go to bed?'

Cowley threw his hands in the air. 'My head was killing me, okay. I didn't want to wait another ten minutes to get home and I wasn't absolutely sure we had any at home so I stopped at a chemist.'

'You got the receipt?'

'I... There was no reason to keep it.'

'You buy anything else?'

'No.'

'You sure about that?'

'Yes, I'm sure. Look, I've—'

'Did you go into the Seven Eleven?'

'No!'

'You took the tablets straight away; how did you swallow them?'

'I keep a bottle of water in the car.'

'So it's just the sales assistant at the chemist who saw you?'

'How many people need to vouch for me before you stop this harassment?'

'Just one would do the trick, Mr Cowley. One who isn't lying of course.'

Cowley's hands balled into fists at his sides. 'Get out. Just get out. I don't want you in here any more.' But there was little fire left in his voice.

'I need a description of the sales assistant before we leave,' Carl said, pen poised above his notepad.

Cowley mopped the shine from his face with a handkerchief as he gave the description. Carl had been right on the money when

he'd predicted there'd be no confession today, but he definitely had made the man sweat.

'You okay?' Carl asked once they were back in the car and heading for the city centre.

Dunai wasn't even close to okay. Until Siobhan's death she'd have sworn she was a pacifist. She'd never raised a hand to any creature in her life, never committed an act of aggression. But moments ago she could have shredded Cowley's face then beaten the truth out of him. And when he'd admitted to throttling Siobhan, she'd have kept beating him, and no amount of crying, begging or blood would have stopped her until he was dead; as dead as Siobhan.

Now that the rage had passed Dunai felt shocked and nauseated. She'd never thought she had it in her. She craved a cup of tea and home, her son and her animals and all the personal things that made up her life; and the person she'd been before Siobhan's death.

'Dunai?' Carl prompted. He reached out and touched her hands; they were clutched tightly in her lap.

She forced herself to smile and nod. 'Don't worry, I'm not going to go to pieces again.'

'Hm,' Carl said. 'I was looking forward to the next time.'

An image of their clinch in his office came to mind and she could again feel her length pressed against him, the way he'd breathed against her hair; the memory made her scalp tingle. She didn't want to look at him just then but his eyes locked onto hers and she had no choice. She turned towards him, expecting to see desire in his eyes that were more silver than grey in the sunlight coming in through the window. Instead she saw what she could only interpret as hunger or longing. Her body responded with a rise in blood pressure, a quickening of breath and a pleasant sensation in her chest, but her mind recoiled.

A car hooter blared behind them. The light had turned green. Carl tore his eyes from her, glanced in the rear-view mirror and pulled away.

'What do we do now? About Cowley I mean.'

Carl didn't at first answer. When he did his voice was gentle. 'The urge to put a name and face to your pain can be very strong, Dunai.'

Maybe this is too much to ask at this stage, but it's important as an investigator to stay impartial. So far all the evidence against Cowley's circumstantial. He's pathetic, obviously warped on several levels, but I don't know if he's a killer.'

'Why do you think that?'

'I don't know. Gut-feel.'

'Not logical then. Pathetic people do murder.'

'We need to work on his alibi,' Carl went on. 'I'll interview the sales assistant tonight. You've got Jesse.'

'Thank you,' Dunai said. She did have a lot more to think about than just her newfound penchant for violence.

They were silent until Carl drew up in front of the turquoise house. Then Dunai voiced something that had been worrying her ever since she'd tried to imagine Cowley's hands around Siobhan's throat.

'Cowley's a couple inches shorter than Siobhan,' she said, removing her seatbelt and turning to him. 'The more I think about it the more unlikely it seems that she'd have allowed him to overpower her.'

'I worked on a case where a ninety kilogram woman was raped by a fifty kilogram man,' Carl told her. 'She did try to defend herself but she'd never been violent with anyone in her life and it didn't enter her mind to actually try to hurt her assailant, get vicious and violent, which is what it would have taken to stop the rape. It happens more often than you think. Too many women freeze because by the time they're adults they've been totally conditioned to be ladylike and non-aggressive.'

'Not Siobhan though,' Dunai said.

'No, Siobhan was a fighter. And she'd been active in an armed-conflict so in a fair fight I'd say she'd have beaten someone of Cowley's stature. But the PM picked up two punches; one to the side of the head, the other to the chin. She probably didn't see them coming. Her throat and nails tell us she fought back but there were no signs of a struggle in the office, so her assailant probably had his hands around her throat by the time she'd recovered enough to fight back.'

ONCE JESSE WAS asleep that evening, Dunai went to the computer in the dining-cum-storage room and began trawling the internet for some reference to the double cross. She tried several search engines, different word combinations. Just after ten she got a hit; a handful of obscure articles she'd almost missed. They'd been typed on an old typewriter and scanned into a research project connected via a series of links to Oxford University's website. They had been written in the late 1930s by Everett Gethers, a lecturer in anthropology at Oxford University.

Dunai found mention of the double cross in a section titled Beyond Emancipation: A Global Feminine Voice. She skimmed the section till she found mention of the double cross then went back to the beginning of the paragraph to read in context.

"... codex fragments^{1, 2 & 3} and correspondence^{4 to 12}, support the existence of a radical female group formed by a handful of Roman Catholic nuns and mystics working in Greece in the 4th century at a time when Church Fathers put together the canonical version of the Christian Bible. Christianity, with its call for social justice and proclamation that freedom and grace belonged to everyone, had shaken the establishment and given women a powerful new voice. Political expediency dictated that this voice be silenced. Gnostic tradition was banned, references to the female aspect of divinity deleted and women barred from teaching, officiating at religious ceremonies and holding positions of authority and leadership.

"During this time high-born and learned women organised into a pressure group; their sole purpose to challenge the church's 'perverse application of Scripture'¹³ and institutionalisation of misogyny. The emblem of the double cross¹⁴ is first recorded as a unifying symbol within this group.

"The first cross of yellow gold symbolised the organised, male-led church, the second cross melded just to the right of the first was wrought in rose or white gold to symbolise the abiding truth of the divinity of God as represented in the feminine sacred.

"The church began a campaign of repression against those wearing the double cross and it is believed that many of the church's

foremost activists, teachers and theologians, some men but mostly women, were martyred as part of this group¹⁵. By the end of the 4th century, the church claimed to have eradicated the heresy.

"The resurgence of a group claiming similar ideology is again recorded in the 13th century in response to the failed embryonic teachings of Thomas Aquinas in which it became official church doctrine that women were failed or spoiled embryos. The double cross as an adornment is again recorded¹⁶, as is the church's attempts to silence the group¹⁷.

"For some time a powerful female movement had been growing with veneration of the Virgin Mary reaching its zenith in the 12th and 13th centuries. Many goddesses, who had enjoyed frequent sexual encounters, had in the ancient religions been called 'virgin', meaning whole unto herself, not under a male's control. The symbol of the double cross again became a popular adornment for adherents to this movement.

"At this time a cyclical backlash began against women that would eventually spiral, in the 16th and 17th centuries, into a holocaust of witchcraft trials in which an estimated nine-million people, mostly women, were tortured and put to death for the 'constellation of beliefs and practices we have come to recognise as the way of the Goddess.'¹⁸

"A climate of absolute terror prevailed,' writes 18th century historian, Franz Johannesson¹⁹. 'By the time the witchcraft trials in Salem, Massachusetts took place towards the end of the persecution in 1692 there were villages in Europe with not one woman left alive or, as in the Bishopric of Trier in Germany, two villages left with only a single female inhabitant apiece.'

"Widows, wise women and spinsters were denounced as witches. Midwives, herbalists and village beauties who rejected the advances of powerful men were tortured, tried then put to death. Witch hunters and informers were paid for convictions and it became profitable employ for many.'

"By this time what some had once called the Sisterhood of the Double Cross had not been seen or heard from in almost a century,

except during Martin Luther's reformation in the early 16th century when several letters from the Sisterhood of the Double Cross were purportedly received with great empathy by Martin Luther's wife, Katharina von Bora, a former nun²⁰.

"What is of interest to the scholar of anthropology, based on evidence of correspondence from the Sisterhood of the Double Cross surfacing as late as the 16th century, is that the group had become sufficiently organised and proficient to survive several campaigns of severe persecution and had created means by which the torch could be passed to other educated and like-minded women.

"It has been noted globally in recent years that a number of women appointed to positions of power in several areas of public life²¹ have been seen to wear variations of the double cross, X, crescent or star, as rings or pendants, sometimes one symbol hidden beneath another. Since the beliefs of these women span not only Christianity, but Judaism, atheism and several other global belief systems, it would seem the group is no longer confined to any one religion.

"A question of hypothesis is: did the Sisterhood of the Double Cross survive 1,500 years of cyclical persecution and what might the nature of the group be in the early 20th century?

"Another explanation is that the movement, long dormant, has once again resurfaced and is being carried forward by educated, resolute and powerful women. This being so, the theory demands as much scrutiny since, should the group become a vigorous political pressure group for women worldwide, what is their agenda likely to be in years to come?"

Dunai found four other articles written in 1938 and '39 but, disappointingly, all different versions of the first. She searched the web for further mention of the lecturer's name and found a small obituary. Everett Gethers had been killed in a car crash in October 1939. There was only one other reference that mentioned his study into an organisation of radical feminists whose movement he believed had spanned the globe for 1,500 years. From the reference

it was clear that his studies had been the cause of some derision from academia in the years before his death.

Dunai rubbed her eyes, sat back and stared at her cold pizza. She'd suspected Siobhan was caught up in something local, but not this. Not some conspiracy that demanded she believe in a 1,500-year-old radical group drawn up of women from heaven only knows how many countries and religions.

She had always refused to believe conspiracy theories, but there were too many encounters in the last two weeks she could not so easily dismiss. And she'd only known about the double cross, not double stars or crescents. Although she remembered the double X she'd seen on the finger of the woman outside the Soviet Club: perhaps the symbol chosen by atheists in the movement?

Siobhan had left all her personal effects to Dunai, so the double cross pendant was hers now, along with all its secrets and conspiracies.

She went over what she knew so far. Siobhan's campaign of blackmail to keep her population control project afloat. The double cross worn by the amazon in the Company Gardens who'd told her they'd made sure Siobhan couldn't be implemented in anything and had likely wiped her computer and removed her documents. The same woman who'd told her she was being watched by a mysterious 'we'. Then there was Thandiwe Dingake, Director of Communications in local government; also wearing a double cross ring and ready to help Siobhan blackmail a sexual predator. The woman in the doorway of the Soviet Club who'd known of her search for Mr Bojangles. Professor Anna Cooper, probably one of the most influential people in the country whose work spanned the globe but who was happy to help her find a vagrant. How had all these women been linked to Siobhan – had they started out as some sort of professional women's club? Maybe someone had shared the story of the Sisterhood of Double Cross at a get-together and they'd decided to adopt the symbol as an outward pledge of their support for one another.

But far more important to Dunai was this: what was their connection to her now? She needed answers and she had an idea

where to find them.

SIXTEEN

ST MARK'S HOME for Children was built 140 years ago on the outskirts of the CBD beside St Mark's Cathedral. Forty years later a school was added that eventually became St Mark's Primary and Secondary Schools. The collection of square white buildings with their base of rough stonework, sash windows, red Spanish tiles and bell tower had changed little over the years.

Dunai and Jesse arrived just as the bells rang to mark the start of morning tea, and the passage was filled with the excited chatter of children making their way from Saturday morning sports activities to the dining room for fruit and tea.

'Siseray give cookies,' Jesse said.

'Yes, probably,' Dunai said. 'But say hello before you ask for them, okay?'

The first thing Sister Raymunda said when she saw Dunai was, 'You look like a stick insect, little one'. She took both Dunai's hands in hers and kissed her cheek. 'We'll have to do something about that.' She turned her attention to Jesse. 'And who is this handsome young man you've brought with you today?'

Jesse giggled and said, 'You got cookies, Siseray?'

'Well, of course I have. Why don't you come with me and we'll find them.'

'The kitchen, the kitchen,' Jesse chanted, and took the nun's hand.

'Sit down, little one,' she said to Dunai. 'We'll be back in a jiffy.'

Dunai watched Sister Raymunda leave the office in her usual sandals and socks, pleated skirt, golf shirt and cardigan. As always, her cropped white hair stuck up in front of her black and white habit. She had continued to call Dunai, little one, even when at age thirteen she'd exceeded the nun in stature.

'So, Dunai, tell me what's been happening,' Sister Finbar said from behind the desk. The nun had been appointed Mother Finbar Dominic Safirey some ten years ago, but Dunai only ever thought of her as Sister Finbar. Her small brown eyes, high-bridged nose, full mouth and broad face was the thing of greatest constancy in the world to Dunai, never changing much in time, joy or anger.

'Although, wait a mo,' she said, holding up a hand as Dunai opened her mouth. 'We'd better not start without Sister Raymunda.'

So they talked about other things until Sister Raymunda burst into the room, slightly out of breath. 'You haven't started your story yet?'

'No, Sister,' Dunai said, hopping up to take the heavy-laden tray from her and putting it on the desk.

'Sit, little one,' Sister Raymunda said, moving towards the tray. 'Jesse's helping Cook make cutout cookies. The pie's vegetarian,' she said, handing it to her.

'I can't manage anything—'

'No, no, none of that now. Not a word till you've eaten your pie.'

Dunai looked to Sister Finbar who shook her head. 'She's right, Dunai. Next south-easter you'll be out to sea. Eat!'

Being outnumbered, she began to shovel pie into her mouth, then she was glad they'd insisted because it was delicious and she ate the rest quickly.

Sister Raymunda poured tea while Sister Finbar sat back in her chair and made a steeple with her fingers. It reminded Dunai of the only time Sister Finbar had ever played a game with her. Dunai'd had her tonsils removed and was miserable because she was forced to stay in bed for three days. Sister Finbar had bustled over to her bed, sat down and showed her a trick she did with her hands to the rhyme of, 'Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors and here are the people.'

'That's better,' Sister Raymunda said as Dunai handed back an empty plate and took her teacup.

Dunai began to talk. Telling the nuns what she could. Leaving out the bits she knew would worry them, which was most of it. She spoke more of her grief, of her suspicion that Siobhan might have

been her mother and that she'd been for a DNA test. Then she came to the real reason for her visit.

'Have you heard of the Sisterhood of the Double Cross?'

There was silence before Sister Raymunda leaned forward. 'Have a cake, dear.'

'No, please, Sister. This is important. I need to know if you've ever heard of the Sisterhood of the Double Cross.'

'Mother Finbar Dominic Safirey,' Sister Raymunda said. 'I believe this is a question for you.'

Dunai's heart sank. Sisters Raymunda and Finbar had been friends since childhood and Sister Raymunda only ever used the other's title when something was to be handled officially.

'There have been many women's movements in the church,' Sister Finbar said in her teacher's voice. 'The Sisterhood of the Double Cross is just one of them.'

'So you have heard of them,' Dunai said, failing to keep relief from her voice.

'Rumours only,' Sister Finbar said and pursed her lips.

'What rumours, Mother?'

'You know, Dunai,' Sister Finbar said, leaning back in her chair. 'I told you this when you pestered us about whether Father Bhengu wore knickers under his cassock. Curiosity is not always a good thing.'

'But I'm asking about a women's movement in the church.'

'Oh, no, dear,' Sister Raymunda said. 'They haven't been part of the church for some time now.'

Sister Finbar cast a disapproving glance at her colleague then looked back at Dunai and sighed. 'Early feminism was led almost entirely by women of faith,' she said, using her teacher's voice again. 'It was often scripture that was called out at protest marches, from jail cells and meeting places surrounded sometimes by mobs of rioting men. Isaiah 58, "Loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke," Sister Finbar enunciated in a rich alto, "set the oppressed free and break every yoke... Then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.'"

Sister Raymunda clapped; Dunai kept her eyes on Sister Finbar's face as she continued.

'The institutionalised church became one of the fiercest opponents of equality for women and last century it caused a split along religious and secular lines, particularly in the US. Not so much here; spirituality's always been part of political activism.

'Unfortunately there has been a tendency in organised religion to use fundamentalist doctrine to justify what divides the sexes and excludes women. Religion as a political vehicle has without doubt compromised women's human rights and turned the religious-secular split into a chasm.'

'So you're saying the Sisterhood of the Double Cross split from the Church in the last century,' Dunai prompted.

'Something you must understand, Dunai.' Sister Finbar said, sitting forward and leaning her arms on the desk. 'Sisterhood of the Double Cross has always been an urban legend within the Church. No one seems to know exactly who or what they are and I personally have never seen proof of their existence. Only ever heard rumours.'

'What rumours?'

'"Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster,"' Sister Raymunda said and leaned forward and patted her hand. 'There were some stories that popped up in the eighteen hundreds,' she said in a near whisper. 'Rumours that the group was not only active but had changed their methods and ideology. There have since been stories of violence and manipulation. Horrible stories.'

'Tell me one,' Dunai said.

Sister Finbar cleared her throat but perhaps Sister Raymunda missed this because she said, 'We heard once about a cardinal. Poisoned. And he was found clutching a double cross. They had to break his fingers to get it out of his hand.'

'Stories, yes,' Sister Finbar said. 'Rumours. What's made you ask about this?'

Dunai'd known this question would come up and she was prepared. 'I came across an article on the internet.'

'Well,' Sister Finbar said, 'I wouldn't take the rumours too seriously.'

'I've seen a couple of powerful women wearing the double cross as rings and pendants,' Dunai said, watching Sister Finbar's face carefully.

The Mother Superior nodded. 'It's obvious they've heard about the group and wear the symbol as a statement. Symbols are often recycled. Have a cake, Dunai,' Sister Finbar ordered, shifting in her seat and crossing her legs.

Dunai reached for a cake. 'Tell me, Mother, because I don't understand this: How can women adhere to organised religion with a clear conscience when they know it excludes their full and equal rights?'

'Don't talk with your mouth full,' Sister Finbar said absentmindedly. 'Religious organisations are merely flawed reflections of the principles they hope to embody. It is up to the individual to strive for the values of love and justice at their core. As women, to cut ourselves off from our right to a spiritual home would be like throwing the baby out with the bath water, to use a nasty cliché.'

'Nicely said,' was Sister Raymunda's contribution. Sister Finbar nodded in her direction.

'But you'll always be second class citizens in an institution that oversees almost every aspect of your life.'

'Not always, Dunai, and never in our own eyes.' Sister Finbar uncrossed her legs. 'Let me tell you a story.'

'Early seventies I was invited to a conference in Brazil for religious women. To open proceedings a group of vested priests walked up the aisle to the front of the auditorium singing the opening hymn of the liturgy. The women joined in, but as the priests sang, "I will raise him up," a handful of women sang, "I will raise *them* up." The priests sang again, "I will raise him up," and this time a few more women joined in and sang a little louder, "I will raise them up." Within minutes the refrain had been taken up by a hundred women, then another hundred until the entire gathering of some two thousand female voices were raised in unison, drowning

out the priests and soaring heavenward. That gathering gave us the courage to express what we'd known all along in our hearts; that the manmade structure was flawed and there was no shame in admitting it.'

Before Dunai had a chance to comment her mobile rang. She recognised Carl's number. 'Sorry, I have to take this.' She left the office. 'What is it, Carl?'

'Top of the morning to you too,' he said. 'Our informant has some info for us about Mr Itchy and Scratchy. Where are you?'

'St Mark's'

'What are you doing there?'

'It's where I grew up.'

'Oh, right...You busy or something?'

'Not anymore.'

'Good. This can't wait. I'll fetch you.'

'I'm at Mother Superior's office.'

'You've been a bad girl, have you?'

'Shut up, Carl.' She rang off and went back to the office.

'I need to take care of some business,' she said to the nuns. 'Could I leave Jesse here till I get back?'

'That'll be lovely,' Sister Raymunda said, springing to her feet. 'And as always I'll pray that angels will watch over you and keep you safe, little one.'

'Thank you, Sister,' Dunai said. 'And thanks, Sister Finbar, for the info and chat. I liked your story.'

Sister Finbar came around the desk and looked intently at her. 'You look after yourself now, Dunai Marks. Heaven help us if those angels ever take a break.'

'They won't,' Dunai said. 'Sister Raymunda won't let them.'

Sister Raymunda laughed her small, breathless laugh, and said, 'Come, little one. I'll walk you out.'

They left the main building and stepped out into a clear winter's day of powder-blue sky and golden sunshine. Dunai lifted her face to its warmth and felt for a moment the peace she'd always found at St Mark's.

'They're called *Cerchio di Gaia*.'

'Who is?' Dunai asked, turning to see a resolute look on the nun's face.

'The Sisterhood of the Double Cross. That was never their real name. It's *Cerchio di Gaia*; Gaia's Circle.' Dunai stared at the diminutive nun. Sister Raymunda looked stubborn for a moment then shrugged. 'Promise me you'll come to us if you need help.'

'Always,' Dunai said and kissed her cheek.

SEVENTEEN

‘WHAT DID THE woman at the chemist say?’ Dunai asked as they pulled away in Carl’s four-wheel drive, heading for the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront. ‘Did she serve Cowley the night of Siobhan’s murder?’

‘She did,’ Carl said. ‘But she was extremely nervous, which means one of two things: she didn’t want to get involved or she was paid to provide him with an alibi.’

‘And the security guard?’

‘There were quite a few customers that night. He doesn’t remember him. But the woman on the till said he reads magazines while he’s on duty so he wouldn’t have taken note of a customer who wasn’t a threat.’

‘Or,’ Dunai said, ‘he doesn’t remember Cowley because he was never there.’

‘That’s the other possibility.’

‘What do we do now?’

‘See if there’s something connecting Cowley and the chemist assistant; maybe a member of his congregation or family friend.’

‘Where are we going?’

‘Waterfront,’ Carl answered.

The Victoria & Alfred Waterfront was the most visited tourist destination in South Africa. Table Bay and Cape Town Harbour were generous with sea, mountains and colonial maritime buildings visible from restaurants, hotels, office blocks, shopping malls, tourist centres and residential marinas. There was always plenty to do with boat, helicopter and fishing charters, festivals, tours and museums.

Carl used the Coen Steytler entrance, took the South Arm Road and after some circling found a parking bay within the Clock Tower Precinct.

Dunai had assumed they were meeting the informant in the Clock Tower Centre, but they strode past it to the Nelson Mandela Gateway.

'Where are we going?' she asked.

'Robben Island.'

'Why?'

'Because the ferries are full on a Saturday and you have to book a place days in advance. The informant has tickets for us, we'll collect them at the last minute and hop on. It'll make it almost impossible for someone to follow us on the spur of the moment.'

'When does the ferry leave?' Dunai asked.

'Twelve.'

'It's quarter to.'

They strode into the Nelson Mandela Gateway; a triple storey glass building of museum offices, shop, restaurant and auditorium. Carl headed for one of the ticket booths, gave his name and took their tickets. Dunai glanced at her watch; they had five minutes to make the ferry.

They raced passed exhibits of prison documents and letters, out to Jetty 1, and boarded the sleek Robben Island ferry. Dunai followed Carl to the back of the boat as the engines started, and found a spot outside the cabin door.

Neither said anything as they glided across the Victoria Basin, out into Table Bay. It was a smooth ride across a calm sea; there was a cool breeze but no wind and the sun shone warmly between wisps of cirrus cloud.

As they moved further into the bay the wind grew stronger and the sea turned choppy. Dunai buttoned her khaki jacket, tucking pieces of dark hair behind her ears so they wouldn't fly across her mouth when she spoke. She leaned close to Carl so she wouldn't have to raise her voice. 'When do we get to speak to this person and how will he know who we are?'

'I've used him before,' Carl said. 'He'll come to us.'

He caught her arm as the ferry bounced and pitched, and she felt a lightness in her chest as she moved her legs apart for support against the roll of the boat. Carl's hand dropped from her arm and

he moved closer to brace her side against his chest. She liked the feeling, also that he looked down at her when most would have been drawn past the ferry's slipstream to the scene of a dwindling Cape Town.

Half an hour later they entered Robben Island's Murray Bay Harbour, nothing more than a cement jetty and high blue slate wall. The large tour party walked from the harbour to three waiting buses.

As Dunai and Carl took a seat she glanced around at her fellow travellers; surreptitiously she thought until Carl put his arm around her shoulders, brought his lips to her ear and whispered, 'Don't be so obvious.'

'You said it was almost impossible for anyone to follow,' she whispered back.

'Almost. But he still needs to make sure. His life depends on it.'

The bus took off and they bumped along the prison island of rocks, sand and windswept places dotted with clumps of tough shrubs and fynbos.

As their guide pointed out sea and water birds, crowned cormorant and night herons, Dunai thought of the forced occupants of the island and how they must have envied the birds. The vanquished Xhosa chiefs, the Muslim leaders from the East Indies, Dutch and British soldiers, lepers, the mentally ill and thousands of anti-apartheid activists.

She couldn't help but feel moved by this flat, rocky island, once the summit of an ancient mountain, which had been turned into the hell-hole of apartheid, designed to crush the spirit, but had become the foundation of a democracy.

She was enthralled as they toured the slate and stone quarries, saw the small stone cairn Nelson Mandela had spontaneously built along with other former prisoners on one of their memorial return trips to the island.

Almost an hour later the three groups, about 150 people, filed into the maximum security prison that had been built over lepers' graves. She looked at the people around her, this time more carefully and, as a former prisoner spoke of life in the dark, cement

dormitories, Dunai listened with only half an ear. She was taking note of accents; most of her fellow tourists were foreigners.

By the time they'd reached the eighty-cell isolation block, with everyone wanting to stand for a few minutes in the tiny cell that had been Nelson Mandela's, she had narrowed the South Africans in the tour party to just five, Carl and herself included. Of the three remaining South Africans, two were a middle-aged couple, white and visiting from upcountry. This left one Coloured man in his early twenties who had originally been indistinguishable from a group of Malaysians.

They stopped in the prison yard made famous by a photograph of Mandela, Sisulu and fellow prisoners seated in rows sewing mail sacks and breaking up rocks in the freezing wind. Dunai began to get a feel for how to turn or position herself so the person she was watching seemed to fall naturally into her line of vision. She noted that the young South African stayed close to the Malaysian group but made no attempt to speak to anyone.

After they left the maximum-security building they were encouraged to explore the surrounding natural habitat and visit the museum shop on their walk back to the harbour.

'Want to see the penguins?' Carl asked.

'Yes,' Dunai said, cautiously; almost certain the question wasn't all it seemed on the surface.

They veered off left and followed a path between rocks, mounds of sand, and scraggly shrubs and fynbos. The colony of African penguins ignored them as they stopped to look at nests or watch their antics.

'I know who it is,' Dunai said as they walked along. 'It's the young, skinny guy in jeans and grey sweatshirt.'

She'd barely finished speaking when the man in the grey sweatshirt approached from behind. There were other people on the path so Carl stopped to let them pass. Dunai, determined not to be accused of being obvious again, kept her eyes on a lizard that scurried across the narrow, rutted path.

'Howzit?' the man in the grey sweatshirt said.

'preciate it,' Carl replied.

'bout a month back, your boy did a *kuier* by Brandon Cupido maybe about a paper bang but the jury's out.'

'No lights?'

'Ja, *bra*. That's it. Just saying, you make a move, better burn up the dance floor.' He brushed past them and continued along the path.

'What the hell was all that about?' Dunai asked.

'Direct translation,' Carl said, as they made their way back to the ferry, 'Wayne Daniels visited Brandon Cupido about a month ago. Seems it might have been about a contract killing although it hasn't been confirmed. Officially nobody saw or heard anything so if we want to move on Cupido we'll have to find some real solid damning evidence.'

'Okay,' Dunai said. 'So who is Brandon Cupido?'

'A Cape Flats gang leader known to every police officer in the province. Thirty years ago he was charged a few times but never tried because nobody survived long enough to bring evidence against him. After that even the charges dried up even though he was guilty of just about every crime in the book. There were rumours till about a decade ago that investigations involving him were window dressing because he'd turned informer for the old government, ratting out anti-apartheid activists in exchange for immunity from prosecution. Apart from being a sadist he'll do anything for money and he has no conscience, even when it comes to his family.'

They stepped off the path to allow another group to pass.

'Ten years ago his daughter converted to Islam and turned informer. Before she could pass on anything she was found in a field in Manenberg. Gang-raped and stabbed seventeen times; one wound for every year she'd been alive. Pretty much everybody believed her father'd ordered the hit.'

'That is sick.'

Carl was silent for a time, and when he spoke again his voice was grim. 'If Wayne Daniels did ask Brandon Cupido to organise a hit on Siobhan, you and I have just waded right into the smelly stuff.'

EIGHTEEN

DUNAI HAD JUST turned out the light and put her head on the pillow when a shadow appeared behind the curtain. She lay still and listened. It was nine o'clock and being winter there were no sounds from the neighbourhood apart from muted traffic and a brief, sudden swell of music as if someone had opened and closed a door somewhere.

Her eyes fixed on the large sash window: nine panes of glass in a wooden frame that opened upwards. Since it was at the front of the house, above the stoep just a few feet from the pavement, it was always locked. There was a streetlight on the corner that softened the darkness inside the turquoise house and because Dunai preferred it this way, she'd hung only a net and thin cream curtain in her bedroom.

The shadow appeared again, and from the way it hovered, it could not be a passerby. Whoever was out there was pacing at her window. It had to be somebody who had business with her, but not the sort that brought a polite knock at the front door.

Her first thought was Brandon Cupido and it set her heart thumping in her chest. She turned slowly onto her back, reached very carefully for the telephone beside her bed and pushed number two on speed dial; Siobhan was programmed at number one but it would be a while before she was able to delete her number.

'Hello?'

'Belle, it's Dunai. There's someone on my stoep; keeps walking past my bedroom window. I think it's a man. Could you ask Bryan to come over? But tell him to approach with caution.'

'Oh my... Okay,' Belle said. 'I'll tell Bryan right now.'

'Thanks.'

'Just don't do anything, okay? Don't go out or look through the curtain or anything like that.'

'I'm not that brave,' Dunai whispered.

'Hold on a sec.'

She heard Bryan's voice in the background, then Belle's. A moment later she came back on the line.

'He's on his way. I'm going to stay on the line with you.'

'No, it's okay. I'm going to phone the boys next door. Thanks so much. Sorry to disturb you like this.'

'Oh, Dunai, of course not. Just get Bryan to let me know as soon as everything's okay.'

'Will do. Bye now,' and she hung up.

All the while she watched for the shadow at the window but it did not appear again. That frightened her even more. Where the hell had he gone? Had she overreacted? Her gut told her no. She tried ringing Rory and Gavin.

'Hi. You've reached Rory and Gavin. We're off somewhere so leave a message and if you aren't selling something we'll call you back.'

'It's me,' she said in a loud whisper. 'It's just gone nine. I need you to come over; someone's prowling outside my window.'

She replaced the receiver and sat very still listening for any unusual sounds in and around the turquoise house. There was the constant whoosh of traffic on Buitengragt Street, the odd shout or dog bark, then a knock at the front door. Thank God, Dunai thought, Rory and Gavin had got her message.

She pulled on a pair of sweat pants and tiptoed to the front door so she wouldn't wake anyone in the house. She turned on the stoep light, kept the chain on the door, just in case, and opened it.

Dan Cowley stood there. He was wearing a suit and pale blue tie. Dunai started with surprise then wished she hadn't. She said nothing, but her arms were tensed, ready to slam the door shut if he moved an inch towards her.

'Can I come in, please?' he asked.

She recovered enough to say, 'Of course not.'

'I really want to speak to you.'

'What about?'

The stoep light above his head drew dark shadows beneath his eyes.

'About Siobhan.'

He glanced, just for a second, at her chest and she realised without a bra her nipples stood out against her t-shirt in the cold. Damn shit, she thought. 'What have you got to say to me about Siobhan? More insults? And I won't listen to any more of your sexist crap.'

'No, no, it's not that. I don't want to talk out here. Can I come in please?'

'No.'

'It wasn't easy coming here.'

The skin around his jaw seemed slack, more so than when she'd met him a short while ago, and his face was pallid in the harsh, yellow light.

Horse appeared beside her and gave a small exploratory bark. Dunai rubbed his neck to reassure him and keep him from waking the rest of the house.

'You're the person who might have murdered Siobhan. How can you even ask me to let you in?'

Dan Cowley looked exhausted. He nodded then began to turn away.

'Wait!' Dunai said. 'I want to know what you came to say.'

He turned back, his eyes sliding from Dunai's face to his feet.

'This has nearly destroyed my life,' he said, so quietly she had to lean forward to catch the rest. 'I haven't only had to live with the blackmail, now the questions you're asking have got the congregation talking. I don't know what will be left of my life when all this is over.' His arms hung at his sides. 'I came to tell you that I've never hurt anyone in my life. I have never physically raised a hand to another human being.' He smiled dejectedly. 'Sometimes I wish I had but I just don't have it in me, you see.'

Dunai had no idea what to say. They stood watching each other till Bryan's blue Citroën roared up to the stoep thirty seconds later. So much for approaching with cautious.

'A friend of mine who's come to check on me,' she explained to Cowley who had jumped nervously at the sound of brakes and was now half turned to the pavement.

'What's going on here?' Bryan asked, striding up the stairs.

Cowley looked agitated and ran a hand through his already dishevelled hair. He ignored Bryan and turned to Dunai. 'I came here to try to make you see that I didn't kill Siobhan. I could never murder another human being, I swear that to you. I don't know how else to convince you.'

Dunai glanced at Bryan; saw shock register on his face then anxiety settle in its place.

She and Cowley stood staring at the ground between them while Bryan looked from one to the other. Then Dunai looked him in the eye and said, 'I don't know why I believe you, but I do.'

He nodded then turned for the stairs.

'Mr Cowley?' Dunai called.

He stopped, looked back over his shoulder.

'You might not hurt people intentionally but your ideas are bigoted and that's enough to start a war.'

'I believe I'm doing the right thing, Miss Marks.' He shrugged and headed up the street.

'You've got a whole lot of explaining to do,' Bryan said as Dunai slipped off the chain. She and Horse stepped back as Bryan came in.

'I'll make some tea,' she said, playing for time. She headed for the kitchen and while the kettle boiled, went over exactly what she could tell him and what was better left unsaid.

When they were settled on the sofa she told him that she'd decided to look into the people Siobhan had blackmailed, but didn't mention Carl's part in it. She didn't want him to feel hurt or slighted because she'd ignored his advice and gone, instead, to a private investigator.

'Dan Cowley,' she said, 'was not only being blackmailed by Siobhan and the last person to see her alive, but his first alibi didn't check out and the second's suspect. The person who seems most guilty is Wayne Daniels. He's a local government official, being blackmailed by Siobhan. He grew up on the Cape Flats with Brandon

Cupido, a gang leader involved in organised crime. He was seen visiting him a month before Siobhan's death, some think to ask Cupido to put out a hit on Siobhan—'

Bryan put his cup down on the coffee table so abruptly its contents almost slopped over the sides.

'You know Dunai, I expected more from you than this.'

She blinked in surprise.

'You have people who care about you, a son. Tell me how you could have deliberately put yourself in danger like this? Gang leaders, organised crime. *Listen* to yourself. You're not some damned investigator in a detective serial. This is real life, and you've put yourself in a position where you could get killed. You're a mother. Did you even think of Jesse when you started all this?'

Bryan got to his feet and Dunai felt a ridiculous urge to burst into tears.

'I had to do it for Siobhan, Bryan. I did think of Jesse. I've done nothing but think of him in all this. But what person would I be if I didn't even try to find who murdered the woman who was like a mother to me? I owe her this, Bryan.'

'No, Dunai,' he said, still on his feet. 'Siobhan would *never* have asked this of you. *Never*.'

She was about to argue when there was a knock at the door just as the telephone began to ring. She snatched the cordless phone from the coffee table, jumped to her feet and started towards the door.

'Hello?'

'Dunai! You okay?' Rory asked.

'Ja, it turned out to be someone involved in Siobhan's investigation and Bryan's here now.'

'I thought I was going to have a heart-attack. I sent Gavin over soon as we got your message.'

'I think he's at the front door. I'll send him home. Thanks, Rory.'

Gavin stood on her stoep looking more terrified than fierce or worried.

'I'm okay, Gav,' she said. 'I explained everything to Rory. You can go home now.'

Rory appeared, grinning, on the stairs. 'You're such a woos,' he said to his lover. To Dunai: 'When I sent him over he said his blood was on my hands.'

'Well, why do *I* always get sent to see if something's wrong?'

'You're bigger than me,' Rory said, putting an arm around him.

'Only because I'm still standing and not lying bloodied all over this stoep. Next time it's your turn to go out in the dark and fight the spooks.'

'I'm so sorry to have given you a nervous breakdown,' Dunai said. 'Sleep well.'

'You too, Dunai darling,' Rory said. 'We live for drama. Don't we, Gav?'

Gavin humphed and they walked back to the pink house.

Dunai took a deep breath and went inside. Bryan was again seated on the sofa. She went to sit beside him. Neither said anything at first then he took her hands in his. 'I want you to understand something. I will never get over Siobhan's death as long as I live. Please don't make me have to get over yours too. I want you to listen to me now.'

'Sometimes terrible things happens to us and as much as we regret or try to undo them we eventually realise we must put them behind us and get on with living or they eat away at us till there's nothing left of the person we once were. I know this because I've had to do it myself. It's one of the reasons I came to this country. And as trite as this sounds; there's nothing more important than living a life of service to your community and working at being the kind of person your kids'll be proud of one day.'

'You have to go to the police with this or leave it alone completely. It's just too dangerous. I'm asking you to do this for me, for you, for Jesse, for Belle and Philippe. We're a small family who's already lost a member. To lose two...' Bryan shook his head.

Dunai looked at his stricken face and felt torn down the middle. She could not bear to hurt him but she had come too far to give up now. If anything, tonight had proved that she had to find who had killed Siobhan or she would spend the rest of her life watching for shadows behind curtains.

Yesterday she'd lied to Sisters Finbar and Raymunda. Tonight she'd lie to Bryan for the first time.

'I'm sorry I put you through this. I really am. I hadn't realised how dangerous it was going to be. I'll leave it for a while but if I find that's too difficult to do I'll go to the police.'

'Promise me,' Bryan said.

Dunai swallowed.

'I promise.'

NINETEEN

IF COWLEY HADN'T pitched Sunday night they might have come for her then, but they had to wait until the next night.

Two knocks sounded at the door just after ten. Horse put his nose to the crack between floor and door, sniffed, stepped back and growled. Mr Nelson bobbed up and down on his perch, shouting, 'Bosh! Bosh!' Cue for the cats to sit up on the sofa, tails twitching. Bringing up the rear was Jesse rubbing his eyes, a piece of hair standing straight up on his head.

Dunai made a mental note to get a spyhole. She put her mouth to the crack between wall and door and called, 'Who is it?'

Other than a mumbled response, she could hear nothing over the racket.

'I can't hear you,' she shouted. 'Hold on.'

It took her a minute to get dog and parrot into Jesse's room.

'You stay with them, Jess,' she said, starting to close the door.

'No, I cry,' he said.

'Oh, all right. But stay in the passage.'

At the door she called again, 'Who is it?'

'We met in the Company Gardens after Siobhan's death.'

'What do you want?'

'You want your questions answered.'

'About the Sisterhood of the Double Cross?'

'Yes.'

'Are you alone?'

'Yes.'

'How do I know you're not here to hurt me?'

There was the briefest pause. 'You've got spirit, Dunai, but your defence isn't that good. There've been better opportunities in the last two weeks.'

Dunai still wasn't convinced but she didn't want the woman to go away.

'Hold on a minute.'

She raced to the kitchen, grabbed the mallet, then wasn't sure where to put it; she was in slippers, track pants, tee and sweatshirt. She put the head of the mallet in the pocket of her track pants and lifted her sweatshirt so the handle was against her side tucked under her arm. It would work so long as she didn't flap her arms around. The metal was like ice through her t-shirt.

'What you doing?' Jesse peered at her from the doorway.

'Nothing. And I told you to stay in the passage.'

She led him across the living room to the passage and hunkered down in front of him. 'I need you to listen to me, Jesse. Stay here. Don't move. Not one step. This is important. If you don't listen to me I'm going to have to close you in the bedroom with Horse and Mr Nelson; even if you do cry.'

'I stay,' Jesse said, nodding vigorously.

Dunai left her son and went to the front door, took a deep breath, opened it and stepped back. The amazon came inside. She looked exactly as she had in the Company Gardens: buffed, six-foot tall, in jeans and a leather duster coat. Thick, dark hair pulled tightly off her face accentuating her bone structure and again the double cross glinted against a black polo neck.

'I'll wait for you to dress.'

'Why?'

'You're coming with me.'

Dunai hesitated.

'That's how it has to be,' she said and Dunai knew if she really wanted answers she would have to follow instructions.

'I need to make arrangements for my son.'

'You can bring him with you.'

'No.' Dunai headed for the passage. 'I'll take him next door.'

'Dunai?'

She turned.

'You won't need the mallet.'

It took her a second to recover. She went to Jesse, who for once was exactly where he was meant to be, and took him to her bedroom. While she dressed she called Barbara, told her she had a work emergency and needed to bring Jesse over. She grabbed her coat as they left the house.

The woman got into a silver Mercedes Benz while Dunai went to the lavender house and dropped Jesse off. As soon as she climbed into the passenger seat she was handed a pair of sunglasses. 'Put these on.'

Dunai discovered the blacked-out lenses were surrounded by a rubbery substance that clung to the skin forming a type of suction. It would be impossible to sneak a peek without making a production of it.

'You've got nothing to worry about,' her driver told her, soothingly.

Dunai had memorised the registration number on her way to the car. Now she wished she could see her watch. If she survived she'd want to know how far they'd travelled. She started counting off the seconds and noting turns and external sound.

'What's the dog's name?' the amazon asked.

'Horse,' Dunai answered. Shit, she thought; I've stopped counting.

'Why'd you call a dog, Horse?'

Dunai hesitated, then gave up the idea of pacing out her journey.

'They're all named after Pippi Longstocking characters.'

'I loved those books,' the amazon said, surprising Dunai who didn't think the woman had ever been a child. 'So what's the parrot's name?'

'Mr Nelson.'

'Pippi's monkey.'

'I taught him to say, "Bosh," like Pippi always said.'

'And the cats are Tommy and Annika; Pippi's friends?'

'Yes.'

'Those were amazing books.' She sounded nostalgic.

'They still are. You should read them again. I appreciate the humour more as an adult and I still think Pippi's a brilliant role model

for girls. I mean look at you. I bet you could lift a horse above your head.'

Dunai wasn't sure what the woman's reaction was. She was sure, though, that her intention had been to stop Dunai taking any notice whatsoever of their route. Not just cautious; paranoid then.

'How did you know I had the mallet?'

'Walking around at home with something that size in your sweats...'

'Ja, but how did you know it was a *mallet*?'

'You've been waving it all over town lately.'

She knew she had not been that obvious. The amazon had to be a professional; but a professional what? Dunai was silent. But silence is not the best companion in situations like these and she began to doubt the wisdom of her decision to be blinded, put in a car and taken to heaven knows where by an amazon who probably belonged to an organisation that was either psychotically delusional or downright dangerous.

The car eventually came to a stop and she was guided across what felt like paving, and into a building. The floor was wooden boards – the old kind that caused an uneven spring beneath your step – along a passageway that went on long enough to tell her she was in a large building or house, round a corner, down another passage; or so she thought.

'You can sit now,' the amazon said, guiding her gently into what turned out to be a soft chair. The sunglasses were taken. 'Wait here,' the woman said and left the room.

It was dim. Obviously a library with dark wood cabinets and a polished floor strewn with thick-pile, jewel-coloured kelims. Above the cabinets, glass-fronted bookcases rose in two tiers, separated halfway by a wooden gallery running all the way around the room. There was a doorway in the upper gallery and she could see a staircase railing behind it. On a wooden panel above one of the cabinets a row of clocks showed the time in ten of the world's major cities. There was a chair and wooden desk in a corner. Dunai was seated in a brown armchair; part of a suite placed in living-room formation.

'Hello, Dunai Marks.'

She turned to the voice. The woman standing inside the door seemed vaguely familiar although she couldn't at first place her. Then she realised it was Paula Swanepoel-Higgs, the only female chief justice in the Constitutional Court.

She came forward and took her hand.

'It really is a pleasure to meet you,' and from the warm squeeze of her hand Dunai thought she was sincere.

She studied the chief justice's face as she took a seat on the opposite side of the coffee table. Usually she was on television sitting with her colleagues on the semi-circular bench in the highest court in the country, delivering some judgement that would set a national precedent. She was dainty in body and features. No make-up, thick grey hair in a neat bob. She wore a white blouse and suit the colour of crushed blackberries. No outward sign of the double cross.

'I've been looking forward to meeting you for a long time,' she said, eyes bright. 'I'm hoping we'll get to know each other better, but for now you have questions. We'll answer some of them tonight.'

Dunai nodded.

'So. What is the Sisterhood of the Double Cross?'

'*Cerchio di Gaia*.'

'Yes, you've got that far. There aren't many who know that name. It's still the Sisterhood of the Double Cross to the conspiracy theorists. It's better that way; more dramatic, less plausible.'

She paused for a moment and Dunai wondered if she was being warned never to use the name *Cerchio di Gaia*.

The chief justice glanced towards one of the clocks on the wall. 'Since you walked into this room ten minutes ago, twenty women have been raped, that's just in this country. Another twelve women and children have been sold into slavery. While you and I sit here females are performing two-thirds of the world's labour, producing more than half our food but own just one percent of the world's assets. Two out of every three people who can't read the label on a medicine bottle tonight, or write a grocery list, are women. Imagine that, Dunai.'

She glanced again at the row of clocks.

'It's just after eight in London, lunchtime in Washington. Sixteen percent of parliamentary and congressional seats are occupied by women even though we are fifty-one percent of the population.

'Boring statistics, I know,' the chief justice said, leaning forward and picking up a remote from the coffee table. She pointed it at a section of wood panelling that slid back to reveal a large plasma screen. Women's faces began to flash across it: bruised, eyes swollen shut, cheek and jaw bones smashed, noses flattened and blood running from gashes, bullet and knife wounds.

'Since Iraq many countries balk at the idea of becoming embroiled in a long, drawn-out conflict. But there is a far more bloody and longstanding war at home. The wounds you see there are real,' the chief justice said.

Dunai looked away.

'We try to collect as far as possible the name of every woman who is killed and abused; not as a record, but a roll of honour like the memorial walls for fallen soldiers although we have some technical difficulties with the presentation,' she went on.

'To give a better idea of the reality of the situation, we'd have to flash hundreds of superimposed images every second which would make it impossible to watch. So it must be one face per second which plays down the real carnage.'

Dunai glanced again at the screen and in an attempt to block out the damage, looked at the eyes, which was a mistake. The shock, misery and pain were worse than the physical wounds. She had to look away again.

'Women's and human rights organisations,' the chief justice said, 'in order not to alienate men and to avoid being accused of hysterics, or sometimes simply in deference to the tenets of report-writing, make statements like, "The abuse of women and girls is endemic in most societies around the world." Fact is, there isn't a corner of the world where it isn't happening, and the sheer numbers and brutality make every other war seem like a playground squabble.'

'But this is crime,' Dunai said, horror, anger stirring in her chest. 'Not a war or conspiracy. What possible reason is there to wage war against women?'

'Same reason for any war. To attain or retain social, economic and political power.'

Dunai realised she'd scooted forward in her seat; she sat back.

'And, yes, Dunai, there is a conspiracy.'

Dunai shook her head, not because she'd be able to offer an argument if she were asked for one, but because it was all too bloody horrifying for words.

'What do you think conspiracy is?' the chief justice asked. 'A group of silvery-haired men meeting clandestinely around a mahogany table?' She shook her head. 'There is a conspiracy by default and it's far more dangerous than the Hollywood type because it's almost impossible to fight.'

She paused and Dunai waited, dreading what was to come.

'The conspiracy by default is the billions of messages generated in everyday life that shape people and the societies they live in. What happens if fifty-one percent or sixty percent of those messages are negative or degrading?'

'The result is rape and murder, domestic violence, bride slayings and mail order brides, honour killings, acid disfigurement, sexual harassment, lower paid jobs and unequal sharing of chores, exclusion from golf clubs, social clubs and certain positions in corporations and religious groups. Female circumcision, denial of access to education and medical care. Forced labour, sex slavery, retail therapy, eating disorders, addiction to plastic surgery; and I could go on but it gets mind-numbing after a while.'

'That's conspiracy by default. And when does a rise in the frequency of negative messages become dangerous for women? Does rape increase when there's a ten percent rise in discriminatory messages, is it perhaps a five percent increase, or as low as two? Who keeps a check on these balances and when a bias occurs, attempts a counterbalance? That, Dunai, is one of *Cerchio di Gaia's* many tasks.'

A large ginger cat walked towards them, stopped a couple of feet away and looked suspiciously at Dunai.

'A friend, Ginger,' the chief justice said, and as if the cat understood, she looked away from Dunai, and hopped onto the other woman's lap.

Dunai hadn't managed to keep incredulity from her voice when she said, 'Most men don't get up in the morning, button their trousers and go off to wage war against women.'

Chief Justice Swanepoel-Higgs smiled. 'Not consciously. But the continuation of a war requires a strong ideology around which to rally your troops, and the ideals that began this war were developed a long time ago. The war continues so long as our way of thinking about gender never changes.'

She kept stroking the cat. 'For instance, that we are defined by our biology. Men being dominant, competitive, aggressive, with large sexual appetites. Women passive, dependant, emotional, irrational and masochistic, with contradicting qualities of modesty and seductiveness.

'So even if we know rape and domestic violence are wrong we still believe rape is the extreme consequence of men's sexual appetite and women become victims because they are passive, unable to fight back effectively; or send out conflicting sexual messages, saying no when they really mean yes.'

Dunai felt angry, at whom she wasn't entirely sure, but she directed it at the chief justice. 'I worked for Siobhan long enough to know women are being abused out there. This is not new to me.'

'Hm,' the chief justice said, blue eyes glittering in the dim light. 'But are you aware that it is not only women who suffer as a result of this belief that we are defined by our biology? Men are victims of patriarchy too. You see, Dunai, *Cerchio di Gaia* does not prescribe to a naïve and romanticised idea of feminism that teaches that men are by nature sexual brutes and women gentle, submissive and nurturing creatures. We're too far down the road for that and it's a path that leads right back to gender stereotyping anyway. Did you know, for instance, that in so-called first world countries men are increasingly becoming victims of domestic violence?'

Dunai shook her head.

'And again, were you aware that seventy percent of children who are murdered in their homes in the US are murdered by their mothers?'

Dunai opened her mouth to protest then shut it.

'Mention a man beaten by his wife and you're met with a laugh or at least a smile. In Canada, despite the number of men abused by their wives and partners, there is not one shelter for battered men. In the entire US maybe one or two. All they can do is request a jail cell for protection, but they must leave their children behind with a dangerously violent partner. And on many statute books across the globe, the law refuses to recognise that men can be raped. And children are still placed with wholly unsuitable mothers rather than with a responsible and loving father. A direct result of patriarchal systems based on gender stereotyping. It must go, Dunai. Primarily for the sake of our daughters but also our sons.'

Dunai thought of Jesse then, and wanted to leave this room and go home, pick him up off Barbara's sofa and carry him back to his bed inside the tiny turquoise house where the world felt safe and at peace.

'Why have you brought me here?'

'The violence will stop only when patriarchal social and political structures are dismantled. This is the over-arching objective we work towards across the globe in myriad ways, and you have a part to play.'

Utter disbelief must have shown on her face because the chief justice said, 'Not as far-fetched as it may sound. Even those who are not sympathetic to our cause are beginning to realise that power-based patriarchal structures are rapidly degenerating and placing the enlightened progression of our species in jeopardy.'

'We are a patient group, Dunai. Generations have passed who never hoped to see the extinction of patriarchy in their lifetime, and I certainly don't expect to see it in mine but it will come. Of that we will make absolutely certain.'

The older woman glanced towards the flashing images on the screen.

'That is our ideology, but we are practical in how we go about our business. Are you familiar with critical mass?'

Dunai shook her head.

'In physics critical mass is the minimum amount of radioactive material necessary to produce a nuclear reaction. Once critical mass has been reached the process becomes self-sustaining.'

Dunai felt a tightening of the muscles around her jaw.

'Illustrations of critical mass are found in everyday life: in fashion, the survival and extinction of species, in language systems, racial integration, political movements, even panic behaviour.

'Based on critical mass, sociologists ask the question; how many people are necessary to adopt a new practice, product or belief system before it becomes a chain reaction that in time persuades most people to adopt that particular practice or product?'

'Social change happens when critical mass occurs but you see, Dunai, numbers alone are not enough. In physics, the size of the nuclear reaction and when it happens depends on the concentration and purity of the radioactive material used in the geometry of the surrounding reaction system. For us this means the concentration and purity of the actions of women and supportive men will determine the size of the reaction. In other words, just how pure and irreversible liberation will be when it eventually does become self-sustaining.'

Dunai stored this information away for consideration at a later stage because there were more personal questions burning a hole in her gut.

'But you're interested in me, why?'

The ginger cat had nodded off in the chief justice's lap. She glanced thoughtfully at the bundle then back at Dunai.

'Four areas of critical importance to us are politics, the judiciary, media and education. We know to win the war many battles must be fought, not all of them large and glorious; most are small and seemingly insignificant. But we encourage our members to do this no matter how scarce their tools or small their platform.

'Siobhan's STOP clinics have both media pull and are educational tools. She believed once government adopted the model there'd be

the backing and resources to use them as an important vehicle and rallying point for female activism; reaching into homes and communities across southern Africa. The groundwork is done and much to our regret Siobhan is gone, but we'd like to safeguard her work and her aims.'

'You want me to take up where she left off.'

The chief justice nodded. 'STOP clinics are one small endeavour in the South African circle's body of work, and to lose them might seem of little importance in the immediate sense, but as the saying goes, "Of such accumulated setbacks were battles lost," and we will not lose this battle.'

'I've heard *Cerchio di Gaia* is a violent organisation. Was Siobhan told to blackmail people?'

'Every person is encouraged to follow her conscience, Dunai.' The chief justice's voice was low and melodious. The cat slept on. 'We are joined by a common ideology, an unbreakable loyalty, but we are not a dictatorship and it will not help to think of our circle as possessing a patriarchal system of hierarchy. We place a matriarchal emphasis on relationships, fluidity and connection based on the scientific theories of complexity and quantum mechanics. Unfortunately for the time being the nature of the conflict generates casualties, but as Nelson Mandela said: it is the oppressor, not the oppressed, who dictates the form of struggle.'

'So then, yes; you are a violent organisation.'

'Circumstances dictate measures. Each situation is unique, as are our adherents; like the couple in the green Valiant.'

Dunai just managed to stay still in her seat.

'We'd prefer not to infringe on a person's privacy but following Siobhan's death we had no idea what danger you were in, which meant following you to keep watch. If we hadn't you might have been raped or murdered in that tunnel.'

Dunai felt herself being drawn in; she clung desperately to her objectivity.

'Siobhan was blackmailing a priest, a genuinely good man. I don't believe she'd ever do that of her own accord.'

Chief Justice Swanepoel-Higgs looked at her kindly, a hint of sadness in her features. 'I see you are struggling with a lot of things. You're still young and idealistic, but I want you to keep in mind when judging Siobhan that she fought the worst social crises and became wearier and more desperate over time.'

'So the end justifies the means?'

'Not always, no.'

'Do you know who killed Siobhan?'

'No. But we intend finding out. You are one way, Dunai. You and Carl Lambrecht have made excellent progress in a very short time.'

'Why aren't you investigating Siobhan's murder yourself? Your resources must be far more than mine.'

'We failed to protect Siobhan. Resources are sometimes a poor substitute for the passion and focus of one motivated individual. And you moved quickly, Dunai; approaching Mr Lambrecht the same day. It was a good move; he has an excellent track-record and coupled with your passion and deeper knowledge of Siobhan could be the best way to bring her murderer to justice.'

'You'd also prefer a woman who loved Siobhan to look into her life rather than the police who might come across sensitive information and demand explanations.'

The chief justice smiled slightly and nodded. 'There is the circle to think about. Siobhan would have been the first to understand that. You know she always believed you'd eventually become part of us, and from what we've seen in recent weeks I believe you'd be a valuable addition.'

'Blackmailing people?'

'We're not the mob, Dunai. We are of all religions, all nationalities and we come from all walks of life. You underestimate our work and our results.'

There was silence in the room except for the cat's purring. Dunai tried again. 'You said Siobhan always believed I'd become part of the group; was she my mother?'

The chief justice sighed and smiled sadly. 'Yes, she was.'

Dunai felt the room fade away. The word mother seemed to spiral, plunge and soar in her mind, her heart thudding to the pulse

of that single word.

Chief Justice Swanepoel-Higgs waited patiently. When Dunai had not spoken after some time, she said, 'You've been deeply traumatised in the last two weeks but you've shown remarkable fortitude. Still, you need time to adjust to the reality of our existence.'

The room swung back into focus. 'What I need is more information,' Dunai said, aware her voice was louder, pitched a little higher. 'How can you ask me to continue where Siobhan left off when I know nothing about the group, have no idea what I'd be getting myself into?'

'Dunai, please understand our situation. Our survival is dependent on our invisibility. I need to be very careful of what I reveal to you. Just bringing you here tonight was a risk. Siobhan didn't think you were ready, but her death has caused a reaction in your life that's a bit like a premature birth. All I can say is that as part of the circle you would be entitled to certain information, but not as an outsider.'

'I can't make a decision now.'

The other woman nodded. 'I've given you what information I can; now it's done.'

She picked up the cat and placed her on the floor. 'I want you to consider what we've talked about. You are being given an opportunity to make your life really count. Think about it, Dunai.'

The chief justice got to her feet and Dunai followed.

'It's been good to finally meet you; even in these tragic circumstances. Here is my card.' She took it from her pocket and handed it to Dunai. 'I'm certain we'll speak again.'

Dunai automatically reached for the card then stood unmoving as the chief justice disappeared with cat in tow the same way she'd come. The amazon returned to the room and proffered the sunglasses. She put them on and allowed herself to be led to the car.

TWENTY

HER ESCORT SAW her safely inside her house then disappeared. It had just gone midnight.

Dunai went next door, lifted Jesse from Barbara's sofa and took him home; he didn't stir. Once he was tucked in bed, she sat beside him, watching him sleep. Then she took a shower, made camomile tea, even though she didn't like the stuff, and sat on the sofa staring at nothing; horse dozing at her feet, Annika in her lap, Tommy beside her and Mr Nelson perched on the back of the sofa. Not so much thinking as trying to let it all sink in, find some nook or cranny in her mind where this strange new knowledge would fit comfortably.

What dominated was the knowledge that Siobhan had been, *was*, her mother. Every childhood fantasy had centred around a woman who, having been forced to give her up, would one day, out of the blue, stride into the orphanage, lift her into her arms and carry her home. The woman's face had always been in shadow or blurred by light streaming in through a window. Not anymore. Dunai closed her eyes and conjured Siobhan; studying her again in this new light, her skin was like Jesse's, pale white with faint gold freckles scattered over the bridge of the nose; like her own. Siobhan's eyes, hazel in colour and almond-shaped, were different to Dunai's, as were her thinner nose and lips, but the women's height and lanky build were the same and there was a similarity to the shape of chin and jaw. Tears squeezed out the corners of Dunai's eyes and trickled over high cheekbones that were nothing like her mother's.

Her face was replaced in Dunai's mind by a scene: the first time she had offered to polish the dunai in Siobhan's flat. At some point Siobhan had stopped talking, and Dunai had looked up to see her

sitting on the sofa, legs drawn up beneath her, eyes fixed on Dunai, an expression on her face she didn't recognise.

'You alright?' Dunai had asked.

'Damn glare in here's making my eyes water,' she'd said and got up to draw the voile curtains. There were other things like the watch Siobhan had given her for her last birthday with the mother-of-pearl face. Dunai stared at it lying on the coffee table.

When the chief justice had told her Siobhan was her mother, Dunai had been stunned and upset, now she was relieved and filled with quiet rage. How could Siobhan have been around her almost everyday for two years and said nothing? Why hadn't she told her? She'd had no right to do that. Dunai wept again for her and everything that was now lost forever; so much more than she'd suspected three weeks ago.

'Siobhan always believed you'd become part of the group eventually,' the chief justice had said. 'Siobhan didn't think you were ready, but her death has caused a reaction in your life that's like a premature birth.'

Whether sane or insane Chief Justice Swanepoel-Higgs, Professor Anna Cooper, even Thandiwe Dingake were enormously influential people and heaven only knows how many other powerful and seemingly insignificant women had found an ideological home with *Cerchio di Gaia*. Now she was being asked to join the group, continue Siobhan's work, allow STOP to be used for the group's aims.

Dunai thought of the group's antithesis: Wayne Daniels, Dan Cowley. Two men representative of millions just like them. To believe she was working towards the eventual eradication from society of their influence would undoubtedly give her life higher meaning but what of men like Bishop Helmsley? And could she ignore the violence Sister Raymunda had hinted at and the dangerous fanaticism she sensed lay beneath *Cerchio di Gaia's* surface?

Dunai wasn't a team player. She'd always prided herself on that; always been fiercely independent. It left her free to follow her conscience. Would she be able to retain that independence within the group? The chief justice had assured her she would. But surely

she couldn't remain untainted by their fanaticism. She thought of how she'd blindly hero-worshipped Siobhan. How long would it be before fitting in and pleasing the group became more important and far more powerful than following her conscience?

The chief justice had admitted that the circle, as she called it, was not above using violence to further their aims.

This dilemma Dunai now wrestled with was not entirely new to her. Her first seventeen years had been lived under the apartheid regime while being brought up in a multi-racial, Roman Catholic orphanage opposed to the government's human rights abuses. This meant her ideology had developed into what was then called 'white liberalism'.

She'd been six when the armed wing of the ANC, moulded by Nelson Mandela who years later would be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, launched its first car bomb attack, killing several and injuring hundreds. And she was eight when the ANC announced that 'soft' targets were no longer off limits. Six months later and two days before Christmas a bomb exploded in a shopping mall, killing five people and injuring sixty. One of the dead had been a two-year-old boy whose bright blue eyes Dunai could still see staring at her from the front page of a newspaper.

Terrorists; it was a word that had become part of everyday South Africa, an expression that for Dunai had come to represent a group of invisible monsters who skulked among ordinary people in everyday places, planning acts of unspeakable evil then executing them without conscience. She'd feared and despised them till the daughter of one of the cleaning staff at the orphanage had told her how the police had bashed down her aunt's door in the middle of the night and dragged her to a police station. They'd beaten her. When she refused to give up the names of her comrades they brought a tape recorder to her and played back her baby daughter's screams of agony. They said they'd only dislocated the infant's shoulder, nothing permanent, nothing that couldn't be fixed, and that's where they'd leave it if she gave them the information they were looking for.

'But they didn't really hurt the baby,' Dunai remembered saying. 'It was a trick, wasn't it?'

The girl had looked steadily at her and shaken her head. 'When they let aunty go she found baby at the Red Cross Hospital. Her shoulder was put back and wrapped in a bandage.'

Then Dunai no longer knew who the real monsters were and tonight it was the same. She remembered a quote from her last year of school when they'd begun to rewrite the history textbooks. Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC, a former maths and science teacher whose character was dominated by an exceedingly gentle nature, had eventually said, 'If I had been approached by an ANC unit and asked whether they could go and plant a bomb in a supermarket, I would have said, "Of course not." But when our units are faced with what is happening all around them, it is understandable...'

Dunai had known and met many liberal white South Africans during apartheid, including the nuns. And she knew only too well that those who did not join the armed struggle came to occupy a no-man's land, trapped between loathing of the fascist government's brutality and aversion to the freedom movement's violent retaliation. These confused citizens had compensated by being especially charitable to the black and Coloured people they'd come into contact with, telling themselves there was nothing they could do to influence such a brutal regime whereas they could make a difference in individuals' lives. But history suggested that if it weren't for the violence people like Siobhan had embraced, a number of black people would be living in tiny, solid brick houses built by their kindly white employers, their children's school fees paid and just enough on the table, but apartheid would still be raging, its casualties mounting daily, costing eventually hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of lives.

Dunai had come to only one conclusion by the time the first democratic elections were held, and that was that the debate about violence versus pacifism remained academic until an individual or those close to them were threatened in a very real way. Peaceable, well-adjusted individuals would almost always cross the line if the push were personal enough.

The decision to resort to violence seemed to have been an easy one for Siobhan; she'd become a soldier because that's what it took to win the war. Her decision to join *Cerchio di Gaia* had probably been equally straightforward.

Dunai realised now why Siobhan had often encouraged her to think about which way she'd have gone if apartheid had continued. But much to her mentor's chagrin, the only verdict Dunai had ever reached was, 'It's one thing to abhor a violently oppressive regime, another to blow up children in a shopping mall.' She knew the debate well enough to know that the question of whether to join *Cerchio di Gaia* would not present an easier answer.

Dunai knew snippets of speeches made by Nelson Mandela. They were repeated in school orals and at Freedom Day celebrations, 'The time comes when there remain only two choices: submit or fight... We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom...' And as the history of Dunai's country had proved perhaps more than any other was that today's terrorist is tomorrow's freedom fighter. How would history remember *Cerchio di Gaia*? And how would she think back on her own decision to submit rather than fight?

Perhaps if she'd been forced to listen to Jesse's screams as his arm was torn from its socket she'd have found some dark place inside herself that was capable of blowing the enemy's child to pieces. Perhaps such terrible trauma, violent and personal, drove one insane, allowing extreme retaliation to be excused by the uninvolved and explained by the mind doctors. But Dunai had no such excuse for joining what she suspected was a dangerous organisation.

Round and round her thoughts went. It was three in the morning when she forced herself to go to bed. Even then, she hardly slept at all.

TWENTY-ONE

SHE WAS EARLY into work, which is why she was alone when the call came through from DI van Reenen at eight o'clock.

'We've recovered a coffee and fax machine stolen from your office with your company sticker on them.'

Dunai had almost forgotten about the police and that they continued to pursue the burglary line of enquiry as she believed they'd been instructed to do by the National Intelligence Agency.

'Where did you find them?'

'Atlantis. Around the corner from the police station in an industrial tip.'

'Why go to the trouble of stealing those items then throw them away?'

'Because, Ms Marks, they were broken,' the detective said, sounding exhausted as usual. 'Obviously damaged during or after the burglary.'

'Who found them?'

'An old man who goes through the tips on refuse day; sees what he can salvage. He saw the STOP stickers on the items, remembered hearing on the news about the murder and took the items to Atlantis Police Station.'

'That was nice of him. D'you often get desperate people handing in fax machines to the police?'

There was silence for a moment, then, 'Nothing surprises me anymore.'

'Does this help your investigation at all?'

'We'll look into the theft syndicates in the area. I told your colleague, Mr Baobi, that two people in your building lost keys and another was mugged two weeks before the burglary. The guy who was mugged lives in Atlantis but he genuinely was attacked;

reported it to the police. No one's been apprehended; he didn't get a good look at his assailant. Also he wasn't working in the building when the burglary took place. He'd quit a week before.'

'Can you remember what company he worked for?' Dunai tried to keep the question as casual as possible.

'Can't remember off hand,' van Reenen said. 'But it's a small risk assessment place on the first floor.'

As soon as she'd rung off, she went towards the door but remembered it was too early for Carl to be in the office. Back at her desk, she dialled his mobile. It rang for some time before a groggy voice said, 'Yes?'

Dunai's brow furrowed. 'You still sleeping?'

'Yes, Dunai, I'm still sleeping.'

'It's ten past eight.'

'What do you want?'

She told him about Van Reenen's call.

'We have a link now,' she said. 'Daniels wants Siobhan killed so goes to gangster Cupido in Atlantis on the Cape Flats. Someone who works in the building and just happens to live in Atlantis is conveniently mugged and his keys to the building stolen. Same guy quits his job and a week later Siobhan is murdered in what looks like a burglary. Two weeks later two broken items from the so-called burglary turn up in an industrial tip in Atlantis where Cupido lives. Too many coincidences.'

'Okay,' Carl said, sounding less groggy. 'I'll get the guy's address. You talk to his former colleagues. But keep it casual for god's sake.'

'And by the way, I had a visit from Dan Cowley Saturday night.'

'You what?' Carl said, sounding alert now.

Dunai told him about the encounter.

'D'you believe he didn't kill her?' Carl asked at the end of her tale.

'I dislike that man so much I wish he was guilty. But I believe him.'

'At least means you're keeping an open mind.'

'Doing my best,' Dunai said. 'Sorry I woke you.'

'No, you're not,' and he hung up.

She took the stairs to the first floor. The large receptionist seemed to have been born without a volume control. After Dunai had told her STOP was looking for an office messenger, she boomed, 'Can't help you. Ours quit couple weeks ago. Worked here a month, not even, then pissed off. How you like that?'

Dunai leaned casually on the counter. 'What was his name again?'

'Jerome Plaatjies. Hardly ever talked. Never stopped for a chat. Most geeky brother I ever met. Always had his nose in a book, you know what I mean? Studying through UNISA or something; business I think.'

'Ja, I don't think he ever spoke to me either,' Dunai said, frowning up at the ceiling. 'Not even sure I remember what he looked like.'

'Tall, skinny guy with glasses,' she shouted. 'Looks like he could fall through his own poop-hole.'

'Oh,' Dunai said, glancing at all the closed doors leading off the reception area. 'I think I remember now. Where'd he go then?'

'Last I heard works for a medical supply company in Darling Street; Castle side of the Grand Parade. Don't know what it's called. So, what's the latest with the investigation? The police got anyone yet?'

'No,' Dunai said, beginning to edge away from the desk.

TWENTY-TWO

THE GRAND PARADE is the city's oldest square and its earliest commercial centre. Over the years it had been the site of public floggings and executions, a burial site and military parade ground. Its fifteen minutes of fame played out to a watching world on 11 February 1990, when thousands gathered to celebrate the release of Nelson Mandela, who made his first public address in twenty-seven years from the balcony of City Hall that fronts the parade.

Now a market place, at eight-ten on a winter's morning, vendors were setting up for the day, hurrying to fasten tarpaulin over the metal frames of their stalls to protect their wares from the steady drizzle.

Dunai unfurled her umbrella as soft drizzle turned to cold needles of rain. She tried to sink deeper into her coat, protect herself from gusts of wind that felt straight off the Antarctic. She huddled against one of the brick kiosks on the Plein Street side of the parade, watching a steady stream of people stop to buy coffee, pies and pastries. It was warmer here, the smells homely, and the constant ping of microwave ovens comforting.

Carl arrived ten minutes later, hands thrust deep into the pockets of his suede jacket. He looked as if he hadn't properly woken yet.

'What else did you find out about Jerome Plaatjies?' he asked.

'He was a quiet person; kept to himself. He's studying through UNISA. And he quit his job suddenly. There he is,' Dunai said, straightening. 'Guy with the glasses, in the navy blue windbreaker, rucksack over his shoulder.'

They had positioned themselves in this spot, guessing that if Jerome really did work in Darling Street on the Castle side of the Grand Parade, he'd have to walk diagonally across the parade and

there was only one entrance from the railway station; a narrow walkway near the brick kiosks.

Dunai wasn't sure when they should approach him. She waited for Carl's lead. The young man had almost passed them when Carl, with Dunai close behind, moved forward and fell into step with him.

'Jerome Plaatjies?'

Far from slowing down, Jerome picked up the pace.

'I'm a private investigator. My colleague and I are investigating Siobhan Craig's murder and we'd like to speak to you about that.'

Jerome stopped suddenly; looked stunned, then glanced nervously around. 'I don't know anything.'

He was Carl's height but a third of his width, his skin the colour of brown paper, eyes behind the glasses almost black, hair straight and short.

'Look, Jerome,' Carl said, 'why don't we get out of the open, okay?'

He began to walk back to the brick kiosks, towards a row of benches under bare-branched trees. Here they'd be out of view of most of the parade. Jerome hesitated just a second before following them.

'I'm really sorry about Siobhan but I don't know anything,' he said quietly. He stooped as if he found always sticking out the top of a crowd embarrassing.

'D'you know you live a street up from Brandon Cupido?' Carl asked. His voice was non-confrontational, soft even, and there was barely a trace of Afrikaans accent.

Jerome bobbed his head but said nothing.

'A couple of days ago some of the stuff stolen from Siobhan's office was found in a tip two blocks from where you live.'

Jerome wiped a hand across his mouth. 'There's a lot of criminals in Atlantis; it's a bad place.'

Carl nodded. 'Okay, Jerome,' he said. 'This is what I think happened, two possible scenarios. Cupido is asked to put a hit on Siobhan Craig. She's working on a government project so her murder would draw attention and he needs to put a bit more planning into this one than his usual in-your-face brutality.'

'I looked into your background. You matriculated last year; did well but still couldn't find a job. So there you are, young guy living a street from Cupido. No criminal record or history of gang activity. You're conscientious, worked hard at school, just started studying for a business degree and you live at home with your mother and two younger sisters still in high school.'

Jerome watched Carl closely.

'Cupido finds a job opening in the building Siobhan works in and puts you forward for it. Once you've settling in you're told to keep an eye on her movements and hand over to Cupido the set of keys you've been given to the building. Only your conscience doesn't allow you to do this so they're taken from you forcibly. You realise this could make you look like a suspect in whatever Cupido's planning so you go to the police with your fresh injuries and lay a mugging charge. But you can't give any details about your attackers because you didn't see them clearly. You've realised Cupido set you up in that job for his own reasons so you leave quickly and find other employment.'

Jerome was staring at Carl as if riveted by the story. Carl waited. Jerome stooped even lower by hunching his shoulders, and stared at his shoes.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'All I want to do is get my mother and sisters out that place. My mother goes to work, my sisters to school; even that's a risk. They never go anywhere else. There's the normal criminals but it's the gangs that are bad. They gang rape girls as an initiation; you hear about it all the time. Girls too scared to go to the police. Everyone's afraid.'

His eyes were large behind his glasses. 'I'll get them out soon. If I don't they'll be killed or raped. I'm telling you, man, you don't win going up against people like Cupido. That's how I've kept out of the gangs. Stay at home much as I can. I learnt to run fast as a kid and if they caught me, let them beat me up, didn't say a thing but I didn't join either, still did my own thing. Now I've got a job, I'm studying. I'll get my mom and sisters out. It won't take long now.'

'What job are you doing?' Carl asked.

'Messenger,' Jerome said, his features animated now. 'But someone's going on maternity leave in three months and they said I can work in her place as a data capturer.'

'You got a mobile number?' Carl asked.

'I told you, man, I can't tell you anything.' Jerome sounded desperate.

'It's so I can call you if I hear about a better job,' Carl said.

Jerome hesitated for a second. 'You got a piece of paper?'

Carl took a notebook and pen from his pocket and wrote down the number, which Jerome repeated twice.

'I'm sorry I can't help,' he said. 'I really am but I've got to stay alive you know.'

'Yes, I know,' Carl said. 'You better get going, you'll be late for work.'

'Thanks, man,' Jerome said, dipping his head and taking a couple of steps back like he was kowtowing. Dunai found that heartbreaking. It made her angry, too. At Brandon Cupido and his type.

When he had gone Dunai said, 'That was horrible. I feel so sorry for him. And it was a waste of time. We got absolutely nothing out of him.'

'Maybe not,' Carl said. 'His body language pretty much confirmed the scenario I put to him and that means we're beginning to put together a clearer picture of what led to Siobhan's murder. It's easier to find evidence if you know where to look.'

'It was nice of you to offer to keep an eye out for better work for him.'

'He'd come in handy as an informant if he felt more secure,' Carl said.

'That more of your apartheid training?' Dunai asked, not bothering to keep the disgust from her voice.

Carl half turned to her, opened his mouth, then closed it and stormed off.

TWENTY-THREE

SATURDAY MORNING STARTED out well enough with no sign of what the afternoon would bring.

Dunai helped Bryan set the table for brunch while Belle saw to the last of the cooking. Jesse had piled Amy's and May's dolls into a pram and was wheeling them around at break-neck speed while the girls sat side-by-side at the piano and Philippe clapped and called encouragement whenever they finished a bar. Siobhan usually sat in that chair.

'You okay?' Bryan asked.

'I miss her.'

'I do to,' he said and smiled. 'The edge she brought to a room. You remember that? Knowing she was going to come out with some horribly controversial statement in the middle of polite company and the more conservative the gathering, the hairier the statement was likely to be.' He stopped smiling.

Dunai reached for his hand. She hadn't yet told him that she'd discovered Siobhan was her mother. She still didn't want to trot out all that business with *Cerchio di Gaia* so she needed to think up a plausible story of how she had discovered this before she could tell him. She was also not entirely convinced the chief justice had been honest with her. She would wait for the DNA results.

'Have you been to the flat to sort out her things?' he asked.

'No. Philippe says there's no rush. He doesn't have any immediate plans to sell the flat and it doesn't seem to bother him living among her stuff.'

'I think they lived apart so much, as long as he hangs onto her things it's like she isn't really gone and he can phone her up and arrange to meet.' Bryan ran a hand over his face. 'Everyone deals with grief in their own way.'

Dunai studied his face; he was paler than usual and he'd lost some weight. 'How are you dealing with it?'

'Work helps. I miss her, but I keep telling myself: get ready for the presentation; that's my tribute to her. Also Belle's a rock, and May and Amy... Sometimes I can't believe how lucky I am.'

They listened to a couple of bars from the girls, then he said, 'You know you've always got a place with us here. You're family, Dunai, you do know that?'

'You'll never know how much it means to me,' Dunai said.

SHE DECIDED TO set up her stall in Greenmarket Square as she'd done every alternate Saturday before Siobhan's death. It seemed important to do something normal again. Bryan seemed pleased and Dunai knew he believed this was a sign that she'd dropped her investigation and begun to put Siobhan's death behind her. She didn't have the heart to tell him that nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesse would usually spend the afternoon with Siobhan; now he stayed with the Larsens.

She set up her stall between a man selling toys and objects made from recycled material, and a woman offering jewellery and ornaments of wire and beads. Dunai laid out her trestle table: a green Japanese fan, a figurine of the Holy Mother, a beautiful old tea pot, cups, saucers and plates, two vintage hats, an evening bag, and some old books. In summer she picked lavender that grew wild in the grass near the old midwife's house in the quarry. She'd dry it then tie it into bunches, fastening it with ribbon or twine; it was always a good seller.

Greenmarket Square was where Africa, Europe and Asia had met to trade and gossip for almost three hundred years. It was one of Dunai's favourite places and although geographically incorrect, she thought of it as the centre of the city. She had always loved the camaraderie between stall owners. The friendly chats and the way they'd move their folding chairs to follow the shade in summer and the sun in winter. But today the companionship wasn't there. The

seller of recycled goods on her left sounded foreign, Nigerian maybe, and although friendly enough communication was strained between them and they gave up after a while. The black woman, about Dunai's age, selling wire and beadwork, seemed disinclined to talk. Dunai had shown some interest in her wares, but she'd walked to the front of her stall where she stood in the sunshine, oil glistening in her tight curls, the smell of coconut in the air.

Dunai sold the Japanese fan, the bunches of lavender and evening bag. The weather was holding, she was selling well, but paranoia had set in; the kind that kept her glancing at the wire and beadwork woman on her right.

She couldn't get Dan Cowley or Wayne Daniels out of her head. Cowley was becoming increasingly agitated as she and Carl dug deeper into his life, but she was more inclined to believe that Daniels and Cupido had been responsible for Siobhan's murder. She also wondered how Cupido had managed to get that job in the building for Jerome Plaatjies. Maybe the receptionist or someone else who worked there was in the gangster's pay. And if she was right on this score, how long would it be before Cupido got wind of their enquiries?

She nearly missed the small, black hand that reached up, right under her nose, and grabbed the porcelain figurine of the Holy Mother.

'Hey!' Dunai shouted, rounding the table. The boy, about eleven years old, in summer sandals, blue tracksuit pants and a filthy brown jersey too small for him, darted along the row of stalls. Dunai ran after him; mobile, keys, lip balm, tissues and coins jiggling in the pockets of her cargo pants. Her running shoes meant she had a good chance of catching him. She knew he was probably cold and hungry and she would give him money when she caught him, but he could not have the figurine.

She chased him to a line of trees a metre from the tarpaulin walls of the last row of stalls, and stopped. The child was gone. She crept slowly along the line of trees, but it wasn't a child that stepped out from behind a large plane tree.

The man was tall and thin with light brown skin, scarred cheeks and eyes as cold and black as a fish on ice. His mouth was unusually wide with lips the colour of raw flesh and his face so narrow it all seemed to come to a point at forehead, nose, mouth and chin without the benefit of a jaw or cheekbones. His resemblance to a tuna fish was uncanny. His large right hand, covered with short, linear gang tattoos, gripped the base of the twenty-centimetre figurine of the Holy Mother and slapped it with some force into the palm of his other hand.

Dunai froze for just a second before turning to run, but she was hauled backwards by the hood of her tracksuit top. He grabbed her arm tightly and spun her to face him. Then stepped up close and brought his mouth to within an inch of her face; his breath had the fetid, sourly smell of rotten meat.

'Mr Cupido sends greetings from the Cape Flats,' he breathed in her face. 'Says he has a story for you.' He paused for effect. 'Mr Cupido bought two dobermanns while back; paid lots for them. But dogs run all over the streets of the flats, so when some bitch comes sniffing around, he blows its brains out. Can't tell you how many he's done. You get that, *bitch*? Mr Cupido protects what's his.'

His fingers tightened around her upper arm and this time the pain burned a hole clean through the curtain of fear. Almost of its own accord, her untended left arm shot upwards, the heel of her hand slamming into the underside of his chin. His teeth snapped together, head shot back, and Dunai half expected him to collapse at her feet but he didn't. His head tipped slowly back to its starting position and this time there was a strange luminosity in those dead, black eyes. Rage, she thought, and began to claw at the fingers around her arm, feeling slithers of skin give way under her nails.

A movement to her left caught her eye and she stopped clawing for a second, turning her head towards the danger. He had the figurine raised in his right hand, ready to strike. Dunai kept her eyes fixed on the serene face as it came towards her. Duck, she told herself, scream.

'Twitch a muscle and I'll cut you.'

She couldn't at first place the woman's Xhosa-accented voice, but recognised the smell of coconut oil. The seller of wire and beadwork was much shorter than Dunai's attacker and remained hidden behind his back.

'Bring your arm down, very slowly. Let go of her and step back.'

He hesitated, then arched his back slightly and winced.

'I'm serious,' the woman said. 'Don't make me cut you more.'

Dunai's breath came out in a rush as the painful clamp around her arm fell away. She stepped back, rubbing at the band of pain. She was angry now. 'You're a sick, insane bastard, you know that? Give me that,' she said, grabbing the figurine. She noticed bloody furrows along his hand where she'd raked him and that made her feel better.

'You come stand with me.'

A hand shot out from behind the man's back and beckoned to her. She obeyed, stepping around the man and going to stand beside her rescuer. The woman's eyes were narrowed almost to slits and there was a deepening of colour on her chocolate-brown cheeks. She held a short knife to the man's back. 'We're going to walk to the end of the row,' she said. At the man's split-second hesitation she pushed the knife forward, just enough to make him wince and arch his back. He began to move forward.

'You're a dead woman,' he ground out.

She said nothing, only advanced the knife another fraction, making him swear under his breath, but he directed no more comments to either woman.

They reached the end of the row and moved back into the thick of the market. When they were once again surrounded by stalls and shoppers, the seller of beadwork said, 'Get lost you rubbish *tsotsi*,' jabbing him once more in the back. Then she turned quickly and strode away. Dunai followed close on her heels, glancing over her shoulder just once, but the man was gone.

She waved away Dunai's thanks. 'I grew up in Guguletu; I know how to deal with these types.'

'Can you at least tell me your name?'

'Thandi,' was all she would say.

When they got back to their stalls, Thandi handed a packet of cigarettes to the Nigerian selling recycled goods – he'd been looking after the women's stalls in their absence – then once again went to stand in silence in the sunshine.

Of course Dunai wondered if Thandi was part of *Cerchio di Gaia*. She looked for some sign of the double cross but could see only a gold chain just visible above the neckline of her brown t-shirt.

Dunai was almost sure the receptionist on the first floor was Brandon Cupido's informant; otherwise Carl would have been mentioned too. Ms Boom Box was the only interview Dunai had done on her own. This would also explain how Jerome Plaatjies had got the messenger job in Siobhan's building.

She believed she had no choice but to ask Carl to proceed more carefully. Perhaps back off for a while until the gangster was no longer watching them so closely. Siobhan would never have expected her to risk her own life or Jesse's.

She called Carl on her mobile. Since he'd stormed from the Grand Parade on Wednesday things had been stilted between them. She didn't particularly want to speak to him now but it was a call she had to make.

She told him about the message from Brandon Cupido but declined his offer of safe passage home, although his obvious concern pleased her. She promised him she would be especially careful but was determined not to run today, particularly in light of her fellow stall-owner's courage. Just as she finished the call, the last bar of her battery faded away.

Dunai set poker-faced Thandi to look after her stall and headed across the square to her office block. She unlocked the safety gate, swiped her security card and checked to see she wasn't being followed by Fishface. She was alone. Still she took the stairs two at a time. At the top, she forced herself to slow to a brisk walk. She reached the end of the passage, swung into the toilet block and locked herself inside a cubicle.

She emerged alert but calmer; washed her hands, went to the outer door, and raised her hand to push it open. Dunai froze. She was sure she'd heard footfalls in the passage outside. She remained

stock-still, palm against the pneumatic door; there was no handle. Nobody worked up here except STOP employees and it wasn't Bryan or Philippe out there. Had Fishface come back to finish his story?

Moments ticked by with not another sound from outside. She had almost convinced herself she'd imagined the footfalls when she became aware of a pressure against her palm. She kept her hand exactly where it was but eased the pressure. There came that push again. Her heart tried to flee its confines, hurling itself against her ribcage, but she had the presence of mind to push back, putting all her weight behind it. The pressure increased on the other side.

'Dunai Marks. I'd like to speak to you please.' It was a man's voice; definitely not Fishface.

Again she saw Siobhan's murdered body in all its grisly detail and anger flew in the face of fear. 'Who the hell are you?' she shouted. 'I'm not letting you in.' She shoved against the door. There was a push from the other side.

'I'm with the National Intelligence Agency. I had an appointment with Siobhan Craig but she was killed the night before our meeting.'

Dunai's shoulders were trembling. 'How do I know you're telling the truth?'

'You can't keep pushing this door forever and there's no one else on the floor,' the voice said calmly. 'You have no choice but to believe me.'

Dunai thought she'd be more inclined to open the door with a weapon in hand. She looked around but everything was fixed to a wall, literally nailed down. Except the bins used to dispose of sanitary towels. It was worth a try.

'Look I'm going to keep—' She sprang back and threw herself across the room to the nearest cubicle. The main door crashed against the wall, there was the slapping sound of hands connecting with floor tiles and the word, 'shit.' She grabbed a bin from the cubicle, stepped out and raised it as best she could.

She recognised the man immediately. He was the charcoal suit on the stairwell talking to DI van Reenen the morning after Siobhan was killed. Thick, dark brown hair had flopped over his forehead. For

an instant there was surprise in his brown eyes, then he grinned at her. 'You plan to gross me to death with that?'

The 'ha' that escaped her was half sob, half laugh. She dropped the bin to the floor and sat on it, arms dangling at her sides.

He brushed hair from his eyes, straightened his shirt collar and pulled at the cuffs of his dark brown suit. 'I see you remember me from the stairwell,' he said, holding his hand out to her. 'Jacob,' he said.

Dunai looked at his hand, then sprang up from the bin and shoved him so hard he was forced to take a step back. 'You could have waited in the passage for me, or outside,' she said. 'You've got a sick sense of humour.'

'There's nothing funny about any of this,' he said. The proffered hand dropped to his side. He stared at her and his scrutiny made her want to shove him again. He was handsome, his features perfect, quite bland.

'What do you want from me?'

His eyes narrowed then he turned abruptly and went to a basin where he washed his hands. 'You been approached by *Cerchio di Gaia*?'

Dunai was stunned but still managed to say, 'Who?'

'*Cerchio di Gaia*.'

'I don't know what you're talking about.'

'Oh, I think you do,' he said, conversationally.

'You said you were due to meet Siobhan the day after she was killed,' Dunai countered, moving towards the basin. 'What was the meeting about?'

He looked up and their eyes met in the mirror. 'You first,' he said.

'I don't know anything about... whatever name you said. I have absolutely no idea what this is about.'

'Don't play dumb, Dunai. It doesn't suit you. Intelligence is in the eyes and they never lie.'

She forced herself to hold his gaze.

He turned, holding his dripping hands out at his sides and moved slowly towards her, stopping an inch away. She could feel his breath

against her cheek, his chest wide open to her and it felt as if their bodies were already touching.

'You're standing in front of the towels,' he said, softly.

She stepped aside quickly, feeling herself redden.

Jacob reached for a paper towel and began to dry his hands.

'Siobhan knew we were having a look at her and her circle of special friends. She called the evening of the fifteenth just after seven, a few hours before she was killed. She said she had information that would be of great interest to me.'

The bewilderment on Dunai's face was genuine. Again the agent's eyes narrowed as he studied her for a full thirty seconds. The only movement from Dunai was a shrug of the shoulders.

'If you don't already have a connection with *Cerchio di Gaia* they will contact you,' the agent said in clipped tones, 'particularly in light of Siobhan's death. We have information, Dunai; facts about your birth that would be of interest to you. But you and I have to establish a relationship first and we do that with an exchange of information; you bring me facts about *Cerchio di Gaia* and I give you facts about your birth. That sound reasonable to you?'

She was silent for a moment, then said, 'No, Jacob, it does not. It sounds like the ranting of a crazy person. For all I know you could be between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, still live at home with your mother and drive a Beetle. Give me something about my birth and if it checks out I'll know you're legit and I'll see what I can do.'

Jacob smiled at her and looked pleased. 'You're a natural.' He scrunched the paper towel and slam-dunked it into the bin. 'Unfortunately it doesn't work like that. You're trying to put the cart before the horse. It's horse then cart.'

'Why are you so interested in this *Cerchio*... whatever?' Dunai asked.

Jacob turned back and smiled at her. The effect on his already beautiful face was devastating. He stepped towards her and the smile was gone. 'They're fanatics, Dunai. They have a history, iconology, they're extremely organised, contained, and there's money and power; lots of it.'

'Don't tell me this is some post nine-eleven thing and you're working with the Americans. You said your name was Jacob; maybe the Israelis?'

'You got a computer I can use? I want to show you something,' he said.

'What?'

'Computer, Dunai.'

TWENTY-FOUR

JACOB PULLED UP a chair beside her, his thigh almost touching hers, which made her feel tingly and uncomfortable. She'd never experienced fear and sexual attraction in one go; this was something new to her.

He inserted a flash drive, his arm brushing Dunai's stomach as he reached for her mouse and clicked on an icon of a pink disc that had appeared on the screen, then he sat back as the file opened in PowerPoint. Dunai moved the mouse to his side of the keyboard.

The logo of the National Intelligence Agency appeared on the first slide: a black, brown and cream eye within protective brackets and the words *Ito la lushaka* (Venda, meaning Eye of the Nation).

The second slide was completely unexpected and Dunai felt a jolt of recognition. There was an elderly man, almost bald, in a four-poster bed draped with heavy brocade. It was difficult to tell what he'd looked like in life because his body was stiff and twisted, hands frozen like claws, face horribly contorted.

The next slide: a man in torn, bloody robes, on the ground surrounded by rocks and stones. His face flattened so it was unrecognisable as human.

The slide changed again. A fat man was propped against a wall, legs spread in front of him on the concrete floor, mouth agape, his hands severed and placed on the floor between his legs.

Dunai lifted her eyes above the screen and focussed on the red beaded flowers and blue vase in the bookcase. 'Turn it off,' she said, quietly.

She heard Jacob click the mouse. 'Sorry about all the gore,' he said. 'Did you pick up anything in the images?'

Dunai's head swung towards him and she looked at him as if he were mad. 'I don't know who or what you—'

'Try not to look at the bodies,' he said, quickly. 'Look at what's around them.'

The mouse clicked again. She forced her eyes back to the screen.

'This is a cardinal,' Jacob said of the old man in the four-poster bed. 'He was poisoned.' He skipped several slides. The screen showed a hand: blue-grey, fingers like claws, and lying on the palm was a gold double cross. This, Dunai realised, was what Sister Raymunda had told her about; one of the rumours they'd heard about the methods of Sisterhood of the Double Cross.

'This sheik was stoned to death. See the stones arranged beside him?'

Dunai saw stones placed to form a double cross.

Jacob skipped to the fat man on the cement floor. 'Head of an organised crime syndicate in the UK, ran a string of brothels believed to be involved in sex trafficking. As you can see his hands were severed and his tongue cut out. But look at the blood spatter near his feet.'

Dunai again saw the double cross.

'Media mogul in the US,' Jacob said of a man lying on a Persian rug, legs spread apart, arms neatly at his sides, eyes gouged out. 'He used to publish many of the porn titles in the US, owned websites and retail outlets. You won't see a symbol in this picture. The afternoon of his death, police were still processing the scene, there was an entry in the obituaries. Other than his name it said only, "Take up your cross and follow me. Again I say take up your cross and follow me." The message had been emailed to the obituaries department from the newspaper editor's computer but she was ruled out as a suspect because she'd never met the victim, had an alibi and no motive.'

A thin, blonde man lying face down appeared on the screen. His knees were drawn up beneath him so his backside stuck up in the air. Protruding from his anus was a large red vibrator; a line of blood trickled towards his genitals.

'This businessman ran at least forty paedophile websites out of Switzerland. A number of photographs were taken of him lying face down, legs together, arms perpendicular. They were posted on the

websites using some sophisticated password security known only within the paedophile ring. When the series of photographs are superimposed, you can see the body has been moved around a point to form a double cross.'

Jacob sat back, elbow on the arm of the chair, chin resting on his hand.

'Intelligence agencies around the world have suspected the existence of a radical feminist organisation for a while now. They began to collate and cross reference material and attempt to build a list of possible members. But this group seems to have no borders, no common language, culture or religion and that poses a unique set of problems for intelligence agencies. Also the organisation of the group isn't based on any known method or structure. Members seem to act independently of one another while being unshakably loyal to the group and a common purpose. The only common denominator we've picked up so far is the double cross symbolism left at the crime scenes; a message to each other, as if they're signing their work. We can't even say if the group's made up of women alone. We suspect some men have joined the movement whose mothers, daughters or wives have been brutalised and failed by the police and judiciary.'

He leaned forward and brought up a slide. The screen split into quarters. Top left, a masked woman exiting a stairwell. Bottom left, a woman draped in a *burka* leaving a building via a revolving door. Right top and bottom, two pictures of the same woman: Caucasian, tanned, brown hair and eyes, unremarkable features, neither too big nor too small.

'The two images on the left are from concealed security cameras. This woman was seen leaving the locations of two murders and was tagged as a *Cerchio di Gaia* enforcer. But the images were useless because her face was completely concealed on both occasions. Then advances in technology meant technicians were able to use certain feature reference points beneath the mask to create a Digi-fit. The woman was identified, those are the images on the right, and put under surveillance. Until two months ago when she disappeared.

'Around that time the CIA sent a red flag to the SA Secret Service. This woman,' Jacob tapped the screen, 'met with a South African who'd been tagged as an ANC operative by western intelligence agencies when the ANC was still listed as a terrorist organisation. She'd received training in Mozambique and the Soviet Union and her specialities were intelligence and arms smuggling.

'The South African was Siobhan Craig and the Americans were particularly interested because their intel on her hadn't been updated for a while and they believed there could be a connection between *Cerchio di Gaia* and the South African government. They were informed of no direct link between Siobhan and the government, but she was put under surveillance as a possible member of *Cerchio di Gaia*.

'Siobhan and our unmasked terrorist must have realised they were being watched because a month after their meeting the terrorist disappears and Siobhan contacts the NIA to say she has information for us.'

Dunai hadn't realised she was wiggling her leg until Jacob looked pointedly at her knee. She stopped and sat up straighter, her fingers pressing into the backs of her tightly clenched hands.

Jacob turned slightly in his chair. 'Our only hope of getting intel about the group is from the inside,' he said, softly. 'A person they're interested in recruiting, but someone who hasn't been indoctrinated yet. You see why we think you're that person?'

'Why is the government interested in adopting the STOP model if they believe Siobhan was part of a terrorist group?' Dunai thought the stiffness in her voice gave away her anxiety when instinct told her to show no weakness in front of this man.

'The women in *Cerchio di Gaia's* ranks extend to government.'

'These people that were killed,' Dunai said, flicking her hand at the screen, 'were child pornographers, heads of crime syndicates, involved in human trafficking.'

'What you see on the surface is vigilante justice,' Jacob said, leaning towards her, 'but there's far more to it than that. Look beyond the possibility of the group helping to weaken or break down

women-hating organisations like the Taliban. D'you think they'd be satisfied with stopping there?

'We know enough about some of the more powerful women in the group to be certain they're not interested in meting out justice to the odd paedophile. They're after something much bigger. *Cerchio di Gaia* is playing for dominance by undermining traditional structures of governance, religion, law and order. And when anarchy happens – that power vacuum that occurs between one regime being overthrown and another taking power – no one's safe; not you, not your son. There is nothing more dangerous than a power vacuum, Dunai. They are places of madness in which anything can happen. Some countries never recover from them.'

'Organised crime, human trafficking, pornography, paedophiles,' Dunai said. 'Clearly we need to start doing things differently.'

'Governments may bumble along, but at least a degree of transparency is expected. They and their agencies are mostly visible, operate within perimeters and their intentions are more or less predictable. Imagine real political power in the hands of an organisation that adheres to a certain ideology but does not subject itself to the norms of society or the laws of any particular country. One that has no stated objective and thrives on obscurity. Then couple this with the certainty that their leaders are no less susceptible to corruption or bad judgement calls than any other politician.'

Dunai's head began to throb.

'Dunai,' Jacob said, touching her arm. 'I want you to think about something else.'

She didn't move.

'If you can find what information Siobhan was about to give me the morning she was killed, you'll probably find who murdered her.'

She looked at Jacob then.

'For instance,' he said, his eyes compassionate. 'What if she'd decided to turn informer and *Cerchio di Gaia* killed her?'

Dunai blinked. 'You told DI van Reenen to make Siobhan's murder look like a botched burglary,' she accused.

'We need to contain any information about *Cerchio di Gaia* that might surface in the course of the investigation.'

'And has it?'

'Not even close,' Jacob said.

'You know I'm doing my own investigation and now you want the same from me.'

'We're hoping for more from you,' he said. 'Something else you need to know, Dunai. The attack on you in the walkthrough the night after Siobhan's murder was staged, as was the couple in the green Valiant who came to your rescue. It was a tactic used by *Cerchio di Gaia* to soften you up; make you feel valued by them and protected.'

Dunai shook her head.

Jacob's voice was gentle when he said, 'If you were to hang around outside the couple's house in Stadzicht Street you'd see the man who attacked you. At least you'd know his voice, recognise his height and build. He's a member of the extended family.'

Dunai remembered the terror she'd felt in the walkthrough and she'd really been hurt. Her back had bothered her for a week after and her cheek had only just healed. They'd also stolen her bag, taken her personal belongings.

The chief justice had admitted their involvement in her rescue but not her attack. She'd told only half the truth. Dunai felt trapped. She wanted to get up from the chair and run; but where to?

'Okay, Dunai,' Jacob said. 'I'm going to leave now. Give you a chance to think all this through.' He reached into a pocket. 'Here's my card; call me when you've decided what to do. You have the chance to either turn your involvement into something that will benefit the relatively secure society you enjoy today, or make an already insecure world a far more dangerous place. Whether you step up or not is your choice. Please make this decision wisely.'

TWENTY-FIVE

THE PHONE RANG in the turquoise house at eleven on Wednesday night. Dunai groped for the receiver beside the bed. 'Hello,' she croaked.

'Sorry to wake you, Dunai. It's Anna Cooper. We've found Mr Bojangles.'

'No, that's fine,' Dunai said, her brain still chugging from sub-conscious to ground level.

'It's late and cold, but I think it would be good to come through to Groote Schuur tonight if you can.'

The animals had gathered around her on the bed: four pairs of curious eyes watched her every move. 'I don't have a car. I'll get a taxi,' she said, pulling her feet out from under Horse, who quickly lifted his colossal paws aside.

'Don't do that,' Anna said. 'I'll send my driver. Could you be ready in ten?'

'Yes.'

'See you soon then,' and the line went dead.

Dunai rang Barbara and apologised profusely for allowing work to intrude like this. She got ready, and took Jesse next door. He didn't stir and she prayed he wouldn't wake before she came back for him.

She returned to the house and waited, perched on the arm of the sofa. She felt terrible. What kind of mother kept bundling her son off to the neighbour in the middle of the night? She hoped Barbara didn't feel she was being taken advantage of. She would find a way to make it up to her. She'd had no choice. In a very short while she might know who had killed Siobhan.

Horse picked up on her mood as he sat at her feet, whimpering softly. She stroked his head, comforted by the rhythmic motion. When the knock came at the door, to her surprise, he didn't bark.

'Who is it?'

'Professor Cooper's driver,' said a female voice.

As they drove away from the turquoise house, Dunai realised she hadn't given her address to Anna Cooper yet the professor had known exactly where to send her driver. Even stranger was the realisation that the peculiarity of it no longer shocked her or caused even the slightest alarm. Had her mind begun to acclimatise to *Cerchio di Gaia's* shadowy presence in her life? That thought alone was enough to cause a new type of panic.

The car came to a stop in a small reserved parking lot at Groote Schuur. The hospital had been built almost a century ago at the foot of Devil's Peak in Observatory just outside the City of Cape Town. It was made famous six decades later by Dr Christiaan Barnard who performed the first human heart transplant in one of its many operating theatres.

The driver took Dunai to an entrance where Anna waited. The professor greeted her with a kiss on the cheek and led her across the empty foyer to a lift.

'I thought we were going to the psychiatric ward,' she said, frowning as they stepped out of the lift to signage that said they'd reached the medical intensive care unit. 'When he stops taking his meds he gets paranoid, but once he's back on them he's fine.'

Anna's hands disappeared into the pockets of her white coat. Her thin, blonde ponytail swung from side to side as she cocked her head and gave Dunai a sympathetic look. 'He's back on his meds, but he's suffered severe respiratory failure and he isn't responding to medication. That's why I've got you out on such a miserable night.'

'Is he going to be okay?'

'I'm afraid I don't know the answer to that.'

Anna opened the swing door and padded across the floor to the nurses' station where she introduced Dunai. Then she led her across the large room to a bed on the right.

'I'll leave the two of you. If you need me, speak to one of the nurses and they'll page me.' Anna squeezed her hand. 'You're a brave woman. It's good to always keep that in mind.' Then she strode from the room.

Mr Bojangles looked very different in his hospital bed, but there was no mistaking him even with his skin shaved and scrubbed clean. She had never seen him without his dark blue cap; his hair was woolly and grey. There was also no mistaking he was seriously ill. His cheeks were sunken and his skin, a couple of shades lighter than she remembered, looked paper-thin and just as dry. The rise and fall of his chest beneath the hospital gown was exaggerated and seemed painful to her. A thin tube ran into each nostril and an IV into his arm. His heart played out its own erratic rhythm on the monitor above his head.

Dunai stood by the bed undecided, not wanting to disturb his sleep but desperate to ask her question. Very carefully, she lifted his gnarled hand and placed it in her palm; ashamed that the thought of their fingers touching had once repulsed her. As soon as she sat on the chair beside the bed his eyes fluttered open.

'Mr Bojangles?' She leaned closer, kept her voice low. 'It's Dunai. I've come to visit you.'

'Where am I?'

His voice was wheezy and very faint. 'You're at Groote Schuur.'

He squinted at her and frowned. 'The president's residence?'

Dunai smiled. 'No, the hospital.'

He nodded slightly. 'Won't give me coffee.'

'That's okay,' she said, wrapping her hands around his. 'As soon as you're out, I'll get you loads of it.'

'Hmph,' he said then coughed.

Dunai patted his hand. 'I'm sorry it's taken so long to visit but I didn't know where you were. I had to track you down first.'

'S'okay.'

'I'm going to leave you to rest, but first I need to ask you a question.'

The old man tried to focus on her face.

'The last morning I saw you in the square, you said you'd had a bad night. That things had happened and you'd seen the devil come out of the building where I work. Can you remember what the devil looked like?'

When he said nothing, she tried again. 'It must have been the day you started to feel sick or just before that because no one saw you afterwards.'

The old man stared ahead blankly, then, to Dunai's relief, something came alive in his eyes and he nodded.

'Can you remember?'

'Off the meds,' he rasped.

Dunai could barely hear what he said. She leaned closer. 'What do you remember, Mr Bojangles?'

He frowned. 'Mind plays tricks off the meds. See terrible things.'

'But what did you see, Mr Bojangles?'

He seemed to look far into the distance then fixed his eyes on her. 'Back on my meds. Better now.'

'I know you are, Mr Bojangles, but that night you thought you saw the devil something bad happened in our building and I think you might really have seen something.'

'No devil,' he rasped, becoming agitated. 'Was sick. Only man, maybe not. I see things off the meds.'

'Can you tell me what the man looked like?'

He shook his head. 'Imagined it,' he said. 'First devil in black, red eyes.' He kept his eyes fixed on her face. 'Then one that works with you; American. He brings food sometimes. I was hungry. Eaten nothing.' Mr Bojangles's chest heaved. 'Thought American bring me something to eat.' His head moved slightly from side to side. 'Wasn't him though. Was a black bird, very big. Flew away.'

Dunai felt as if her heart had stopped being a throbbing, living thing during Mr Bojangles's tortured speech, and become a heavy, slowly sinking glob.

The old man began to cough. 'It's okay,' she said, patting his hand, trying to soothe him. 'Sleep now.'

She felt terrible. Not only had Mr Bojangles's information been useless but she'd caused the old man enormous distress. She sat at his bed, holding his hand, feeling utterly useless. What had she been thinking? Carl had warned her about this. She'd pinned so many of her hopes on a schizophrenic vagrant who'd been off his medication

and was in the beginning stages of respiratory failure. Stupid, stupid, stupid, Dunai told herself.

'Good person.'

She leaned forward as the old man spoke.

'Good person,' he said again.

'Who is?' she asked.

'You. Dunai.'

His hand still clasped in hers tightened a little. She lifted it to her lips and kissed it. 'Sleep, Mr Bojangles. I'm going to stay with you as long as a can.'

'Good person,' the old man said, closing his eyes.

Dunai felt like a fake. She'd well and truly blown it in the last few weeks. Angry at Siobhan, lying to Bryan and the sisters, antagonising Carl and just being generally ungrateful for his help, her violent hatred of Dan Cowley, keeping *Cerchio di Gaia* a secret and refusing to help the NIA. She seemed to be failing everyone around her.

But all this paled into insignificance beside her failure to find justice for Siobhan. Mr Bojangles was wrong, poor man. She definitely wasn't a good person. Still clutching the old man's hand, she leaned forward and placed her cheek against the blanket.

'Dunai?'

She sat up, looked around.

'You fell asleep, poor thing,' Anna said, rubbing her back. 'Did you get the information you were looking for?'

She shook her head. 'He didn't see anything. Or at least he saw a lot of things, none of them real.'

'Well, at least you tried. And he's had a visit from a friend.'

'Not much of a friend, I'm afraid.'

Anna smiled sadly. 'You must be exhausted. Come, let's get you home.'

'I don't want to leave him,' she said, pushing hair from her eyes.

'He's comfortable, Dunai. Well cared for. And he's just been given some heavy pain medication so he'll sleep for a long time. He isn't aware right now of who's here and who isn't.'

Anna helped her to her feet.

'I feel like I'm abandoning him.'

'You're not, Dunai. You've been his only visitor since he was brought here. You care about him and you'll take that home with you. That isn't abandonment.'

'Will he be okay?'

'Eventually we're all okay, Dunai. If death is release from unbearable pain and constant fear and sickness, then it's a type of healing, too, isn't it?'

Dunai let go of Mr Bojangles's hand and allowed Anna to lead her away.

TWENTY-SIX

SHE'D BEEN EXPECTING the call, only not so soon. And even though she had braced herself for the news, it didn't make it easier when Anna said, 'He died just before four this morning, poor man.'

Dunai didn't tell Anna she wished she'd stayed just another four hours then at least he wouldn't have been alone.

'What'll they do with his body?'

'A state cremation,' Anna replied.

'I'd like to put something towards a proper burial; a plot and all that.'

'Why don't you let me take care of it? I'll let you know the details in a few days and then maybe you can arrange a small funeral for him.'

'Thank you, Anna.'

'Don't mention it. And, Dunai, I do want you to remember he was peaceful when he died. Not in any pain at all. It's a better end than most homeless people have.'

'I know. There just seems to have been too much death around lately.'

Bryan and Philippe had stopped working and stared at her.

'Why don't you come in to see me?' Anna said. 'Soon. Nothing formal, just a chat.'

'I'll call, set something up,' Dunai said, feeling suddenly drained.

'I'd like that very much. Don't wait too long, okay?'

Bryan and Philippe wanted to know what had happened of course. She told them about Mr Bojangles's death, but left out the real reason she'd been searching for him.

'Ah, this is too *much*,' Philippe said, jumping to his feet as if he intended taking on the world and all its unfairness.

'Jeez, Dunai,' Bryan said, shaking his head. 'I always felt kinda sorry for him. You should've called me last night. I would have taken you to see him.'

Dunai didn't want to talk about it now. She'd have to when she told Carl. He'd called earlier asking to see her and she'd promised to stop by his office on her way home for lunch.

'Let's not talk about it now,' Dunai said. They both nodded, and looked a little relieved, she thought.

'Since the date's set to make presentation to government Friday next,' Bryan said, putting on a cheery voice, 'I think we should treat ourselves to dinner afterwards. What do you say?'

'I say, good idea,' Philippe said.

'We deserve it,' Dunai agreed.

'I'll make reservations. Where's my diary?' Bryan asked.

'You left it on my desk.' Dunai got up to take it to him then went to the kitchen to put on the kettle. She knew there was a limit to how long she could keep going under so much stress, not eating properly and without enough sleep.

When she returned to the office, Bryan said, 'Belle's just told me she's cooked a soya cottage pie for you and Jess.'

'Oh, you didn't call her and get her to make it especially for me, did you?'

'Not at all,' Bryan said, indignantly. 'We've been planning this for months.'

Dunai went over to him and kissed the top of his head. 'Thank you, Bryan. Don't know what I'd do without you. You, too, Philippe.'

Bryan cleared his throat, tried to make light of it. Philippe was all misty eyed and not the least ashamed.

'I'll fetch the cottage pie when I'm done here and drop it off,' Bryan said, all business again.

Dunai made coffee for them then headed for the toilet block. As she emerged from the cubicle she looked around quickly; a habit ever since her encounter with Jacob, and she was being careful after her brush with Fishface.

She washed her hands and glanced at herself in the mirror. Again she asked herself why Siobhan would contact the NIA. 'If you can

find what information Siobhan was about to give me the morning she was killed you'll probably find who murdered her,' Jacob had said.

The call had come through to him just after seven, which meant Siobhan had waited for them to leave so she could speak to the agent without being overheard. But Bryan had returned to the office for his diary and Cowley had been on his way up to confront her. Had he heard the conversation? Is that what had prompted him to murder her? They already knew Siobhan had dug into Cowley's life, but she might have found something far more damning than an incident involving his father some twenty years before. And Bryan had seen and heard none of this. He must have missed it by seconds. But what if he hadn't? Siobhan might still be alive if he'd just stopped to listen to her conversation and hung around a little longer. Instead of being in a hurry, racing upstairs, grabbing his diary, probably rushing back down without even bothering to wait for the lift.

A jolt of shock ran the length of Dunai's body as if she'd run smack into a glass wall she'd had absolutely no idea was there. Her hands hovered beneath the running tap and she stared unseeing at her reflection as a sequence of events ran through her mind in slow, excruciating detail.

She was again in the dim stillness of the passage the morning she'd found Siobhan's body. She remembered walking back to the office with Bryan, turning on the light, drawing back the blinds. The square had been covered by fog and she'd turned away and walked to her desk. Bryan had said, 'Let me take that,' and she'd handed him the biscuit tin she'd been clutching. He'd pushed a diary out of the way and put the tin on the desk in front of her.

But it hadn't been her diary he'd moved that morning. She remembered taking hers out of her drawer later that day. She was sure of it. It was a mix up that happened often enough; they all had the same type of diary. Sometimes when a call came through and she wasn't in the office, Bryan would transfer the caller to her phone so he could check his diary against her desk planner, then he'd

accidentally leave it on her desk. It had happened again this morning.

If there'd been a diary on her desk the morning of Siobhan's murder, and it hadn't been her own, it could only have been Bryan's. She remembered him opening his arms to her in the passage that morning, drawing her against his chest. He hadn't had a diary with him.

Dunai's breath came in short gasps; it made her feel light-headed. She focussed on her face in the mirror. 'Don't do this to yourself, Dunai. Just think,' she told herself. 'There has to be a logical explanation.' And there was.

For all his perfectionism Bryan was easily distracted when he had a lot on his plate, which he'd had with the government presentation just weeks away. He might have been sidetracked by a call on his mobile and come straight back down again without his diary. By the time he'd once again reached the foyer and realised his mistake he'd probably decided to leave it rather than make a second trip upstairs. But she heard Mr Bojangles's voice. 'First devil in black, red eyes. Then one that works with you; American.'

Dunai bent over the basin, splashed cold water on her face. She straightened, stood there not moving, water dripping onto her denim jacket. Carl was the person to tell. But would it sound crazy? She hoped so. She hadn't thought through the implications; couldn't bring herself to do it. She'd far rather believe she was losing her mind. Grief did that sometimes. She reached for a paper towel, wiped her face. She was being paranoid again. Really letting things get out of hand this time. She needed a break, time to pull herself together.

She told Bryan and Philippe she was taking early lunch and would be back by two, then stopped by Carl's office.

'You want coffee?' he asked over his shoulder as he led her through the empty reception area.

'No thanks,' she said. 'I'm on my way home.'

He sat behind his desk and Dunai took her usual visitor's chair. He leaned back, looked at her, brows slightly raised.

'You wanted to speak to me,' Dunai prompted.

He hesitated.

'Cupido's the most likely suspect but the police don't know about the link to Wayne Daniels and Daniels's link to Siobhan. If they did they'd go after him with the kind of clout and resources we don't have. Might even convince Jerome Plaatjies to testify in exchange for witness protection for himself and his family.' Carl paused. 'Time's come to decide whether to take what we've found to Van Reenen. I'd advise you do that.'

'It would destroy Siobhan's reputation,' Dunai admitted, 'and the presentation to government... The model works but they'll never use it to draft policy if they know about the blackmail. I need to think about it.'

'Don't take too long.'

Carl was the first to break the silence that followed. 'Anything else you want to tell me?'

'No sign of Fishface,' she said. 'But I've reported Cupido to the SPCA for shooting dogs. I tracked down Mr Bojangles. He was at Groote Schuur. Went to see him last night, but he didn't know what he saw the night Siobhan was murdered. He thought it was the devil then Bryan because he gives him food sometimes when he's hungry, and he was hungry that night. Then it was a black bird that flew away. You did warn me,' she said, placing palms against the edge of the desk and pushing backwards so her upper body was at arms-length.

'Still,' he said, 'it's a pity.'

'He died this morning; respiratory failure.'

'How did you find him?'

'A friend who works at the hospital put word out.'

Carl said nothing. He kept staring at her as if he were searching for something in her eyes, like the NIA agent had done.

'There's something else,' she said, 'but it's a bit crazy.'

'Okay.'

She told him about Bryan and the diary but hated herself for doing it; every word felt like a betrayal. 'He probably got sidetracked on his way up. I've seen him do it before. I just don't understand why he didn't mention to me or DI van Reenen. And then there's Mr

Bojangles who thought he saw Bryan the night Siobhan was murdered.'

Carl was staring at her and even the hardened former detective looked a little shocked.

'I know,' Dunai said. Once you start to think like an investigator you see something sinister in almost everything. Also I'm probably only thinking like this because I thought I knew Siobhan really well then found out I didn't. I know Bryan isn't involved in any of this. There's been absolutely nothing suspicious about his behaviour since her death and I've known him for two years, professionally and personally. I shouldn't have said anything. It's stupid. The morning of Siobhan's murder was chaos; he probably didn't think forgetting his diary for the second time was that important. And as much as I feel compassion for Mr Bojangles, he was schizophrenic and off his medication.'

'Still worth looking into,' Carl said, but he didn't sound that interested. 'I'm going to Stellenbosch for the long weekend, I'll look into it when I get back. You got a photo of him?'

Dunai tore her eyes from the overnight bag beside the desk and rummaged in her tote. She pulled out a small maroon album and found a photograph of Bryan. He and Siobhan were in lifejackets, clinging to each other, laughing, hair sodden, after they'd rafted on the Hex River six months ago. They'd spent three days in the valley, making their way along the forty kilometre river, surrounded by rugged mountains. Bryan, Belle and the girls, Siobhan, Dunai and Jesse, and a guide. Dunai had taken the photograph on the last day of the trip and they'd all agreed that night around the fire that it was the type of experience they'd repeat every year.

'All we're doing is covering our bases,' Carl said, sensing her reluctance to give up the photograph. 'It's what any good investigator would do.'

Dunai nodded and handed it over. He took it but kept staring at her.

'Anything else?' he asked.

She frowned. 'No, why?'

Carl's demeanour changed. He broke eye contact, shook his head and began shuffling folders on his desk. Dunai felt as if she'd failed some sort of test and was being dismissed.

'I was wondering if there was any more info on Dan Cowley,' she asked, reluctant to leave just yet. 'Anything new about the woman at the chemist?'

Carl didn't look at her. 'No. But I'll let you know if something comes up, as I expect you to do with me.'

Dunai's stomach flipped. Had he found out about *Cerchio di Gaia*? It was unlikely if even the NIA were desperate for information. She couldn't contemplate telling him anything about the group till she'd figured out her own course of action and whether she could trust him with the information or not.

'Carl, is something wrong?'

'Not on my side.'

'See you around then.'

'Hm,' he said, and began to read a file.

As she left the office she wondered if he wasn't interested anymore. He'd advised her to go to the police with what they'd uncovered so far. That way he'd be able to hand everything over to someone else; be done with her and the investigation. Dunai didn't want that. And she didn't want to risk Siobhan's memory and reputation either. But if they continued investigating with limited resources they'd risk losing her murderer. She couldn't live with that. And by continuing to dig herself, she knew it wouldn't be long before she became too much of a threat and Siobhan's murderer came after her. There was a good chance Jesse too would be in harm's way. She thought of Brandon Cupido's threat and the way he'd had his own daughter murdered. Perhaps she had no choice after all but to go to the police.

BRYAN LEFT THE office just after three. He and Belle were taking the girls away for the long weekend. Dunai was relieved he'd gone. Throughout the afternoon her eyes had wandered across the office, coming to rest on his face; searching for something in the familiar

features that she might have missed before. And on several occasions Bryan had looked up to find her watching him, and he'd smiled and all she'd seen was the Bryan she'd come to know so well over the years.

Philippe left the building around four. Dunai's mobile rang soon after. The deep timbre of Carl's voice sent a frisson of pleasure through her.

'Where are you?' he asked, without greeting.

'At the office.'

'You alone?' Words that made her heart beat faster.

Her voice was slightly breathy as she said, 'Yes.'

'Go to the fax machine,' he instructed. 'I thought you'd gone home.'

'I did but only for lunch and to settle Jesse for a nap.'

'I'm sending something through,' he said. 'I sent it to your home fax first.'

'Where are you?' she asked. 'Couldn't you have brought it to me?'

'I'm in a chemist outside Stellenbosch. Coming through yet?'

'Yes,' Dunai said as the machine finished chugging out a page. She caught it before it landed in the wire basket. Carl was saying something but she'd stopped listening. She heard nothing, saw nothing except the photograph in front of her. Eyes travelled from the photos to the heading, 'FBI's Most Wanted' and back again. The photo on the left was of a young man with pale blue eyes, largish nose and thick, brown hair. The photograph on the right was an aged composite of the picture on the left and Bryan Larsen stared back at her.

TWENTY-SEVEN

'DUNAI?' CARL'S VOICE had the crackle, ebb and flow of a bad mobile connection. 'Dunai,' he said again, and although the connection was good this time, she heard nothing. She wasn't thinking of Bryan, or betrayal and deception either.

She was back in the maternity ward at the Vincent Pallotti. Sister Finbar hanging onto her hand. Sister Raymunda fluttering somewhere near her head, dabbing her face, saying, 'You're doing beautifully, little one.' She'd been in labour for sixteen hours, without drugs of any kind, but about half an hour before Jesse was born a strange anxiety came over her, blocking out everything except the pain. It was this: how much agony could a person bear before something gave out, physically, psychologically? It gnawed at her until Jesse slipped into the world and the white-hot pain disappeared. For months after she'd watched herself closely, trying to find where and how that pain had altered her, because it had. No one else knew, but she did. She was more anxious, careful, as if she'd faced mortality and become sensitised to the fragility of life.

She felt all these things again as she leaned against the fax machine on a small table beside the filing cabinet. She slid towards the floor till her buttocks rested on her heels.

'Dunai! Talk to me!'

'I'm here,' she said, eyes drawn back to the sheet resting on her thighs.

'I know this is... shock,' Carl said, the connection breaking up. '... you can't go to piece... Dunai?'

'This is Bryan,' Dunai said in the same tone she used when pointing to a picture and telling Jesse, 'This is a cow,' or 'this is a sheep.'

'... you sitting down?' Carl asked.

She looked away from the page, glanced around the office. 'Yes.'

'I want you to...'

'What?'

'Get up, Dunai. Get up.'

'Okay.'

'You standing?'

'Yes.'

'Good girl. Now I want you to get that great big padded coat of yours and put it on.' She started towards the coat stand beside the door, dropping the fax on her desk as she went; she was glad to be rid of it.

'*Put it on,*' Carl shouted at her.

'I am,' she said, threading her arms one at a time while hanging onto the mobile that felt hot against her ear.

'Now get out of there.'

'My bag.'

'Well, get it... get out of there.' She went back to her desk for her bag.

'D'you have the fax?'

'No.'

'Shit!' Carl said. 'Get it. Put it in your coat or your...'

She folded the sheet and slipped it into her coat pocket.

'D'you have somewhere to go where he can't get to you?' Carl shouted. There was noise in the background. A car door slammed then it was quiet again.

'St Mark's.'

'Go there,' Carl instructed. 'Don't stop to do anything... St Mark's. I'm in the car, on my way back to Cape Town... traffic's heavy... about two hours.' Dunai had her keys out. She opened the door and stepped into the passage and as she did so, she had the odd feeling of waking up, not suddenly but the same feeling one had when coming out of a deep sleep. She locked the door.

'I've got to get Jesse.'

'No,' Carl said. 'Listen to me. Call Barbara... to St Mark's.'

'What?'

'Call Barbara. Tell her to keep Jesse... ..not open the door to anyone except me. Go to St Mark's... I'll bring him to you.'

'Okay.' But Dunai had no intention of going without her son; she just didn't want to waste time arguing. 'I'll call Barbara,' she said, rang off and started down the passage. The building was silent around her; even the odd clang from the old lift was missing. She glanced at her watch; it was four-twenty. There couldn't be many people left in the building at the start of a long weekend. The fear she felt seemed to work its way to her muscles; it made them stiff and jerky. She punched in Barbara's number as she walked. Her mobile beeped once loudly and the screen went blank.

'Shit,' Dunai said, stopping dead. 'Shit, shit, *shit*.'

It was then she remembered the meal Bryan had promised to drop off. How could she have forgotten? And when had he said he would bring it over? He was going to finish at the office, then fetch it from home and bring it to her. He'd left at three; it was now four-twenty so he'd either dropped it off already or was on his way to her house now. Either way she'd never get there before he did.

Don't panic, she told herself. Bryan had no idea she knew his secret. Then again, Dunai knew he'd take one look at her and know. She realised now what Carl had known instinctively; her only sure way of staying safe till the police had questioned Bryan, was to avoid him completely.

Dunai ran for the office. She had to call Barbara; tell her not to answer the door to Bryan. She fumbled with her keys, dropped them, told herself to get a grip or she'd mess everything up. She opened the door, rushed for the phone but Barbara's line was busy. 'No!' Dunai slammed down the receiver. Perhaps she'd dialled the wrong number. She snatched it up again, dialled carefully but it was still engaged. Her eyes moved from the wall clock's second hand to the rain drumming against the windowpane. She tried once more at four-thirty then rushed for the door. She'd wasted ten minutes. She'd have been home by now if she'd opted to run rather than call.

Outside the wind blew and the light was dim and concrete-grey. The square was almost deserted except for some late office workers hurrying home in the pouring rain. A group of street children

staggered around, sniffing glue from plastic cartons, high as kites, raggedy brown and forever grounded.

She tried to run across the cobblestones but slipped twice, so she forced herself to stick to a brisk walk. As soon as the cobbles gave way to the tar of Shortmarket Street she began to run, rain plastering hair to her face, her fingers and toes numbed by the cold.

Buitengragt was clogged with headlights but she dodged across the six-lane thoroughfare without slowing. Her muscles began to cramp as she reached the opposite pavement and she was forced to lope along until she'd caught her breath and the pain in her calves eased to an ache. She began to run again.

She reached Rose Street and hadn't gone more than a few paces when she slipped and landed on her backside in the gutter. For one terrifying moment she thought she'd twisted her ankle. She placed both palms on the pavement behind her and hoisted herself out of the gutter, reached past her sodden skirt and eased off her shoe. Her hands trembled as she pressed fingertips to her tights, tentatively prodding the ankle. There was a little tenderness but no pain. She shoved her shoe back on, got to her feet and started down the road again, this time taking more care.

She kept the fear in check by thinking out a plan of action. She'd get to Barbara and make sure they were locked in. Then she'd call a taxi and let Sister Finbar know they were on their way. Carl could pack a suitcase when he arrived and bring it to St Mark's. She just had to keep reminding herself that Bryan had no idea she knew about the FBI Digi-fit.

She had just reached Chiappini Street when she saw a red Toyota Conquest very like Barbara's heading away from her towards Church Street. It couldn't be her neighbour of course; Dunai still had to fetch Jesse. She squinted at the licence plate through the driving rain. It *was* Barbara's car. She began to run, cheeks on fire despite the freezing rain that lashed her face. 'Wait!' she screamed, 'Wait!' The car kept moving. Why was Barbara driving away? Was something wrong with Jesse? 'Stop,' Dunai screamed, arms waving wildly above her head, but the car turned right into Church Street and disappeared.

Dunai stopped, chest heaving. Barbara wouldn't just take off like that. She'd have left a note. Maybe one of the boys was sick; the reason the line had been engaged. Then Dunai had been on her way home, her mobile out of commission. Or it might not have been Barbara at all, maybe her husband had borrowed the Toyota.

Just as Barbara had keys to her house, so she had keys to Barbara's. She knocked on the door of the lavender house. No answer. She pounded on the door; again no response. She fumbled in her bag for the keys and unlocked the door, her fingers clumsy with cold.

The lights were out and it was almost dark inside. She turned on the living room light and reached for the piece of paper propped against the phone. 'Bryan brought a meal over for you so fetched Jesse and took him next door. We've got an early start heading out to Mom for weekend. Enjoy. Love Barbara.'

TWENTY-EIGHT

DUNAI'S FIRST REACTION was abject terror then she reminded herself it was Bryan waiting next door for her, with Jesse and a meal prepared by Belle. Carl didn't know Bryan, she did, and she should have kept quiet about her crazy notion of forgotten diaries and deathbed ramblings. Bryan was not a monster. The FBI Digi-fit was of a criminal named Jeffrey Stappleton aged over a twenty-year period. There was some resemblance to Bryan but not an exact match. Wayne Daniels had ordered the hit on Siobhan, and Brandon Cupido was responsible for her murder. They were monsters. Bryan didn't come close. The thought made her want to laugh.

Dunai felt calmer. She called Carl.

'Where are you?' he said as soon as he heard her voice.

'I'm at Barbara's—'

'I told you to go to St Mark's,' he said, harshly. 'Take Jesse and go.'

'I can't,' Dunai said. 'He's next door with Bryan.'

'He's *what?*'

Dunai explained, but it made no difference to him. 'I want you to get out of there,' he said. 'Go to St Mark's now. I'll bring Jesse to you.'

'I'm not leaving him, Carl, and what'll Bryan do if I don't pitch? He'll probably take Jesse with him. We don't even know it's Bryan in that photo. I mean this is *Bryan* we're talking about. He's one of the kindest people I know. I think we're over-reacting.'

'*Over-reacting,*' Carl exploded.

Dunai blinked with surprise. She'd expected an ex-detective to at least be calmer than she was in a situation like this.

'Now you listen to me, you stubborn, bloody-minded woman,' he said. 'You do *not* go anywhere *near* that man on your own. Do you

hear me?’

‘Excuse me,’ Dunai said, surprise and adrenalin turning to anger. ‘Bryan’s been like a father to me. I know him. I know his family, and right now he’s completely unaware of all this craziness, waiting next door for me with my son and a meal he’s been good enough—’

‘Dunai, please listen to me,’ Carl interrupted and she was taken aback by the pleading in his voice. ‘I know you love Bryan and, yes, we could be wrong. But just for a minute think of what could happen if we’re right. This is one fucker of a shock, and unless you go next door and give an utterly believable performance, Bryan is going to know something’s wrong. And if he knows you as well as he does and is as clever as I think he is, how long d’you think it’ll be before he gets it out of you?’

‘I’ll do it for my son. I have to.’

‘Goddamn traffic,’ Carl said through clenched teeth. ‘Shit!’ It sounded as if he’d hit the steering wheel. ‘I’m going to call the police.’

‘No! Please, Carl, don’t do that till we know for sure. My, god, what if we’re wrong? I don’t want to think what we’d put Bryan and his family through, and based on what? Right now all we have is a neurotic suspicion about his diary, the deathbed ramblings of a schizophrenic vagrant and an aged composite that bears a passing resemblance to him.

‘What I’ll do is call a taxi, go next door, make some excuse, send Bryan home quickly then go to St Mark’s with Jesse till we’ve sorted this out.’

‘I’m still not happy about you going next door on your own.’

‘I have to go now. Call me when you get back to Cape Town or come straight to St Mark’s. I’ll see you there.’ Dunai didn’t wait for a response. She called the taxi company she used and asked for a driver to be outside her house in fifteen minutes. Then before she could think too much, she locked up the lavender house and went next door.

‘Boy, something smells nice,’ she said loudly to cover her nervousness as she stepped into the living room. ‘Bosh!’ Mr Nelson screamed and she jumped nervously.

'That would be me,' Bryan said, getting to his feet. He and Jesse had been colouring in at the coffee table. Horse rushed to greet her but she couldn't see the cats anywhere. Jesse looked up and smiled at her and she had to fight the urge to rush to him.

'And what have the two of you been up to?' Jesse held up the fish he was colouring in. 'You've found Nemo,' Dunai said. 'Well done!' Turning towards Bryan she noticed he was watching her. Her heart beat faster.

'You okay?' he asked.

'Oh, yes,' she said, casting around for some reason why she seemed about to break out the pom-poms. 'I nearly had major organ failure when I turned into Chiappini and saw Barbara drive away. I thought something'd happened to Jess. I actually ran up the street after them. Then I went next door and got her note.'

She still had her bag over her shoulder. Do exactly what you'd normally do, she told herself. So she went to the narrow, limed-washed table against the wall and dumped her bag on it as she always did.

'I didn't see your car anywhere,' she said, picking up a pile of mail Bryan must have placed on the table.

'In the side street,' he said, coming towards her. 'Place was parked up when I got here. Looked like the entire neighbourhood was getting ready to go away for the long weekend. I saw Rory and Gavin drive off.'

'They're not going away,' Dunai said a little too quickly. She kept her back to him, supposedly sifting through the mail. Take a deep breath, she told herself, and take it down a notch.

'They've probably gone shopping.' She forced herself to turn and meet his gaze. All she saw was the usual gentleness and concern, and the band of tension squeezing her chest eased a little. She smiled and reached out for his hand.

'Let me get you a towel,' he said. 'You're dripping.' And he strode across the room and disappeared down the passage.

It took Dunai seconds to realise she had the opportunity to get out with Jesse. She had just reached the coffee table when Bryan

came back with a towel in his hand. He handed it to her and she began to automatically rub her hair.

'You want me to make you a cup of tea?' he asked.

'No, no,' she said, her broken heart shattering just a little more. 'We're all set here. Go home to Belle and the girls and thank her for the meal, Bryan. It was really good of her to do this. She's done so much for us; you both have.'

'Will do,' Bryan said, still holding her hand. 'And speaking of meals, you'd better come with me to the kitchen. I've got strict instructions from Belle.'

At the mention of the word 'kitchen' Horse leapt forward and headed in that direction. 'Bosh!' Mr Nelson shouted, fluttering from his perch and following. As Dunai allowed herself to be led to the kitchen, she glanced at her watch. Ten minutes since she'd called a taxi. Five to get rid of Bryan before it arrived.

He took her to a tray on the counter. 'Soya cottage pie,' he said. Horse danced around and Mr Nelson fluttered to the counter and dipped forward to peer at each item as Bryan said, 'Salad, bread rolls and a lemon pudding.'

'Bosh!' Mr Nelson said.

'Cottage pie can be heated in the microwave, but the pudding has to go in at 180 degree for twenty minutes to cook properly and get it crisp on top.'

'Your wife is a saint,' Dunai said, trying to keep her voice light. 'Now off you go; get home to her.'

'Santa Bella,' Bryan said, bending to pat Horse who was pressing against his legs. 'Life plods along until one day you find this one amazing person and then everything falls into place. It'll happen to you too one day; wedding bells, another baby, the lot. Mark my words.'

'Horse is neutered, Bryan.'

He stopped ruffling Horse's coat and stood up grinning.

Dunai dumped the towel on the counter and moved towards the kitchen door. She wasn't going to get rid of him before the taxi arrived. What was she to say; that she and Jesse were going away for the weekend? But why hadn't she packed a bag for them and of

course she'd have mentioned this before. Perhaps she should say they were spending the night at St Mark's. But she never did that and if anything did go wrong she'd have given her hiding place away.

Dunai gave a startled jolt as a car horn sounded close by. Bryan looked at her and frowned. She could feel the blood pulsing at her temples and her legs felt stiff as she forced herself to begin feeding the animals. A hooter sounded again. She knew it was the taxi at her front door. Bryan set the dial on the oven. Two more impatient honks from outside.

'Oh, for heaven's sake,' Dunai said, striding from the kitchen. 'Let me see what all this hooting's about.'

She had to get Jesse outside. She reached her son without looking back to see where Bryan was, and stooped to pick him up.

'I colour in,' he said, squirming away from her.

'You can carry on when we get back. Won't be a minute,' she said in a low voice.

'No, I colour,' Jesse said as she tried to pick him up. He went stiff as a board and Dunai swore she'd never have another child as long as she lived.

'Everything okay?' Bryan asked.

Dunai spun towards him. He stood at the entrance to the kitchen, leaning against the doorjamb.

'No, fine,' she said, her voice sounding a little breathless. She turned back to her son, took hold of his arm. 'Come Jess,' she said, firmly. 'Let's see who's hooting like that outside our house.' She knew she sounded ridiculous but there was a reason they gave out Oscars.

'You don't have to disturb him,' Bryan said, walking towards the front door. He turned on the stoep light. 'I'll see who it is.' He opened the door just a crack. 'It's a taxi,' he said, and opened the door wider.

Dunai stared out into heavy, slanting rain illuminated by the stoep light, and nothing but blackness beyond, as if the entire universe had narrowed to the size of one small turquoise house.

'I think Barbara might have called it,' she said, starting towards Bryan. There was no saliva in her mouth; her tongue seemed stuck

to her palate. 'Her husband's car was in for a service and she had some problems with her Toyota. She might have called a taxi to take them to her mom for the weekend and forgot to cancel it. I'll explain to the driver.'

'Don't go out in this weather,' Bryan said, taking his coat from the stand beside the door. 'I'll sort it out.'

Horse had come out of the kitchen and made as if to follow Bryan. Dunai automatically closed the door to keep him inside. That's when it occurred to her to lock Bryan out. But it was such a crazy thing to do. He wasn't behaving strangely. If it was a mistake how could she face him again? Then again, if Bryan did have something to hide, what would he conclude when the driver insisted the call had been placed by Dunai Marks?

She looked at the empty keyhole and felt a mix of fear and relief. She'd been so thrown when she'd arrived home she'd unlocked the door and closed it behind her without locking it again. She'd slipped the keys into her bag, which of course she never did. Shit! But there was more than one door out of the house.

She rushed to the coffee table and grabbed Jesse. 'If you don't do what I tell you, you're going to get hurt, Jess,' she told him as he began to protest. She hoisted him onto her hip. 'Don't make a sound, d'you hear me?' He looked up at her with eyes round with surprise and his mouth hung open. She resisted the urge to apologise.

She still had Barbara's house keys in her coat pocket and that brought to her attention another mistake she'd made; she'd kept her wet coat on. Stupid, stupid, stupid, Dunai thought as she rushed into the kitchen. Her plan was to go out the back door and into Barbara's house where she'd lock herself and Jesse till Carl arrived. And if she was wrong about Bryan she'd make up some excuse, she decided. A nervous breakdown wouldn't be out of the question.

She took Barbara's back door key from her pocket and moved it to the hand propped under Jesse's bum. She heard the front door open, moved quickly to the windowsill above the sink and reached behind the African violets.

'You looking for this?'

She spun to see Bryan standing just inside the kitchen door, holding up the back door key.

TWENTY-NINE

IT WAS THEN she knew of course. There were no more doubts as he slipped the key into his pocket. Her loyalty to Bryan had been a fatal mistake. Not fatal, no. Mistakes could be fixed. She'd been born with the odds against her; she was a fighter, and this time she had more than herself to fight for. Her arm tightened around Jesse.

'Why don't you let Jesse go back to his colouring,' Bryan said.

Dunai shook her head. Jesse looked from his mother to Bryan and back again.

'Let him go, Dunai. You and I have things to talk about and I know you don't want him in the middle of it.'

She clung to her son for another precious second, and it took her greatest act of willpower to loosen her arm from around him and let him slide off her hip to the floor. 'You can colour in, Jess,' she said, her voice cracking. Jesse looked up quizzically. She smiled at him but her lip trembled so she bit down on it, nodded and bent to place a hand on his back and give him a gentle push towards the door. Her eyes followed him as he walked past Bryan into the living room.

She turned her attention back to Bryan, took a deep breath and tried to keep her voice steady. 'So what do you want to talk about?'

He regarded her for a moment; it was impossible to guess what he was thinking. He shook his head and reached into a coat pocket. 'How about this,' he said, unfolding a sheet and holding it up. It said 'FBI's Most Wanted' and the aged photograph of Bryan looked back at her.

Dunai realised what had happened. Carl had mentioned when he'd faxed the composite to her office that he'd thought she was at home and had faxed it to her there. Bryan must have gone into the dining-cum-storeroom for some reason and seen it lying there.

'You look like you've seen a ghost,' he said.

Why didn't he deny it? She leaned back against the counter, pressed her forearm hard against its edge, but felt absolutely no pain.

'There was a covering note,' Bryan was saying. "'On my way back to Cape Town, Carl.'" You asked Carl Lambrecht to investigate me? Why?'

She noticed a slight trembling in the hand that held the sheet.

'I didn't. We were investigating Siobhan's death then I remembered your diary on my desk that morning. You didn't fetch it the way you said you had.'

'Who else has seen this?' he asked, indicating the paper with a twitch of his head, and for a moment Dunai believed he was innocent of the charges on the sheet; a case of mistaken identity.

'Only Carl,' she said, offering up one last gesture of loyalty. But she wasn't a fool. 'I've spoken to him and he's on his way here.' She would not allow herself to wonder if he'd go straight to St Mark's as she'd told him to do.

Bryan said nothing. Both stood stock-still. Then, very slowly, he looked from Dunai to the sheet in his hand. 'You've jumped to conclusions, haven't you?'

She could not speak or move as he came towards her.

'You know the truth of who I am.'

'No,' she said. 'I know Bryan Larsen. You're Jeffrey Stappleton.'

'*No!* Yes. I was then. But I put that behind me, Dunai. Please just hear what I have to say. That's all I'm asking.'

She stared at him, relieved he wanted to talk, terrified of the moment when all pretence would be over.

'I've told you I've done things I'm not proud of but you see I could either let them destroy me or put them in the past and do everything I can to make a difference to the people I love and the community around me. I've done that Dunai. I *am* doing that.'

She watched him take a deep breath. 'Late seventies I went to university. I was an idealist, wanted to change things really bad, but the peaceful protests of the sixties and seventies had changed nothing. I found an ideological home with the Student Liberation Army. We believed we were living in drastic times.'

Dunai stepped to the left. Bryan turned to keep her in his sights.

'I built a pipe bomb in 1980 that killed four people. Only three of us escaped arrest. I went to Zambia where Bryan Larsen was born. I knew no one, owned nothing that couldn't fit into an overnight bag. But I began work as a statistician for a humanitarian organisation; threw every ounce of energy into making people's lives better. I hated what I'd been forced to do. I'm not a violent man, you know that, and I have made restitution. I still am putting things right, Dunai.'

He folded the sheet and slipped it into his pocket, wiped a hand across his forehead; he was sweating. 'I got here in '87 'cause I knew I'd be safe during apartheid. I hated the regime but the country was isolated and there was suspicion and little co-operation between South Africa and the US. I met Siobhan at a conference in '98 and she offered me a job. You know the story. Belle changed my life forever. Amy, May; I couldn't live without them. They mean everything to me. And you too; you and Jesse are part of my family, too.'

'Don't say that,' Dunai said, tears sliding down her cheeks. 'Don't you *dare* say that.'

Bryan came towards her, arms outstretched, to comfort her like he'd done before.

'*Don't!*' She put up her hand to stop him.

Bryan began to cry, silently. 'I'm the person you've always known, Dunai. You know me. I love my family. I've tried so hard to put the past behind me. Spend my life in service to others—'

'*Siobhan.*' The name tore from her lips like a keen. '*Siobhan*, Bryan. Oh God. Please tell me you didn't. Please tell me you didn't murder her. Not Siobhan. Not you.'

'Of course I didn't.'

'*Don't lie to me,*' Dunai shouted. 'I know you did. You went up to get your diary and heard her talking to the NIA. That's why you forgot your diary again. And Mr Bojangles saw you. He told me before he died but I didn't believe him.'

'Dunai, listen to me. I had no choice. You know Siobhan wasn't who you thought she was. You didn't know her like I did. I had no

choice. She was going to betray me, betray our friendship. She'd eaten meals in my home, played with my children. She knew my history.'

'No.' Dunai shook her head.

'Yes, Dunai. Even Belle doesn't know but Siobhan did. She found out soon after I started working with her. Said she knew what had driven me to it. That I'd tried to make amends. She said we'd all been forced to do things we thought we'd never have to do but it would always stay between us. Then one day she decided to give me up. After so many years she was going to betray me.'

Bryan reached into his pocket and pulled out his gloves.

'She thought I'd left for the day but I went back up for my diary. She had her back to the door and I heard what she was saying. First I didn't believe the information she was going to give the NIA involved me, then she looked up and saw me and from the look on her face I knew. I heard the lift doors open; must have been Cowley. So I left. But I came back. I had no choice. I couldn't lose everything. I had to choose between Siobhan and my family. It was the last thing I wanted to do but that's what it came down to.'

'But Brandon Cupido,' Dunai said, confused. 'They found some of the things taken from Siobhan's office in a bin in Atlantis.'

'The night Cowley came to see you, you told me the evidence was pointing to a hired gang leader in Atlantis so that's where I dumped the fax and coffee machine I'd taken the night... I'd intended it to look like a burglary.'

Bryan finished pulling on his gloves. Dunai tried to back away from him but she was already pressed against the counter. They'd changed positions. Slowly she'd manoeuvred so she was closer to the kitchen door and he near the back door. She had to get out. Get to the living room, grab Jesse and get out; the front door was unlocked.

'You need to understand, Dunai, that Siobhan would've betrayed you too if it'd served her purposes and she'd have lost no sleep over it.'

'*You killed her,*' Dunai shouted, pointing a finger at him. '*You killed her, Bryan. You killed her.*'

Horse lifted his head from his water bowl and looked questioningly from Dunai to Bryan. The cats had shot up onto the top of the cupboard. Mr Nelson shouted, 'Bosh!'

Bryan took a step towards her. She cast around for a weapon but all the utensils were on the other side of the kitchen. With the counter at her back, she began to move sideways.

'You're not like Siobhan, Dunai; you wouldn't betray me.'

She kept facing him as she took two quick steps out of the kitchen.

'Mummy?' she heard behind her, but didn't turn.

'Don't make me do this,' Bryan said. 'Please don't make me do this.'

'Carl's on his way,' she said, desperate for more time.

Bryan nodded. 'And I'll be waiting when he arrives.' He took his eyes off her for a second, reached back and shut the kitchen door behind him.

Dunai glanced quickly over her shoulder. Jesse was standing at the coffee table, crayon in hand, the colouring book forgotten on the table in front of him.

'Go to your room *now*,' she shouted. She turned back to face the threat in front of her, not knowing if Jesse had listened to her. Horse barked once from inside the kitchen and she wasn't sure if she was relieved he'd be out of whatever was about to happen, or if she now felt completely unprotected.

Bryan took a step towards her; she tried to avoid him but he caught her sleeve and pulled her back towards him.

'Bryan, *no!*' she screamed as he reached for her throat.

Horse began to bark in the kitchen. She felt Bryan's hands close around her throat. Terrible pain shot through her as his thumbs pressed against her windpipe. Then even the pain dulled beside the desperate need for oxygen. She began to claw at his hands, but he was wearing gloves and it made no difference. She tried to reach for his face, get at his eyes, but he pulled his head back and she couldn't reach. She had the sensation of slipping beneath a body of water. His face seemed less substantial, as if she really were looking

up at him from under water. Jesse. She had to stay conscious; get to Jesse.

There was a thud from somewhere in the house and Horse's barking got closer till she thought her head would burst with the sound. Bryan looked down suddenly and cried, 'No, Horse.' Dunai heard a low, menacing growl. 'Leave,' he shouted. His grip loosened around her throat. She still couldn't get enough air into her lungs; she was sure she was going to pass out. Where was Jesse?

Then Bryan cried out and let go of her. She sucked in a deep, rasping breath and bent forward, thinking she was going to be sick. She saw Bryan's leg was bleeding and he was focused on Horse who was growling. She knew she should try to move away from him but it was as if her arms and legs were filled with lead. Horse made another dart towards Bryan but he kicked out at him. The dog's scream of pain cut right through her then everything went black.

It took her seconds to realise she hadn't fainted; the lights had gone out. She had to get away from Bryan, but her head throbbed and she was disorientated. Move, do something, she told herself.

She thought of Bryan's hands around her throat; saw Siobhan's face: the shrivelled blue-grey lips, the bruises around her throat. Bryan had done that. And when he was finished with her would he hurt Jesse? Jesse had seen him. Jesse was a witness. Dunai almost sobbed aloud but instinct told her if she made a sound she'd die.

'Mommy?'

Oh, God, Dunai thought, Jesse must have left the living room when she'd shouted at him but hadn't gone to his bedroom; he was somewhere in the passage behind her. She had to reach him, get him into her bedroom, they could lock the door, call Carl.

She forced herself to stand stock-still. Where was Bryan? She thought she heard something. The whisper of fabric, perhaps his trousers as he moved? She put a hand to her throat.

'Bosh!'

She almost screamed as Mr Nelson shrieked from the kitchen. She thought she heard a sudden intake of breath but it had come from behind her. Bryan had been in front of her. She'd taken a step

back thinking she was moving away from him towards Jesse. But what if he'd anticipated her move and stepped behind her?

'Mommy?'

She didn't dare answer.

'Is dark, Mommy. I scared,' and Jesse began to sob.

Dunai wanted to scream then, not in terror but in rage. She wanted to rip and claw at the threat that stood between her and her son. But she had to survive; use her head. She forced herself to stay frozen to the spot. She could hear Horse's shallow breathing and had to staunch the panic it brought. Her body was pumped with adrenalin, everything in her screamed for movement. She had to do something. What if the lights came on again? She took a step back.

'Dunai,' she heard a woman whisper beside her. She spun in shock just as her arm was caught in a firm grip. 'This cannibal's planted his last potato,' the voice said. So low it was almost inaudible, particularly over Jesse's sobs. The tone was calm and even, and if it weren't for the grip on her arm she'd have thought she'd gone mad and the voice had come from inside her head. But she recognised the voice of the amazon in the Company Gardens and from the trip to meet the chief justice when, blindfolded in the car, they'd talked about their mutual childhood hero. Now it was one of Pippi Longstocking's lines she'd chosen to convey not only who she was but also her intentions.

'Dunai?' This time it was Bryan's voice.

Had he heard the whispers? Dunai hoped so; it would confuse the hell out of him.

'Go to the spare room window. I'll get Jesse,' the amazon said.

Everything rational in her urged her to obey, but she was a mother and to abandon her son to a relative stranger in such a dangerous situation went against her instinct. It was this part that won over all others.

Dunai moved away from the amazon to where she thought Jesse was waiting for her; his sobs louder now. She had every intention of grabbing him and running for the storeroom as she'd been instructed but what happened next seemed to play out in a universe with a

different time system. It happened in seconds but each movement had slowed to a fraction of its normal speed.

She took a step back, felt herself come to a stop against Bryan's chest. She tried to scream but too quickly his hands were around her bruised throat. She clawed at his gloved fingers but they kept squeezing. Her eyes frantically scanned the darkness. Oh, God, where was the amazon? Had she gone to get Jesse thinking Dunai was waiting for her in the storeroom? She was going to die just meters away as they waited for her in the dark.

Dunai saw a change in the quality of blackness just off to Bryan's right; darkness that seemed a little denser, or perhaps she was losing consciousness. Just as she began to make out the outline of Bryan's face, she saw a fist swing towards his right temple. She heard the impact; his hands fell from her throat.

'What...!' he said, his voice strangled as he staggered back.

It took her a while to realise the hammering was coming not from inside her head, but from the front door. She thought she heard someone shout but there was a loud, rushing in her ears as if she'd cupped a seashell to either side of her head. Jesse was still crying.

The front door of her house exploded inwards. Drunken firefly beams of light zigzagged across the room. Horse let out a loud, menacing bark then screamed in pain. Dunai heard someone shout her name, then Bryan's. She chose that moment to leap away from him and drop to the carpet. There was more shouting but she paid no attention to the words. She began to crawl frantically towards the passage. Torch beams lurched towards her in the darkness then swung away.

She reached Horse, put her hand out to touch him. Jesse rushed towards her from the passage, his face ashen, eyes wide with fear. He flung himself at her and she caught him in her arms. She was sure she could feel his heart hammering against her chest. Several voices began to shout all at once.

Dunai knelt beside Horse, her weeping son cradled against her chest. She twisted her head to see what was going on behind her, saw a split second played out in slow time.

Bryan coming towards her, voices shouting; 'Move away from her. Stop!' There was an explosion. Dunai flinched. Horse raised his head, tried to get up; cried out in pain. She tried to keep him down with one hand, terrified of what damage he was doing every time he tried to get up. She pressed Jesse against her chest, curling her body around him, her other hand pressed to his ear. There was more shouting. Then her ears seemed to shatter in a series of explosions that lit up the room.

She tried to crouch lower, her head twisted to the left. She watched as Bryan's body stopped suddenly then staggered backwards as if he'd run at full speed into an invisible pane of glass. He was looking down at her; shock on his face, tears on his cheeks. She saw ink blots appear on his shirt; one, two, three of them. He reached out towards her as he crumpled to the ground, coming to rest on his back, one leg caught awkwardly beneath him. She watched the ink blots spread outwards, their edges joining together till they covered his shirt.

She felt herself being lifted but clung to Jesse who was now silent in her arms although she could feel him trembling from head to toe. She looked up to see Carl's face above her. He was talking but she couldn't hear what he was saying. She looked back to where Bryan lay, but Carl placed his palm against her cheek and brought her eyes back to his face. His skin looked cold and pale but there was enough intensity in his eyes to make her believe that she and her son would not die today. She watched his lips as he spoke and thought she heard the words, 'you hurt?' but they sounded too far away to be important.

She reached up and pulled his hand away from her cheek so she could look at Bryan. Philippe was kneeling beside him. His huge bulk bent over the figure on the carpet. Tears ran down his cheeks, he was shaking his head and his lips moved quickly, as if in prayer.

Two uniformed police officers, a man and woman, were trying to pull Philippe to his feet but he wouldn't budge. She looked above their heads, saw DI van Reenen coming towards her.

Paramedics appeared, knelt beside Bryan. One of them reached across his chest and took hold of Philippe's arm as he spoke. Philippe

staggered to his feet and the paramedics went to work on Bryan, blocking her view of him.

Carl reached for her and Jesse and pulled them against his chest. She let him do this for a moment then lifted herself so she could see over his shoulder as they carried Bryan out on a stretcher. They'd covered him with a thermal blanket. That was good, Dunai thought. No body bag for Bryan; he wasn't dead then. The stretcher exited the turquoise house then Rory and Gavin were running towards her. A uniformed policeman came in after them; agitated, his arm raised, finger pointing.

Dunai loosened her grip on her son. She looked down at him. His eyes enormous, mouth open wide.

'I've got you, Jess. It's okay.' He began to wail. 'You're fine, Jess. It's over. You're safe. I'll never let anyone hurt you. Not ever, I promise. You're safe now, okay? Horse is hurt, Jesse, so I have to get him to hospital, but I'll be back soon. I promise I'll come back soon.'

Rory knelt beside her.

'See if the paramedics can give him something for shock then take him next door out of all of this,' she told her neighbour. She felt as if she were tearing her heart out as she handed him to Rory who immediately got to his feet and left the house with the child cradled in his arms.

'The animals,' Dunai said, her voice echoing in her ears. 'Horse is hurt.'

She grabbed Carl's hand, looked imploringly at him, thinking she might have difficulty being able to leave the house in all this chaos. She needed to make him understand.

'Please, Carl. I need to get him to a vet. And the others?' She looked wildly around, staggered to her feet. Carl was at her side, supporting her weight.

They found Tommy, Annika and Mr Nelson on top of a kitchen cupboard, pressed to the wall. Gavin went inside and closed the door. Carl stayed with Horse while she went to get a blanket. He eased the dog onto it while Dunai tried to reassure him whenever he cried in pain. Then they each took two corners and carried him

outside. Into absolute chaos. Sirens wailed, lights flashed, radios crackled, neighbours watched from the pavement. Another police car arrived, a second ambulance. And Philippe sat alone on the stoep, head in his hands.

They placed Horse carefully on the stoep as Carl went to speak to Philippe. DI van Reenen came out to join them. He argued with Carl then seemed to relent. It was decided Carl would stay behind to deal with the events in Chiappini Street while Philippe took Dunai and Horse to the Cape Animal Medical Centre.

They placed Horse on the back seat of Siobhan's old Renault and Dunai sat beside him. Philippe jumped into the driver's seat and they took off down Chiappini Street and for a split second she searched the crowd for Bryan's face, then remembered.

THIRTY

HORSE HAD A broken rib and was being kept overnight for observation and pain treatment. When she returned from the animal hospital, Dunai went immediately to the pink house and lifted her sleeping son out of Rory's arms.

She refused the sedating syringe but allowed a paramedic to clean her smashed and bleeding nails and dress the throat wound. He'd told her she needed to have x-rays and a scan but she assured him she'd get them done the next day.

Carl had taken charge of activity inside the turquoise house, moving restlessly from room to room until the last police officer, scenes-of-crime technician and journalist had left. Then he found a 24-hour locksmith to replace the broken lock on the front door, made a cup of tea for Dunai and brought it to her on the sofa. Jesse slept against her chest, wrapped in his Winnie the Pooh blanket, the cats were curled against her hip and Mr Nelson perched on the sofa arm. She drank the tea at Carl's instruction but tasted nothing. He took her cup back to the kitchen, turned out the lights and sat beside her, reaching for her hand; she let him take it.

In the darkness she saw flashes of gunfire, bullets slamming into Bryan's chest, saw blood well from his wounds and spread across his chest, eating his shirt till there was nothing left. And she watched his face, every flicker, every twitch, every changing emotion, as he fell to the carpet again and again.

The images had little effect at first. Ever since she'd climbed into Siobhan's Renault, Horse beside her, she'd experienced a strange stillness, of life suspended, as if her heart had stopped beating and blood no longer flowed in her veins. But with no warning at all, she felt a jolt in her chest, as if her heart had started again, only this time it seemed too large for its cavity, its rhythm unnaturally strong.

She imagined blood rushing to her temples, her fingertips, too much too soon, veins and arteries dilating to accommodate the flow. She heard it pounding in her ears like an ocean flinging itself continuously against manmade defences of harbour or jetty. Her nostrils flared and she could smell the hot metal of bullet casings or blood perhaps. She began to shiver and sweat and her skin itched.

She let go of Carl's hand, laid Jesse on the sofa, walked to the bathroom and undressed without turning on the light. The rain had cleared and a full moon shone through the windows covering her skin with greyish light. She reached into the shower to turn on the taps and a smell rose from her body that reminded her of the smell of Mr Bojangles's blanket: ice, old sweat, fear, and the confusion of a world with no right way up.

She stepped into the shower, closed the door and moved under the water before it had heated properly. She turned up the hot water, rubbed lemon-scented soap into a sponge and pressed it to her throat; the pain brought tears to her eyes. Avoiding the dressing she scrubbed her skin, but no matter how hard she tried she couldn't get rid of the smell that kept seeping out of her.

She worked the taps again; less cold, more hot. Steam rose around her. She grabbed the soap, rubbed it into the sponge, scrubbed harder this time; stomach, thighs, reaching down to her legs, and still she smelled of blood and fear. She straightened, snatched the soap but the sponge dropped from her hand. Carl stood in front of her; water running over his t-shirt, down his jeans.

She turned her back to him but he reached around and tried to take the soap. She pressed it against her stomach. Some part of her knew she'd snapped, but there was another part that had to scrub away the smell of blood and Bryan's hands around her throat.

'Dunai?'

She didn't move.

'Dunai, look at me.'

She kept her back to him.

With hands on her shoulders Carl turned her to face him.

'I smell of blood,' she said, pressing the soap to her chest. 'I need to wash it off.'

'You smell of lemons.'

'No, it's definitely blood.'

Carl put a hand on either side of her face and lifted her chin towards him but she kept her eyes fixed on his throat.

'You've just survived terrible trauma,' he said. 'This is your mind's way of dealing with it, but you're safe. Jesse's safe. And I swear it's going to be okay.'

He took the soap from her, retrieved the sponge and put them in the shower caddy. Dunai placed her palms against his chest and rested her forehead there. His hands went to her arms and she thought he was going to push her away again like he'd done in his office that day. She closed her eyes.

'No, look at me.'

She opened them. He was looking down at her and for a while she lost herself in eyes the colour of storm clouds. She watched a drop of water hover at the tip of an eyelash. Then he blinked and it fell.

'Maybe it'll never be okay again.' The thought broke her heart. She moved forward till their bodies were pressed together, his fingers tangled in her hair.

'Somehow it always manages to be okay again,' he said.

She wanted to believe him, even more for Jesse's sake than her own.

She was methodical in the way she undressed him. Rolling the wet t-shirt away from his skin, over his stomach and chest. He pulled it up over his head while she unfastened his jeans and eased them over his hips and erection. She waited, arms at her sides, as he pulled one foot out then the other until they stood in front of each other, naked.

He went to kiss her but she placed her hand flat against his chest. Without looking at his face, her fingers moved across his chest, meeting at the sternum, going on to his belly. His stomach muscles tensing when her fingers moved over the end of his penis.

She wasn't sure if it was perceptiveness or coincidence, but he seemed to know what she needed, stroking the inside of her thigh, his fingers moving into her moistness and when she was ready,

lifting her and driving deep inside. Her mouth filled with saliva. She wrapped her legs around him, needing to test, and be sure, that the parts of herself were as they had been before, not damaged or broken. She concentrated carefully on the sensations as they built, changed, intensified; and each was as it should be. Then the orgasm in her belly rushed to her toes, her fingertips, the roots of her hair and she stopped thinking all together.

SHE SAT SIDEWAYS on Carl's lap on top of the laundry box, cheek against his chest. She could hear the sound of his heartbeat, the scent of lemon soap in her nostrils and a deep weariness that had settled over her like a warm bath sheet over her shoulders.

Dunai started awake and glanced around her. She looked up at Carl. 'How long have I been asleep?'

'bout fifteen minutes.'

'Thank you,' she said, simply. His expressive eyes glittered but he said nothing, just nodded. She noticed he'd put his damp jeans on again.

'You can put your clothes in the dryer,' she said, getting to her feet. 'My robe's on the back of the door, you can use it till your clothes dry.'

She went to her bedroom and pulled on a pair of blue flannel pyjama bottoms and a long-sleeved t-shirt. Carl appeared in the doorway, her white terrycloth robe reaching just below his knees, pulling tightly across his shoulders; she smiled.

They went back to the sofa where she fell asleep, her son in her arms, Carl against her left hip, the cats against her right and Mr Nelson on the sofa arm.

When she woke at seven-thirty, Carl was still where he'd been four hours before, awake and watchful, dressed once again in t-shirt and jeans. Jesse woke and began to cry, but they managed to reassure him he was safe. When she went to the kitchen to make breakfast, he walked around the house beside Carl, a handful of trouser fabric clutched in his fist. They sat at the kitchen counter and had breakfast together. The house seemed empty without Horse.

Then Dunai went off to bath and dress Jesse and Carl left to get a change of clothes.

THIRTY-ONE

DUNAI SAT ON the passage floor outside Carl's office, the morning paper on her lap. It was Friday morning, a public holiday and the building was quiet around her.

Carl hadn't returned to his office yet. Dunai didn't mind waiting. She opened her bag – no longer one of the large totes she'd once sported – this was small and compact, with a thick strap worn across the chest to keep both hands free. She pulled her watch from the bag. It had just gone nine-thirty.

She thought of the morning almost a month ago when she'd found Siobhan's body, and with this came memories of Bryan. She remembered him in the passage one floor above where she sat now, coming towards her, shock and trauma on his face. 'I just can't believe this has happened,' he'd said. How many hours had it been since he'd strangled the life out of Siobhan? Dunai counted eight and a half.

She remembered him bringing her tea that morning. 'You going to be all right, Hon?' Comforting arms around her; if she closed her eyes she'd probably be able to feel them. She stared wide-eyed at the wall opposite and raised a hand to the dressing at her throat that covered the mess of scratches and bruises that were so livid they looked as if they would burst through the skin. Swallowing, speaking above a whisper and turning her head were extremely painful but it was nothing compared to the agony of heart and mind.

The lies were almost too numerous to count, but count them she would. She would keep remembering the deceptions, trying hard to recall the exact expression on his face as he'd told them, looking for telltale signs; more than likely finding none.

She hadn't seen Philippe since he'd dropped her back at the house after they'd been to the animal medical centre. She knew he'd

later gone to the hospital where he'd remained for another half hour till they'd declared Bryan dead. Then he'd insisted on accompanying what had already become a large group of officers from various law enforcement agencies to break the news to Belle.

Dunai rubbed her eyes and spread the paper across her thighs. The headline in the *Cape Times*, and she was sure several papers across the US, was: *FBI's Most Wanted Caught in Cape Town*.

Dramatic events in Chiappini Street, Bo-Kaap, last night led to the capture of a terrorist who has been sought by the FBI for 25 years. Jeffrey Alan Stappleton was wanted for his involvement in extremist activities in the US in the late 1970s and early 80s.

Stappleton was a member of the Student Liberation Army, a group responsible for killing a police officer in Baltimore, Maryland on 9 March 1979 and a pipe bomb explosion at First Eastern Bank, Baltimore, that killed four people on 14 January 1980.

On 5 April that year, an unregistered pipe bomb was found at Stappleton's residence. He was subsequently charged with the unlawful possession of an unregistered bomb device on 7 April 1981 and with four counts of murder on 2 May 1981.

It is believed Stappleton evaded capture by fleeing to Africa where he lived as Bryan Larsen. He settled in South Africa in 1987.

He was employed as a statistician by NGO, STOP (Strategies for Targeting Over-Population).

It is not clear whether Stappleton's capture is in any way related to the death of STOP founder and human rights activist, Siobhan Craig, who was found murdered in her office a month ago.

After a dramatic shoot-out last night Stappleton was declared dead an hour after arriving at Groote Schuur Hospital. He died of bullet wounds to the chest.

FBI representatives will arrive in Cape Town this morning to question his wife, Belle Larsen. He is survived by his wife

and two daughters, aged eight and six.

Dunai felt enormous grief for Bryan's family. She hadn't contacted Belle yet, couldn't; didn't know what to say. She told herself she'd call later today; offer to do anything she could to make the weeks ahead bearable.

She still could not equate Jeffrey Stappleton with Bryan Larsen. She was sure it would be the same for his family. She had separated him now into two men: Jeffrey Stappleton the terrorist, and Bryan Larsen, her Bryan, the man she'd known and loved. She had accepted Stappleton's guilt in the murder of Siobhan but not Bryan's. Dunai wondered if this delusion wasn't perhaps essential to her sanity.

She looked up as the lift doors opened and Carl got out. He came towards her, held out his hand. He had shaved and looked handsome in a tailored grey suit and open-necked shirt. He was scheduled to give a television news interview later in the day.

She took his hand and he pulled her to her feet. Neither spoke as he unlocked the safety gate and door. She went to his office while he put on the coffee machine.

Carl returned with two coffees and she wrapped her hands around the mug's warmth.

'You okay?' he asked. She nodded.

He took a sip of coffee and placed the mug on the desk in front of him.

'They've done the post-mortem; pushed it through as a favour to the FBI.'

Dunai nodded, took another painful swig of coffee.

'There's one finding no one can figure out though; you might be asked about it.'

Dunai met his eyes.

'They picked up a large bruise on his temple like he'd been punched or hit with something; except if he was hit with a fist it was one hell of a punch, a large man probably. There was nothing lying around at the scene, which there would have been if he'd been hit

with an object, and we know he didn't connect with anything other than the carpet when he went down. Any ideas?'

Dunai looked away, shook her head. Carl waited a moment.

'How's your throat?'

'Sore,' she whispered. 'Could've been worse though.'

'Did you know your storeroom window was unlocked?'

She shook her head.

'I know you don't need a lecture right now, but you do need to be more careful.'

She smiled sadly at him. 'I will, I promise.'

'There's one other mystery,' Carl added. 'No one can work out why the lights tripped.'

Dunai shrugged. 'Maybe it was one of Sister Raymunda's angels.'

'Sister what?' Carl asked, frowning.

'Sister Raymunda; one of the nuns who brought me up. She prayed from the time I was little that there'd always be an angel to look after me.'

Carl cocked his head and watched her through narrowed eyes.

'There's something I'd like to ask you,' Dunai said, casting around for something to distract him. 'You lost interest in the case towards the end, didn't you? You thought the trail had gone cold and we'd never find who'd done it.'

'Why do you say that?'

'After the interview with Jerome Plaatjies – I don't think it had anything to do with my apartheid comment – you wanted to hand everything over to the police. You didn't seem interested anymore.'

Carl looked her in the eye. 'I didn't think I could trust you. And the apartheid comment *was* off-colour by the way.'

'Trust me?'

'Yes, Dunai.'

'Why wouldn't you trust me?'

'Saturday, after you called about the threat from Brandon Cupido, I came to see if you were okay. I saw a man who fitted the description you gave me of the NIA agent in the stairwell the morning of Siobhan's murder. I saw him follow you to the third floor and leave forty-five minutes later. You came out soon after, looking

as if you'd seen a ghost. You should have told me what happen. Even when I probed yesterday, you chose not to tell me.'

Dunai looked down at the desk. She was silent but her brain worked furiously. 'I didn't think it was important. He said Siobhan had contacted him to say she had information for him but she'd been killed before they were due to meet. He wanted to know if I had any idea what that information was. I told him I didn't and he left. Now of course we know she was going to tell him about Bryan.'

'And that took forty-five minutes?'

'I wouldn't at first let him in or believe he was who he said he was. He had to do a bit of persuading.'

Carl's eyes narrowed. 'It is totally important to keep your partner in the loop, Dunai. That information would have given me another angle to pursue.'

'I know. I'm sorry, I should have told you. Am I forgiven?'

'If you'll come to work for me.'

There was dead silence. It took her a moment to recover.

'You want me to work for you?'

'As a private investigator; trainee to begin with. You've still got a lot to learn but you've got all the instincts.'

Dunai's mobile rang and she jumped at the suddenness of it.

Carl's brow furrowed. 'You going to answer that?'

She grabbed her bag, located the mobile and answered it.

'Dunai Marks?' It was a man's voice.

'Yes?'

'This is Dr Verster from Two Military Hospital. I've got your DNA results. Where would you like me to send them?'

'Could you fax them to me?' She gave him Carl's number, thanked him for pushing the results through so quickly and rang off.

'What is it?' Carl asked.

'Dr Verster's going to fax through the DNA results.'

'You know where the fax is?'

Dunai nodded but made no attempt to get up.

'You okay?'

'I doubt it.'

They heard the fax start up on the reception desk next door. 'You want me to get it for you?'

She nodded.

He returned to the office and came to stand near her, still reading a sheet of paper. He glanced at the second page then went back to the first. Dunai's heart hammered. Part of her wanted to tell him to get on with it. Another part never wanted to know. Perhaps she hadn't done the right thing. Sometimes ignorance really was bliss.

Carl sat on the desk beside her; there was a frown on his face.

'Just tell me,' she said, no longer able to take the silence.

'According to these results,' he waved the second page, 'you've got to be an expert to read these charts.'

Frowning, Dunai tried to grab it from him. He held it out of reach.

'But,' he said, 'Dr Verster's written a summary.' He placed this page on top of the other. 'It seems you're related to the person who's DNA you supplied. That person is your mother.'

Silence followed. The chief justice had told her the truth. She let out a long, slow breath and leaned back in her chair.

'The DNA sample you provided was Siobhan's,' Carl prompted, looking down at her.

'Yes.'

'So Siobhan was your mother. But we know Philippe is not your father. You'll have to speak to her family then.'

'She doesn't have family,' Dunai said. She paused before saying, 'Except me.' The words sounded strange to her ears. Jesse had been the only biological link she'd had to another human being.

'Chances are you have a parent who's still alive,' Carl said, placing the sheets on the desk in front of her and walking around to take his seat again.

'She never spoke of any. Not even Philippe's aware of relatives. Only that she changed her name, so I don't even have that to go on.'

'She must have lost touch with them. Might have been her activities during apartheid. It happened. Families disowned members who they thought were traitors or terrorists.'

'So it might be possible to trace them,' she said, slowly.

'Which you could do if you came to work for me. Use your new skills and contacts.'

Dunai nodded. 'I like the idea but it's too much to take in right now. D'you mind if I think about it?'

'Course not.'

'I still need to speak to Philippe; find out what's going to happen at STOP. I think we can still get through the last bit of work to get us ready for the presentation. I want to finish this for Siobhan now more than ever.'

'No rush,' Carl said. 'Oh, and by the way there is some good news. Dan Cowley announced he's stepping down as leader of the South African chapter of Men of the Covenant to concentrate on his business and family. So that's a posthumous victory for Siobhan.'

'I was so sure in the beginning he was guilty.'

'He might have thought about killing her,' Carl said. 'But maybe couldn't get up the nerve. Could be why he drove around that night for almost two hours.'

'And Wayne Daniels is innocent, too.'

'Of Siobhan's murder,' Carl agreed. 'But I still believe he asked Cupido to organise a hit on Siobhan and Cupdio was in the advanced stages of doing that, only Bryan got to her first. Law enforcement will continue to keep an eye on Cupido. One day he'll make a mistake. As for Daniels, he still has Thandiwe Dingake to deal with.'

'That's something,' Dunai said. 'And at least Cupido will back off now; no more story-time with Fishface or shooting dogs.'

Carl nodded.

'The NIA agent was right,' Dunai said. 'He told me if I found out what information Siobhan had planned to give him, I'd find who'd killed her.'

Dunai hated lying to him about the depth off the NIA's involvement in the case but she still felt she couldn't tell him about *Cerchio di Gaia* and that Siobhan's allegiance to a listed terrorist organisation was such that she'd sacrificed Bryan to throw the authorities off her trail. Dunai knew so little about Carl and she wasn't entirely sure what he'd do with such explosive information.

He was an ex-police detective, which told her he tended to lean towards the establishment while *Cerchio di Gaia* was very definitely anti-establishment. He might try to persuade her to co-operate with the authorities. She also balked at the idea of having to reveal just how much she'd kept from him during the investigation. She remembered what he'd said just moments ago, 'I didn't think I could trust you.' He'd also said, 'It's important you keep your partner in the loop.' Dunai hoped by the end of day there'd be no reason to tell him about any of it.

She hesitated before saying, 'You won't let this go any further will you? I mean Siobhan's blackmailing activities. I know she was wrong but there was so much good she did and it's over now. Protecting her memory's all I have left to do for her.'

'No reason to tell anyone. You have my word,' Carl said.

'I think I'm ready to fetch Jesse now,' she said, getting to her feet. 'He's at St Mark's. Sister Finbar's a child trauma counsellor so I wanted her to have a chat with him and find out what effect last night had so I know how to help him deal with it.'

Carl stood. 'I'll drive you.'

'No, it's okay. Thank you, but I'll be all right.'

'You sure?'

'I want to walk,' she said. 'Clear my head a little.'

'You need to have that throat scan and you need to sleep.'

'That's the plan. Philippe's taking me for the scan then to fetch Horse this afternoon. I'll sleep before we go; Jesse probably will too.'

'You need anything, call, okay?'

Dunai nodded and turned to go, trying not to hear the echo of Bryan in those words. She turned back at the door. Carl was still watching her.

'You know you asked me to have dinner with you a couple of weeks ago?'

'Hm.'

'I'd like to do that.'

THIRTY-TWO

DUNAI DIDN'T GO to fetch Jesse right away. There were things she had to do which she wanted as few people as possible to know about.

She hit some congestion at the top of Plein Street as thousands of women, some men and children, gathered outside the gates of parliament. The Women's Day marchers held banners aloft and sang and chanted slogans. They would eventually hand over petitions and memoranda to the President's representative as they did every year.

Dunai avoided them and entered a brown high-rise, signed in at security and rode the lift to the twelfth floor.

Siobhan's lawyer, Graham Shapiro, met her at the glass door to the dark and deserted legal practice.

'What do I even say, Dunai? Bryan of all people.' He shook his head, palms held out to her.

'It's going to take a long time for us to come to terms with it,' she said but felt surprise at the hard knot of resolve in her chest. 'I don't want to take up a lot of your time,' she said, gesturing towards the passage. 'I appreciate you seeing me on a holiday.'

'Anytime, Dunai,' he said. 'Let's go to my office.'

They sat opposite each other at the small conference table. He slid the document across, pointing with a pen, 'Here's the clause you requested in the revised will. I want you to go through it to make sure it's exactly what you want.'

Dunai nodded and dipped her head to read.

In the event of my death, the contents of safe deposit box 1113, being held at Standard Bank, Adderley Street, are to be studied by Graham Shapiro, Philippe Baobi and Carl Lambrecht in consultation and a decision made regarding the appropriate steps to be taken in light of the information

contained therein. Unanimous agreement must be reached by all three of the aforementioned before action of any sort is embarked upon.

Dunai looked up and nodded. 'Yes, that's it.'

'All you need to do then is sign.'

The details and signatures of two witnesses were already filled in as she'd instructed. Dunai signed as testator and slid the document back across the table.

OUTSIDE, SHE PUSHED her way through a large group of women wearing the purple t-shirts of People Opposing Women Abuse and kept walking till she had reached the call boxes on a relatively calm and quiet corner of Spin and Parliament Streets. She took a phone card from her purse, a business card from her pocket and dialled the number on it.

'Hello,' the voice said on the other end. 'This is Paula Swanepoel-Higgs.'

'This is Dunai Marks,' she replied.

'Dunai. How are you feeling?'

'Alive,' Dunai said. 'Thank you. For my son too.'

'We were relieved we could help,' the chief justice said. 'Thank you for bringing Siobhan's murderer to justice.'

'I'm calling to tell you I can't join the group,' she said.

There was a second's pause before the chief justice said, 'Why is that, Dunai?'

'I know almost nothing about the group and there're too many rumours of violence for me to join with a clear conscience.'

'Our *raison d'être* is not the creation of conflict or the perpetuation of violence,' the chief justice said, her voice resonating with authority. 'If violence exists it is because there is no other way and the situation has been forced upon us. No, you do not know the workings of the circle but Siobhan did and she strove towards our aims with unquestionable loyalty to the very end. And you knew Siobhan, Dunai. Don't forget that.'

Dunai sighed. 'I understand what drives you; agree even with your ideology but Siobhan always ended up sacrificing the people she loved for a cause; me as a baby, Bryan now, and I don't know how many others there've been. I loved Siobhan, always will, but I don't want to choose the same course for my life.'

'Remember, Dunai, those of us who experience a strong pull toward social justice are compelled to act because we feel an intense compassion for those suffering around us, yet it is this same emotion that makes the morally ambiguous decisions so terribly hard to make. But it is only she who watches from the sidelines and does not act, who avoids the risk of moral compromise and is never required to make peace with her conscience.'

'Turning down your offer is not a cop out,' Dunai said, stung by the comment. 'It is a carefully considered decision. I choose to put the care of my family and friends first. I choose to be honest with them and live my life with a clear conscience. A decision to join *Cerchio di Gaia* would put everything I care about in jeopardy and I'm not willing to do that.'

'Okay, Dunai,' the chief justice said, not bothering to disguise her disappointment. 'I understand you're not ready just yet. There still is so much you need to work through.'

There was a brief pause before Dunai said, 'I understand you believe you're fighting a war and I think you probably are, but for my safety and that of my son, I've made sure that until I see fit to change the stipulation, in the event of my death the entire story will come out. I don't have many facts but I know enough names the NIA would be interested in.'

There was silence for a moment. 'What would make you think you and Jesse are in any danger from the circle?' the chief justice asked.

Dunai could have mentioned the couple in the green Valiant, the assault and staged rescue the NIA claimed had been organised by the circle, but the chief justice could deny all this and debate was not the purpose of the call so she said nothing.

'All right, Dunai,' the chief justice said. 'I understand you feel the need to do this now but I think we can trust you and I predict you

will eventually join the group as Siobhan believed. Did I tell you I knew your mother for twenty years?’

‘Hm-m,’ Dunai said.

‘I think you were the only sacrifice, to the cause as you put it, that she truly resented; something she never made peace with. But I believe losing the STOP clinics for *Cerchio di Gaia* would have broken her heart.’

It would have been hard for Dunai to explain the feelings that flitted through her then; there were too many of them. But there was one over-riding emotion and that was a strong resolve. Not so much to get her life back because what had been before was now gone forever, but rather a fierce desire to push forward with a life of her choosing. One in which she woke believing she had some control over what happened to her during the day, one that was based on who she knew herself to be and what she believed was right at the time.

‘I plan to speak to Philippe,’ Dunai said, ‘about introducing a gender reconciliation component into all STOP’s programmes.’ There wasn’t the slightest trace of uncertainty in her voice so perhaps she was her mother’s daughter after all. ‘I’m going to honour the good in Siobhan by choosing conciliation rather than contention and I’m going to use STOP to do it.’

‘The way of the idealist,’ the chief justice responded, and there was a hint of amusement in her voice.

Rather the idealist than this, Dunai thought, staring at the smashed nails on her right hand; there were still thin, almost invisible lines of dried blood trapped in the cuticles.

‘I must tell you,’ the chief justice went on, ‘that every person who has joined our circle began as an idealist. And keep in mind, Dunai, that the non-violent anti-racism campaigns of civil disobedience in the fifties eventually led to an armed struggle that claimed civilian lives.’

‘That’s just it,’ Dunai responded. ‘By the time they did resort to violence they could at least comfort themselves with the fact that they’d tried every peaceful means available to them. That’s why for now I must choose the pacifist route and I don’t feel any need to

apologise for viewing the bigger picture in a more optimistic light than you might.'

'The father of modern psychology, Dr Viktor Frankl, believed that the world, post World War II, needed pessimists,' the chief justice countered. "We have to be, we have to become, we have to remain pessimists," he said, "in order to be activists. Because my generation has watched and witnessed what man is capable of... I believe decent people are and will remain forever a minority. But all the more we are challenged to join this minority. Unless each of us tries to do his or her best, we are doomed."

'I don't think I'm in any danger of romanticising human nature right now,' Dunai said, a hint of impatience in her voice. 'I have chosen a path of non-violence and if that makes me an optimist, then I suppose that's what I am.'

'Well,' the chief justice said. 'I haven't given up hope. You are by nature an activist and I believe your path will eventually lead to the circle. If you ever need us for anything you know where to get hold of me.'

'Perhaps then I'm not the only optimist after all.'

The chief justice laughed. 'Well, Dunai Marks, the last word is yours this time,' and she rang off.

DUNAI STOPPED AT St Mark's to fetch Jesse. She found Sister Finbar alone in her office.

'He's fine,' the nun told her. 'Just be willing to talk with him about his fears and keep reassuring him he's safe. He'll be a little clingy for a while but he'll rediscover his independence when he's ready.'

She got up from behind her desk and came around to Dunai. 'And how are you holding up, little one?'

Dunai blinked; it was the first time Sister Finbar had used this term of endearment that had always belonged to Sister Raymunda. Dunai smiled. 'I just need to be willing to talk about my fears and keep reassuring myself I'm safe. I'll probably be a little clingy for a while but I'll rediscover my independence when I'm ready.'

'Well put,' Sister Finbar said. 'Jesse's with Sister Raymunda. I'll let them know you're here.'

ON THEIR WAY home they stopped for milk and *bollas*, a sticky confectionary they were both particularly fond of, at the Rose Corner Café on the corner of Rose and Wale Street.

Dunai, with Jesse in his pushcart, emerged into bright sunlight and headed along Wale Street. She turned the corner at the top of Chiappini and came face to face with Jacob.

'Oh, *crap*,' she said under her breath but he obviously had good hearing.

'Pleased to see you again too,' he said. 'You did call.'

This morning he wore a navy blue suit and yellow tie and stood facing west, forcing her to squint into the sun.

'When I said I wanted to speak to you, you didn't give a time, just said you'd catch up with me.'

'And here I am,' he said. 'I was relieved to hear you'd survived the night.'

'Thank you for your concern,' Dunai said, stiffly. 'You didn't have a clue about Bryan, did you?'

Jacob's eyes narrowed. 'The unlocked window, tripped lights, hefty blow to the side of Stappleton's head. You get a little help from your friends?'

'Friends?' Dunai asked.

'I think we both know *Cerchio di Gaia* had a hand in last night's timely intervention.'

Dunai shook her head and sighed. 'I don't want anything to do with this. That's what I called to talk to you about. I didn't ask for it and I don't want it.'

'So they have contacted you,' Jacob stated.

Dunai said nothing.

'Let's cut the crap, Dunai.'

She flinched at his tone, her nerves still raw from the night before. She felt a strong need to be rid of all the intrigue. Another reason she'd decided not to tell Carl about *Cerchio di Gaia* and the

reason for the NIA's interest in Siobhan's murder; because she intended to be rid of both groups. There was no need for Carl to know the details when they'd never figure in her life again.

'I am not part of the group,' she said, 'and I want you to leave me alone.'

'At least we know what happened now,' he said ignoring her. 'Siobhan meets with a *Cerchio di Gaia* enforcer, our unmasked woman, whom she somehow finds out is under surveillance. Not so strange with her military and intelligence training in the Soviet Union during apartheid and the more recent, substantial resources of *Cerchio di Gaia* at her disposal.

'Siobhan knows of course that because of her meeting with the enforcer she too has come under suspicion. The enforcer disappears and Siobhan, knowing she's being watched by international intelligence, leads an exemplary life and has no contact with *Cerchio di Gaia* that we know of for a month. Then she contacts the NIA to say that, even though it's going to cost her personally, she has important information for us.

'We know she was going to tell us she'd found out about Larsen's involvement in terrorist activities in the US and had used one of her old apartheid connections to confirm the Larsen/Stapperton link. It's a plausible explanation. By turning Larsen in, she'd have explained away her meeting with the *Cerchio di Gaia* terrorist and deflected attention away from herself and the group. Chances are it would have worked.'

Dunai had every intention of walking on, but hadn't yet moved a muscle when Jacob's hand came up to stop her. He moved a step closer.

'Siobhan was prepared to stop at nothing to conceal her involvement in the group and protect them from investigation. She was murdered as a direct result of her loyalty to them. Bringing *Cerchio di Gaia* into the open would be real justice for her murder, Dunai, and you can do that.'

He looked down at her. He was tall, solidly built, and she hated the way he interfered with her chemistry. She tried to reason that

perhaps sex with Carl last night had awakened something in her again.

'We need you on the inside.' He spoke softly, the way you'd speak to a lover the moment before kissing them. 'You can penetrate the group. They're waging an unseen war, Dunai, but you can put a stop to the bloodshed.'

She thought then of Siobhan, Bryan, Mr Bojangles. She was only one woman and a very ordinary one at that. She seemed to have so little power to stop anything even though she had discovered reserves of strength she'd been unaware of until her life had fallen to pieces. She stepped away from him.

'I'm sure your intentions are noble,' she said, too bone-weary to get angry now. 'But you've approached the wrong person at the wrong time. A month ago my worst fear was that I wouldn't have enough money at the end of the month to pay the vet's bills. Then, right out of the blue, someone I love and admire is murdered as it turns out by another person I love and admire who is now also dead. The one it would seem was part of a dangerous organisation, the other on the FBI's most wanted list.'

'I have been attacked, threatened, followed, chased. Right now I really have no idea why I'm not a raving lunatic. I have only one aim and that is to keep holding onto my sanity and somehow get my life back. You're going to have to let this go, Jacob.'

She moved past him.

'I can't let this go because they won't.'

She began to walk away from him.

'Since you refuse to help your country and remain an unknown quantity, Dunai Marks, the government has already been advised to distance itself from STOP.'

She almost paused then but forced herself to keep walking. He raised his voice.

'They'll always be there,' he called after her. 'And once they've got their claws into you they'll never let go. Even when you think you're alone they'll be on the periphery of your life, in the shadows, in the silences. There'll never be another coincidence in your life. Think about it, Dunai Marks. You'll never be able to trust a stranger'

again; never be sure if that person really is a stranger or whether they've been sent. Even those who get closest to you; you'll never know.'

A group of barefoot children stopped their football game and scampered out of the road to make way for a passing car. Dunai gripped the handle of Jesse's pushcart and walked faster.

The decision to turn down both *Cerchio di Gaia* and the NIA had been the only one that had made any sense to her and she'd done it precisely because of Siobhan and Bryan. Both had crossed a line that had allowed them to believe their causes were just and worthy, not only of sacrifice, but of sacrificing a friend. And in the end they'd destroyed each other.

Dunai relaxed her grip on Jesse's pushcart, slowed her pace and tilted her face to the sun. She didn't look back to where Jacob might still be standing. She was thinking of the people she did know. All those who had proved their loyalty and love in the last few weeks and there were so many she had to go over the list twice because she thought she might have left someone out. Then she thought of Mr Bojangles and the many faces she'd seen on the streets the morning she'd searched for him, and she felt more than a little fortunate. Her back straightened and a smile touched her lips as she turned into Chiappini Street and headed for her turquoise house.

'What we do now?' Jesse asked.

'I think it's time for a nap.'

'Oh, *crap*,' he said.

'Better not to say that, Jess.'

'It a shouting word?' He twisted in his seat to look up at her.

'Yes, it is.'

'*Dammit*,' he said, turning frontwards. He clapped a hand over his mouth then threw his hands in the air. 'When I be three?' he asked.

'Don't worry about it,' Dunai said. 'When we get to that bridge we'll cross it together.'

EPILOGUE

Controversial Draft Bill Given the Green Light,

Cape Times, September 1st

Drafting of the controversial Population Control Bill will see STOP clinics (Strategies for Targeting Over-Population) become the paradigm for population control in South Africa.

STOP's flagship clinic in Khayelitsha today celebrated the announcement by Esther Gqabi, Minister of Health in the National Assembly, and the appointment of a parliamentary committee to oversee the drafting of legislation.

The minister announced that in light of the substantial interest the bill is likely to generate, public hearings would be held in the provinces before the white paper is submitted to a sitting of the house for debate and final vote.

A programme of gender reconciliation was added at the eleventh hour to STOP's presentation to government. The additional component will inform all STOP's programmes and activities and run in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Violence & Reconciliation.

'We face the catastrophes of global conflict, unsustainable economic systems, global warming, dwindling resources, the search for viable, clean energy,' said STOP director, Philippe Baobi. 'We must act at the base of the problem, which is to control human population growth immediately.

'We have introduced a new programme of gender reconciliation into all aspects of STOP programmes because we believe men and women must become comrades in this struggle. We simply cannot afford to have more than half the world's human resources

immobilised by violence and discrimination. The survival of our species may in the end be determined by this single factor.'

THE END

**If you have enjoyed Bold-Faced Lie, please take a moment
to leave a review.**

TEASER CHAPTER:

The Slave Tree (*Marks and Lambrecht are back*)

MYASSER AND HER brother left the ruins of the old factory just after eight and headed towards Railway Street. She had been told never to go out without an adult even though she was fifteen and had travelled a long way to find this place. Some people didn't think she belonged here and might get angry if they saw her and since she was alone try to beat or kill her.

Myasser was cautious by nature; she had cause to be. Her childhood monsters appeared suddenly in groups or pairs on horseback or in jeeps and whooped and screamed, eyes darting this way and that, killing with less effort than it took to chop a piece of firewood in two.

The streets were deserted this morning. Church bells rang in the distance but otherwise it was quiet. Strays and vagrants who usually wandered this place had found shade somewhere and even a hoped for breeze had failed to turn up.

She squeezed her brother's hand; he craned his neck to look up at her. Mawien was small for seven, because he had never had enough to eat. Myasser's formative years had played out when they'd belonged somewhere so she was tall. Mawien watched his sister's face. Their communication was mostly non-verbal and she always kept him close. She smiled, he smiled back; a hesitant, unfamiliar gesture.

They turned the corner where Treaty and Spring meet and at first Myasser took in nothing about the old woman moving purposefully towards them except the mad black eyes that glared and twinkled.

'You come to the tree, girl?' she asked as she reached them.

Myasser didn't understand the question. She kept walking.

'Just a minute, girly.' The woman grabbed her arm. 'I show you the tree.'

Myasser felt Mawien's hand tighten in hers and squeezed back as she looked more carefully at the woman blocking her path. She wore a red dress and cardigan despite the morning heat. Grey curls had crept out either side of a red scarf pulled low on her forehead. Her eyes were half hidden by drooping lids and her skin was an old dull brown.

'You black Muslim, girl? Old milkwood tree's specially for you.'

'No,' Myasser said firmly and tried to prise the woman's fingers from her arm. Mawien began to make small panting sounds.

'Ugh,' the woman said, her face sagging with disappointment.

She let go of Myasser's arm and moved quickly ahead of them, then stopped and pressed her back to a fence, arms spread, palms flat, fingers curling around the wire. 'Here it is,' she called. 'The old slave tree.'

Myasser lifted Mawien into her arms as they drew level with her. The woman smiled. 'They used to bring them here,' she said, then cocked her head, looking troubled. 'Human goods. Mommy was a girl when they brought them here, bought and sold them here. Under this very tree.' She made a sweeping motion towards the huge fenced-off tree, to its dense canopy of foliage and the thick trunk that bent sharply leftwards.

'They used to hang them here.' She raised her voice as Myasser passed quickly by. 'The slaves. They used to hang them from the branches of the old milkwood tree.'

Myasser believed in signs and coming across madness at the outset of her task was a bad thing. It made her nervous and she had to force herself not to rush or she would sweat. She had washed her pale blue *tobe* the night before and taken more care than usual winding it around her head and shoulders and across her chest where it hung to mid-thigh. Her skirt was brown and old and came to just above a pair of scuffed sandals that half-protected feet so calloused they were almost indistinguishable from the leather around them.

Myasser squeezed Mawien briefly to her chest then placed him on the ground, taking his hand again. She loved him with a fierce, protective love and cared well for him. He was dressed in his best this morning; brown trousers and a dark green tunic so thin in places it would make holes soon. But she was good at fixing things.

She picked her way across a derelict plot, unmindful of the sand, stones and sharp twigs that scratched her feet between the bands of mended leather. They passed a group of sleeping vagrants, faces baking in the sun. The sharp, sour smell of alcohol oozed from their pores and hung around them. A small child sat on her haunches, rolling a wine bottle back and forth. Myasser felt sorry for her, but made no judgement and moved on.

What had driven her across a continent now prompted her past an abandoned house without windows and doors like an old woman: toothless and blind. Danger had for years pursued Myasser, fear hovering above her head, but since she had arrived here it had taken to flying off sometimes and she would look up at a clear sky and find her path un-littered with misfortune. She would feel excited and agitated, hopeful. Unexpectedly she had fallen in love with the feeling; it obsessed her. It meant she had to work out a plan then keep watch for opportunities, make decisions that were less instinctive; like going out this morning without an adult.

There was a point, just as the freeway came into view, where she stopped suddenly. Mawien looked up at her but, other than to squeeze his hand, she remained completely still. Her eyes found the area deserted. Her head lifted, nostrils flared. She sniffed the air that was nothing like the dry wind of the desert and the light, clean scents it carried. Here it was heavy and smelled of fish and rotting things. Myasser smiled down at Mawien and continued towards her destination.

THIS WAS A sleep unlike any she'd experienced before. Darkness held two fingers against her lids and only sickness could cause such weakness in her arms and legs. She was frightened. She waited for her beating heart to throw panic to her fingers and toes but they

would not respond. She tried to move again with all her strength, but only her hand obeyed, feeling something soft beneath her, unlike any ground she had slept on before. She could hear voices in the distance and tried to move her mind back to what it remembered last. She and Mawien had set out without an adult... This is as far as it would go before darkness pressed harder against lid and limb. Half her mind knew she slept an unnatural sleep while the other took her back many months to the Rwandan forest floor where she dozed exhausted, hidden beneath palm fronds. The air was heavy, hot and wet, and hunger gnawed like a small creature at her insides.

Mawien stirred beside her. She wrapped her arms around him, drawing her legs up beneath her skirt so they cradled his backside. She covered her head and his with her *tobe* and hoped he would sleep and dream he was home where he could hear the mooing of cows when they settled into rest for the night, his mother's voice drifting soft and peaceful as she spoke to her parents beside the fire, a circle of stars above her head where smoke trickled into the sky.

Myasser remembered she'd been told not to make a sound or she would die. The rebels knew the forest and could pick up the smallest noise that was out of place. If they were found they would be chopped to pieces. She'd seen what they left behind; withered parts spilled like firewood from a basket. These scenes no longer made her head swim and heart pound. It was the babies and small children in the trees that stayed with her long after she passed.

After the day's walk through the forest, they had stopped only once it was dark. Rebels and hunger were not the only danger. There were hungry creatures desperate to feed their own young that under cover of darkness could snatch a small child from its sleeping parent's arms. So the teacher from Nyala wrapped her baby girl in a blanket and tied her high in a tree above where they slept.

She remembered the child; she had not yet reached her first year and cried a lot. She stopped when Myasser held up her small fabric doll, jiggled it and made funny noises. She had given the doll to the baby because Myasser had only brought the toy along to remind her of home and she was now too old for such a thing anyway.

That first night in the forest she had woken to her mother's voice. 'Run,' she had said. 'Run very fast, Myasser, and don't look back no matter what you hear. Don't ever let go of your brother.'

So Myasser knew the rebels were nearby and she did as her mother told her; running faster than she had ever thought she could. She ran till it felt as if it was fire in her body instead of blood and her heart would burst inside her. But she disobeyed and looked back.

Her mother kept pace a distance behind; eyes fixed on her children running ahead of her, and Myasser knew she stayed back to divert the rebels with her own death if they caught up. Myasser had looked back for just an instant then her face was whipped by a branch as she flew past. It opened up her cheek and she felt the heat of blood but no pain. Her eyes swivelled frontward again and she screamed silently for her mother as she plunged through the forest holding onto her brother's small, stick-like body that clung to her as if both their lives depended on it.

They escaped that night, hiding under fallen, rotting trees at the end of a ravine. As the sun rose the teacher from Nyala became hysterical. They had to go back, find the place where she had tied her baby into the tree before they'd had to run from the rebels.

Some had stopped their journey to help her search; Myasser's mother was one of them. They spent all day searching but had found nothing familiar. Every night they spent in the forest endangered their lives still further so as the sun set they tried to persuade the teacher to leave her baby and continue her journey. She had refused and they had left her searching.

The next day they found an infant and a young child tied in their blankets in the trees; they were dead.

It took them a week to leave the forest, but Myasser never got used to the babies in the trees, dead, half eaten by vultures. She still dreamed sometimes of the teacher from Nyala's baby and she was always tied into her blanket, swinging dead in a tree, still clutching the doll Myasser had given her.

She heard Mawien whimper beside her and fought to shake off this strange sleep she could not control, but she could only tighten

her arm around him. The creatures that snatched children from their sleeping parent's arms were coming, she could hear them. Or it was the rebels. Then she remembered this was not the Rwandan forest. It didn't matter to her; no matter who came for them, she would never let go of her brother.