



## Midnight Captive: A Killer Instincts Novel

By Elle Kennedy

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**“For those who enjoy their romantic suspense on the dark and steamy side,”\* here’s the blisteringly sexy new novel in the Killer Instincts series by the author of *Midnight Action* and *Midnight Pursuits*...**

Former CIA agent Bailey Jones has spent months trying to forget her night of passion with mercenary Sean Reilly. An elite and methodical assassin, she has no room in her life for a reckless, rule-breaking Irishman, and she’s vowed to steer clear of the tempting bad boy who lured her into his bed under false pretenses.

When Sean is implicated in the robbery of a Dublin bank, Bailey knows something isn’t right. So what if she can’t trust him? There’s no way Sean would end up on the wrong side of the law. In fact, he’s stuck in the middle of a dark and dirty conspiracy that could put his twin brother’s life at risk with one wrong move. And Bailey’s life too when she agrees to help.

As the stakes are raised and Bailey finds herself torn between two brothers, the fine line between danger and desire is crossed...and it’ll take more than a killer instinct to survive.

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## Editorial Review

Review

**Praise for the Killer Instincts novels:**

“Elle Kennedy...leaves you breathless.” —*New York Times* Bestselling Author Vivian Arend

“Heart-stopping, riveting suspense.” —\**New York Times* Bestselling Author Christy Reece

“Hard-core romantic suspense loaded with sensuality.”—*USA Today*

“A gripping, pulse-pounding tale.”—*Publishers Weekly*

“An adrenaline-filled, exhilarating ride.”—*Fresh Fiction*

“Suspenseful, heartbreaking, and full of sexy times.”—*Fiction Vixen*

“As sexy as it is exciting.”—*Joyfully Reviewed*

About the Author

**Elle Kennedy**, RITA Award-nominated author of the Killer Instincts novels, including *Midnight Action* and *Midnight Pursuits*, grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, Ontario, and holds a BA in English from York University. From an early age, she knew she wanted to be a writer and actively began pursuing that dream when she was a teenager. She loves strong heroines, alpha heroes, and just enough heat and danger to keep things interesting!

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

### Chapter 1

*Somerset County, England*

“Being a hermit isn’t healthy, you know.” Bailey paused to shoot a pointed stare at her friend before continuing to wander through the cozy living room of Paige’s isolated country house.

Wall-to-wall bookshelves took up nearly half of the room, crammed with hundreds of titles that all looked well read. The lingering scent of smoke wafting out of the massive stone fireplace hinted that Paige had lit a fire recently. It was obvious that the woman spent a lot of time in this room, which corroborated Bailey’s belief that her friend was a total recluse.

“Says who?” From her perch on the overstuffed sofa, Paige sipped her Merlot, unperturbed by the accusation.

Watching the other woman daintily hold the stem of her wineglass was almost jarring. With her slight frame, light-red hair, and fair, freckled face, Paige Grant was cute and delicate—and the last person you’d imagine to be a ruthless assassin. But Bailey supposed all of her colleagues were the same in that way. Sweet and harmless on the surface, tough and deadly beneath it.

Bailey herself was no stranger to death and violence. Seven years in the CIA followed by five working for a dangerous assassin had definitely hardened her. She didn’t see the world as sunshine and rainbows—she saw it for what it was: cold, toxic, and treacherous, with rare moments of warmth and compassion slicing through the darkness like shards of moonlight. *If* you were lucky. She hadn’t experienced many warm and fuzzy moments in her life, not as an adult, and certainly not as a child.

But right now was one of those moments. Spending the weekend in a beautiful, albeit run-down, English farmhouse, sipping deliciously smooth wine, catching up with one of her best friends. Sunshine and rainbows, all right.

“Says me,” Bailey announced, returning to the couch and flopping down on the other end. “You’re too young and beautiful to be hidden away here. You should be out and about, kicking ass and breaking hearts.”

Paige snorted, then set her glass on the weathered oak coffee table and spoke in her crisp British accent. “First, I kick plenty of ass, thank you very much. Second, I’m not interested in breaking any hearts, but if you’re hinting that I need a good shagging, then don’t worry. I’m doing just fine. And third, you say all this as if *you’re* a social butterfly, when we both know for a fact that you, my dear, are as big of a loner as I am.”

Bailey couldn’t argue with that. Loner was her middle name. But still, her friend’s shut-in ways bothered her. Paige’s bubbly personality was completely incongruous with a life of isolation.

“At least I attended our boss’s wedding,” she said mockingly.

“You did not! They eloped.”

Bailey grinned. “Yeah, but I flew to Costa Rica after I heard the news to drop off a wedding present.”

Paige rolled her eyes. “Yes, well, I couriered a gift. And mine was most certainly better than yours.”

Curiosity flickered through her. “What’d you get them?”

“A ten-book set aptly titled *How to Keep the Sexual Fire Burning After Marriage*.” Paige laughed in delight. “Noelle sent me a text message in reply. Two words. *Fuck* and *off*.”

Bailey burst out laughing. She would’ve paid money to see their boss’s face when she opened Paige’s gift. Poor Noelle had already been annoyed enough that her former love turned enemy turned love again had twisted her arm until she married him. But Jim Morgan was a stubborn alpha male, and the deadly mercenary had insisted they get married . . . or else he’d drag her down the aisle kicking and screaming. And the icing on the cake—he’d talked Noelle into taking his last name, which officially made her Noelle Morgan now.

Maybe she was a jerk, but Bailey found the whole situation hilarious. She’d met Morgan two months ago in Paris after he’d reconnected with her boss, and she really liked the man. She was glad he and Noelle had finally worked through their decade-long issues.

Though their union did have one drawback.

Noelle and Morgan had joined professional forces. Which meant that Bailey and the rest of Noelle’s

assassins—chameleons, as they'd been dubbed—now worked for Morgan too.

"I'm still not sure how I feel about it," she confessed.

Paige furrowed her brow. "My wedding gift? Why? I thought it was awesome."

"No, not the gift—it *was* awesome. I was just thinking about our new working arrangements," Bailey clarified. "We're not mercenaries. We work alone."

"Don't worry. Noelle knows that. She said we'll still be working solo, but if Morgan's team ever needs undercover help, they'll call us in."

Crap.

Crappity-crap-crap.

Bailey quickly swallowed the lump of unhappiness that rose in her throat, but clearly she hadn't managed to mask her expression, because Paige's blue eyes narrowed.

"What's the problem? You've helped Morgan out before. And God knows I get a call from him or Noelle at least once a week hitting me up for tech assistance."

"Which you can do from home," Bailey said, pointing to the insane collection of laptops on the long table across the room.

Cables and power strips snaked along the floor, some of them climbing toward the exposed-beam ceiling, all plugged in to Paige's command central, as she called it. The woman was a wizard when it came to computers, which was why she was on everyone's speed dial. If you wanted information, Paige Grant was your first and only call.

Unless it was the kind of information a computer couldn't find . . . in that case, that honor went to the Reilly brothers.

Aka the reason Bailey was unbelievably reluctant to call herself a member of Jim Morgan's team.

"I still don't see the issue," Paige said in confusion. "Morgan's a good guy—you said so yourself. Besides, you were the one just talking about breaking hearts. Think of all the hot single men you'll be working with. Liam Macgregor is a bloody movie star, that Sullivan guy is smokin' hot, and then there's the scary sexy badass . . . What's his name? D? Plus there's Sean—actually, wait, he's off the team—and the cute rookie—"

"Wait, back up." Bailey had frozen at Paige's last remark. "What do you mean Sean's off the team? Since when?"

"Since about a week ago, apparently. I spoke to Abby the other day and she said he suddenly quit."

"Did he say why?"

"He told Morgan he works better alone and that he was wrong to think he'd be able to function on a team." Paige shrugged. "Or something along those lines."

Bailey's brow furrowed. She supposed that made sense. Sean Reilly didn't take orders well. He was also

impulsive to the core, exactly the kind of man who'd join a mercenary team and then abruptly change his mind less than two months later.

A sudden rush of bitterness flooded her chest. Yup, she was well acquainted with Sean's impulsive nature. She'd experienced it firsthand nearly a year ago, after the cocky Irishman had seduced her under the pretense that he was someone else.

*And you let him.*

It was hard to ignore the internal accusation—especially since it was one hundred percent accurate. Truth was, she couldn't lay all the blame for that night on Sean. The second he'd slid into her darkened hotel room she'd known he wasn't Oliver, Sean's equally gorgeous twin and the sweeter, more mature of the brothers. She'd *known*, yet she'd still allowed him to touch her. Kiss her.

Fuck her.

Aggravation clamped around her throat as old memories crept into her head, wicked images and seductive words whispered in a deep Irish brogue. Damn him for lying to her. Damn *herself* for playing along with the lie.

"I guess he headed back to Dublin to join forces with Ollie again," Paige was saying, oblivious to Bailey's inner turmoil. "Which is probably where he belongs. The Reilly brothers, information dealers extraordinaire, bona fide Irish heartbreakers." The redhead slanted her head. "Didn't you go out with Ollie a while back?"

Bailey nodded, keeping her expression veiled. "Yeah, we went out a couple of times. We decided we were better off as friends, though."

"Pity. He's quite cute. Sean, too, though that's a given considering they're identical."

The conversation was veering into dangerous territory Bailey wanted to avoid. She hadn't told any of her colleagues about her night with Sean. The only person who knew about it was Liam Macgregor, who, in the past couple of months, had somehow become one of her closest friends. Figure that one out. Maybe she wasn't as much of a loner as she'd thought.

"Okay, enough man talk. This is our annual girls' getaway, remember?" She grinned at her friend. "What cheesy rom-coms did you get for us?"

Paige looked delighted. "Oooh, I ordered a bunch of them from the movie channel on the telly. You're in for a treat."

Bailey laughed as the other woman swiped the remote control from the end table and turned on the television. Back when she'd worked for the CIA, evenings like this hadn't existed in her life. She'd been a solo operative, spending months undercover and executing covert missions on foreign soil. She still did all that for Noelle, except nowadays she actually managed to squeeze in some downtime. Which was kind of comical—two assassins curled up on a couch with popcorn and wine, about to watch sappy romantic comedies. Life was strange sometimes.

"I ordered that movie about the chick who loses her memory and her hubby has to make her fall in love with him again," Paige revealed as she clicked the remote. The television was turned to a news channel, the broadcast nothing but a square box at the bottom of the screen as Paige scrolled through the channel list. "Hence the box of tissues on the table. Be prepared to sob like a baby."

Another laugh slipped out, but was cut short when Bailey noticed the line of text running beneath the news report. “Hey. Stay on this channel for a sec,” she said, her good humor fading.

Paige stopped scrolling, clicking another button to bring the segment into full-screen view. “Ah, shit,” the redhead murmured. “Obviously the world’s gone to hell again.”

Not the world—just Dublin, according to the screen. Bailey listened in dismay as the reporter quickly recapped the unfolding events to viewers who were just tuning in. There was a holdup in process at a downtown branch of Dublin National Bank. A half dozen masked, armed men had taken the bank employees and patrons hostage, and the law enforcement officers surrounding the bank were attempting to negotiate with the robbers. Apparently the situation was beginning to escalate, with reports of shots fired and hostages screaming.

“Turn it up,” Bailey told Paige, leaning forward when a shaky camera image suddenly filled the screen.

Paige raised the volume, and the urgent voice of the female newscaster blared out of the speakers.

“—courageous woman uploaded a video to her social network page. We don’t know how she was able to record this, but it’s been confirmed that the account belongs to Margaret Allen, a twenty-one-year-old student at Trinity College. Be warned—some of these images are not suitable for young viewers.”

The screen flickered for a beat before the video began to play. Immediately, loud footsteps and angry shouts filled Paige’s living room. The two women watched in silence as jerky images flashed on the screen, accompanied by gruff orders from the robbers and muffled whimpers from the hostages. It was difficult to zero in on any one image—everything was moving too fast, and the men in charge wore all black, from the ski masks on their faces right down to the boots on their feet.

An uneasy feeling washed over Bailey as she focused on one of the men. Tall and broad, eye color indiscernible and voice low and deep as he issued a soft command to someone out of the camera’s line of sight.

“Look at these idiots,” Paige remarked with a sigh. “Do they honestly expect to get away with this?”

Bailey didn’t answer. Something niggled at the back of her mind, an intangible flicker of familiarity, a sense of bone-deep dread. But she wasn’t sure what was bugging her. People robbed banks all the time. People took hostages. People killed other people and did seriously stupid, dangerous shit every second of every day.

So why was this particular armed robbery making the hairs on the back of her neck tingle?

Another anguished sob echoed in the bank, followed by a male response.

“S’okay, luv, it’ll all be over soon.”

The husky timbre of that voice, combined with the faint brogue, turned the blood in Bailey’s veins to ice. A gasp flew out, her heart rate kicking up a notch as she stared at the screen in shock.

“Oh shit,” she whispered.

Paige glanced over, big blue eyes swimming with concern when she saw Bailey’s expression. “What is it?”

“That’s Sean.” Her finger trembled as she jabbed it in the direction of the television.

“What?” The other woman sounded bewildered. “That’s nuts.”

Maybe, but Bailey would recognize that voice anywhere. It haunted her dreams every goddamn night.

“It’s him, Paige. One of the robbers—it’s Sean fucking Reilly.” Horror, shock, and confusion clawed up her throat like icy fingers. “It’s *Sean*.”

\* \* \*

### *Dublin, Ireland*

Well. This was his life now. Robbing a bloody bank in bloody Dublin. His ma was probably rolling over in her grave.

Sean Reilly hadn’t given much thought to how he would die, but considering the dangerous path he walked on a daily basis, the assumption was he’d eventually meet a violent end. Tonight, that fate looked pretty fucking promising. Maybe the Emergency Response Unit hunkered down outside the bank’s doors would swarm in with shoot-to-kill orders. Or maybe one of the snipers positioned on the perimeter would put a strategically placed bullet in his brain.

*Relax, mate. They won’t risk the hostages.*

Bullshit. Sean had worked enough military ops to know there was always at least one crazy asshole on an assault team. One hotshot who thought he could take down the bad guys *and* save the innocents.

Truth be told, usually *he* was that man. His brother lectured him daily about his act-first-and-think-much-much-later approach, but Sean had inherited the reckless gene from their father, while Oliver had gotten their mother’s more practical approach to problem solving. In his defense, Sean was more than capable of getting the job done, even when acting on impulse. The child’s-play exercises the Garda officers underwent were nothing compared to his extensive training.

On the upside, the Irish weren’t as aggressive as other folks—ahem, the bloody Americans—which meant there *was* a chance he could avoid a bullet in the head today. The ERU rarely acted with lethal force unless the threat to innocent life was imminent, and at the moment, all the hostages were safe and sound.

Sean figured he had another hour. Two, tops. After that, the negotiator would realize the gunmen were stalling and the response unit would make their move.

If the ERU had even the slightest inkling about the dead body currently taking up space in the bank, they would’ve acted an hour ago.

Sean swallowed his anger as he shifted his gaze toward the long teller counter spanning the back wall. A cop. A bloody cop—literally, because the garda’s head was surrounded by a sticky crimson puddle. Paddy Lynch had blown the man’s forehead clean off with a sawed-off shotgun, the crazy maniac. If by some miracle they managed to claw out of this clusterfuck alive, first thing Sean planned on doing was knocking Paddy’s crooked teeth out.

But at least Lynch had possessed the good sense not to shoot the undercover officer in the lobby. The garda had made his move closer to the doorway at the edge of the counter. The bullet had sent him tumbling backward, and Lynch had hastily dragged the lifeless body under one of the desks, where it remained hidden from view.



In the commotion, however, one of the tellers had dashed behind the counter and triggered the panic alarm—which was why Sean and his cohorts now had the equivalent of an American SWAT team bearing down on them.

He was definitely gonna die today.

A loud sob broke through his pessimistic thoughts, drawing his attention to a slim, ginger-haired girl crouched on the floor five feet from his scuffed boots. Another thorn in his side—the little bird had nearly been killed too, thanks to the stunt she'd pulled with her phone. Her life had been spared only because Sean had stepped in and talked Gallagher out of shooting her.

Stifling a sigh, he headed for the girl and squatted beside her. "I promise you, it'll be all right, luv."

Her head lifted slightly, big blue eyes peering up at him. She was young, no older than twenty or twenty-one. Tears stained her pale cheeks and she'd bitten her bottom lip so hard it had started to bleed.

"He's going to kill me," she whispered.

Her gaze darted toward Gallagher, who stood in the doorway separating the lobby from the rear offices. The tall man frowned when he caught sight of his accomplice chatting with a hostage, but Sean gave a brief nod to signal that everything was fine.

"He won't kill you," Sean murmured. "I won't let that happen."

A panicked breath blew out of her mouth. "He *will*. He knows I uploaded the video. He said he's going to kill me."

"You shouldn't have done what you did," Sean agreed.

Alarm filled her eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Please don't hurt me."

*Bloody hell.*

She truly believed he would hurt her.

How had it come to this? He was no saint, but he sure as hell wasn't a bad guy. A man who instilled fear in a young woman's eyes.

Anger bubbled in his gut as he wrenched his gaze off the redhead's tearstained face. The hot, suffocating emotion wasn't directed at the girl, but at his former employer. Why the *fuck* had Rabbit put him in this position? He'd given that bastard nothing but loyalty for more than half his life. He might have left Rabbit's employ, but they'd parted on good terms—the old man had helped Sean and his twin get their network off the ground, for Christ's sake.

Well, fuck him. Sean was officially done with that fanatic motherfucker. Rabbit had all but stomped his foot on their former relationship and ground it into dust, making it painfully clear what the Reilly brothers meant to him.

Absolutely nothing.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Sean said through clenched teeth. "I'm just pointing out that if you'd simply handed over your phone when we asked, you wouldn't have drawn any unwanted attention to yourself."

“I’m sorry,” the girl whispered again.

“What’s your name, luv?”

She hiccuped softly. “Maggie.”

“Listen to me, Maggie. Nobody else is going to get hurt, not as long as you do what we say. It’ll all be over soon.”

He hoped that was true. The in-and-out heist he’d signed up for had turned into a deadly hostage situation, and it would turn into something much worse if the ERU decided to launch a full-scale assault.

They’d been trapped inside the bank for an hour, and the hairs on the back of Sean’s neck hadn’t stopped tingling since the response unit had arrived. He knew bloody well there was a rifle trained on his head. Probably an outdated Steyr SSG 69, the ERU’s weapon of choice.

Come to think of it, Bailey occasionally used a Steyr too. Or at least she had that time he’d tracked her to Germany. He doubted she ever used the same weapon twice, though. That would mean giving law enforcement a routine, a calling card, and the woman was too damn smart to leave a trail.

But now was *not* the time to be thinking about Bailey, goddamn it.

“Delta.”

The sharp address came from Gallagher, whose expression had gone dark, deadly.

Sean stared at the man’s masked face and cocked his head in question.

“Leave the bitch alone and do your job,” was the brusque response.

He rose to his full height, offering Maggie a reassuring pat on the shoulder before turning to monitor the status of the other hostages. There were fifteen of them, sitting on the floor against the counter like a group of preschoolers. More females than males, ranging from early twenties to late sixties. The bank’s security guard sat at the end of the line, clad in his crisp blue uniform. Unfortunately for him, that uniform hadn’t come with a weapon, which was something the man was no doubt cursing at the moment.

Satisfied that his charges were behaving, Sean marched across the tiled floor toward his “leader”—Rhys Gallagher, former Irish army special ops, current Irish Dagger lieutenant, and one of Rabbit’s most trusted enforcers. Sean and his brother had grown up not only with Gallagher, but also with the other four men situated throughout the bank, but while the twins had left Ireland for bigger and better things, the others had stuck around to serve Rabbit, who’d been a mentor to all the boys.

Some bloody mentor he was to them now, keeping Ollie hostage and forcing Sean to do his dirty work.

Sean approached Gallagher and addressed him in a low voice. “We need to talk.”

The man nodded at Joe Murray to take his place, then stalked into the corridor with Sean on his tail. They paused when they were out of sight and earshot of the others.

Sean promptly peeled off his black wool balaclava and rubbed his face with both hands. The mask had been itching the shit out of him. “Look. We got what we came for,” he announced. “It’s time to get the hell outta here.”

“No shit,” the other man snapped. “But in case you haven’t noticed, we’re in a real fucking jam at the moment.”

They sure were, and all so Eamon O’Hare could get his hands on the flash drive burning a hole in Gallagher’s back pocket. Rabbit had instructed Sean to be present when the men breached the vault where the safe-deposit boxes were stored. The Irish Dagger leader was paranoid that a mole had infiltrated his organization, but from what Sean could tell, the five Dagger members involved in the heist were on the up-and-up.

“Then we find a way out of the jam,” Sean said coldly.

“What the feck do you think I’ve been doing? Buggering myself? I’m *thinking*, you fecking fool!” The man’s Irish intonation grew deeper and less comprehensible the angrier he got. “But that fecking fasser shot a *garda*.”

“Nobody said Lynch was smart,” Sean muttered. “We just need to improvise.”

“Ya?” Gallagher said scornfully. “Got any bright ideas?”

Sean shrugged. “We give ourselves up.”

Gallagher gazed at him in disbelief. “Are you daft? You’re suggesting we walk out the bloody front door? We’ll get thrown in the Joy,” he snapped, referring to Mountjoy Prison, the medium-security facility where most of Rabbit’s men had been “guests” over the years.

“Five of us will,” Sean agreed.

Gallagher hissed out a breath. “What the hell does that mean?”

“It means we got what we came for. Rabbit has his prize. And I’m no mathematician, but I’m pretty sure he doesn’t need six men to deliver it. One will do the trick.”

“So five of us surrender?” Gallagher sounded skeptical. “And how exactly do you see the sixth man walking away from this?”

“By pretending to be a hostage. The Garda doesn’t have an exact head count of how many people we’re holding here. For all they know, we could’ve stashed a hostage in the back for shits and giggles.” Sean shrugged again. “One of us takes the flash drive and joins the hostages, the other five surrender.”

Gallagher went quiet as he considered it, just as Sean had known he would. The members of the Irish Dagger were good little soldiers, prepared to martyr themselves for their leader. Rabbit spoon-fed them his bullshit, and they ate it up like it was candy. They didn’t care that the world had labeled them a terrorist group. They believed in what they were doing and why they were doing it, and Rabbit made sure to remind them of it every second of the day.

“It’s a sacrifice for the cause,” Sean said meaningfully, knowing the reminder would override Gallagher’s survival instincts.

After a long beat, the other man nodded, resignation flickering in his eyes. “A sacrifice for the cause,” he echoed.

Idealistic idiot. Sean would never sacrifice himself for a losing battle. The IRA and its dozens of splinter

groups were living in the past. Their sacrifices meant nothing.

People, on the other hand—Sean would give up his life for the people he cared about. Oliver. Bailey. Any of the men on Jim Morgan's mercenary team. If Macgregor or Port or, hell, even that bastard D, were in trouble, he'd risk everything to save them.

But Gallagher and his men didn't matter to him. He had no intention of dying for them, even if it meant risking an arrest. If anything, he was banking on getting pinched. Once the Garda took him into custody, he wouldn't stay there long. He had contacts in this city, allies with enough clout to ensure that he'd be back on the street in less than twenty-four hours.

Except Gallagher surprised him with his next remark. "You'll play the hostage."

Sean's eyebrows rose. Well, fuck him sideways. He hadn't thought he'd make the short list for hostage, let alone be tasked with the role.

His reappearance in his former group had been met with hostility and suspicion, particularly from Gallagher and Kelly, Rabbit's second-in-command. The crew didn't trust him, he was well aware of that, and they didn't like him anymore either, not since he and Oliver had abandoned Rabbit to deal in intelligence.

"Why me?" he asked slowly.

"Because you're the least recognizable." Gallagher lifted the bottom of his mask and rubbed the dark stubble on his chin. "We've all gotten pinched before. I don't know if the Garda is using some sort of face-recognition bullshit, but if they see me or Lynch or one of the others walk out with the hostages, someone might recognize us. You've been off the grid long enough that none of those Garda rookies would know who you are."

Jesus Christ.

He'd just been handed a winning lotto ticket.

Sean kept his face expressionless, careful not to reveal his eagerness. "Whatever you think is best," he said with a nod.

"But . . ." Gallagher frowned. "They'll be expecting six men. With you in the hostage pool, there'll only be five left to surrender."

"Because the sixth is dead." Sean arched a brow.

Gallagher instantly understood, a wry smile playing on his lips. "The cop."

"Our leader," Sean corrected. "You've been dealing with the negotiator, but when he calls back, get someone else to talk to him. Murphy, I'd say—lad's a pathological liar. Murphy tells the negotiator that our merry band had a disagreement and our leader was taken out of the equation, and the other men are ready to give themselves up now that the head of the snake has been cut off."

Gallagher narrowed his eyes. "You're a clever little bugger, aren't you, Reilly? Always have been."

He didn't answer.

"All right. We do this, then." After a moment of hesitation, Gallagher reached into his pocket and pulled out

the flash drive. “Go to the staff room and find something else to wear. I’ll grab you after Murphy talks to the Garda. Then I’ll bring you to the lobby at gunpoint and throw you in with the other hostages.”

Every nerve ending in Sean’s body crackled with triumph as Gallagher handed him the flash drive.

Well, goddamn. Maybe he *wasn’t* going to die today.

## Chapter 2

Bailey spent the majority of the flight making phone calls and cashing in favors. She had no idea what to expect when she got to Dublin, but she would damn well be prepared for anything. She would’ve felt better if Paige had come with her, but the woman had adamantly refused. Paige shied away from any mission that might place her in the public eye, and since the bank was crawling with police and reporters, Bailey wasn’t surprised that her request for assistance had been categorically denied.

Of all the women who worked for Noelle, Bailey was closest to Paige—yet she didn’t have a shred of insight about the woman’s past. She suspected Paige harbored secrets that rivaled her own, but she had never pushed her friend for answers. Paige would tell her eventually. Or she wouldn’t. Either way, Bailey still adored the woman.

And it wasn’t like she didn’t have any backup—she’d already contacted a former colleague and he was hard at work on his end, gathering as much intel as he could about the bank robbery.

Bailey checked her phone again, but Rafe hadn’t checked in, so she dialed Paige’s number instead. The helicopter’s cabin was noisy as hell, but despite the whirl of the rotors and the wind hissing past her window, she clearly heard the frustration in her friend’s voice.

“I can’t find a bloody thing,” Paige grumbled. “The bank’s system doesn’t have any floor plans or schematics. I’m trying to hack into the city records to get my hands on some blueprints, but their security is surprisingly intense. Every time I knock down a firewall another one pops up.”

“Shit,” Bailey said. She needed those blueprints *now*. If the holdup was still in progress when she landed, she had every intention of finding a way into that bank.

“It might take a while. I’m working as fast as I can, though.” There was a pause. “Is there really no way to talk you out of this?”

“Nope.” Her tone was light, but the tension weighing on her chest was heavier than a block of cement.

A part of her still questioned her decision to hightail it out of England to rescue Sean Reilly, but no matter how many times the rational part of her brain tried to point out that she didn’t even *like* the man, she hadn’t been able to talk herself out of it.

She and Sean might not be bosom buddies, but he’d helped her out in the past. Helped her colleagues, too. And yes, he was annoying and arrogant and so reckless she wasn’t sure how he was still alive, but he wasn’t a criminal. He didn’t rob banks, for fuck’s sake, which meant that his presence at Dublin National was part of something . . . bigger. Something that could very well get him killed.

“You know what?” she told Paige. “Forget about the blueprints. I have another source I can hit up for those. I want you to focus on accessing all the security cameras in the area. I want to know where every member of

law enforcement is positioned. Try to access the cameras inside the bank, too.”

“Copy that.”

Bailey hung up and ran a hand through her hair, once again going over the details of the robbery. It was Sean’s voice she’d heard on the TV. She was certain of that. But why the hell was he inside the bank? What had that idiot gotten himself into?

“Ten minutes until descent,” the pilot called from the cockpit, twisting around in his seat to give her a thumbs-up.

She nodded in return. She hadn’t flown with Greg before, but Paige had, and the woman said he could be trusted. Bailey found it ironic—she had an easier time trusting a man she’d known for less than an hour than she had trusting Sean Reilly, a man she’d known for years.

Her gaze drifted out the window as she considered everything she knew about Sean. He’d been born and raised in Dublin, but he’d lived all over the world, including New York for a few years. He’d had a variety of unsavory professions—mercenary, information dealer, errand boy for an Irish gangster. His dad had been IRA and trained his sons to be soldiers for the cause, but Sean and his brother had strayed from the group, choosing their own path.

Could he be working for O’Hare again? Bailey knew that Eamon “Rabbit” O’Hare had been heavily involved in Sean’s life when he was a kid. Sean’s dad had been the Irish Dagger leader’s right-hand man. But in the five years she’d kept tabs on Sean and Oliver, there hadn’t been any indication that they were still in contact with the Irish gangster.

A frustrated groan crawled up her throat, but she choked it back. Why was she running to help him, damn it? They’d slept together. Once. And the bastard had *lied* to her. Didn’t matter that he’d owned up to it immediately after. He’d still come to her hotel room that night pretending to be someone else. Just because she’d known who he was certainly didn’t excuse his deception. She should be celebrating that he was in trouble, not rushing to get him out of it.

The phone buzzed in her hand, providing a much-needed distraction from her turbulent thoughts. “Hey,” she said when Rafe’s voice echoed in her ear. “What are we looking at over there?”

“We’ve got a dozen gardai front and back. Blockade on the street, but a looser formation at the rear. Two snipers street side, positioned on the rooftops. But there’s got to be another one in the back. Haven’t made him yet.”

“I’m working on getting us more intel,” she told him. “Stay in position. I’m landing in five. Rendezvous in thirty.”

“Gotcha.”

Rafe disconnected abruptly, but just knowing he was backing her up filled Bailey with relief. She’d worked with him a handful of times over the years, having met him when she was still with the CIA and Rafe was working in Spanish intelligence. He’d left his agency after a falling-out with a supervisor and had gone private, now operating out of the UK. She was damn lucky he’d been in Dublin when she’d SOS’d him. With Paige refusing to help, and the rest of her colleagues halfway across the globe, Bailey desperately needed Rafe’s assistance.

But she needed someone else too. Someone she had no desire to get tangled up with again.

Anger and annoyance rippled through her as she scrolled through her contact list and pulled up the number. Goddamn Sean for putting her in this position. She was sticking her neck out for him, and knowing him, he probably wouldn't express an ounce of gratitude for what she was about to do.

She hesitated for a beat, then dialed. Because hell, she was already in this deep.

The call didn't connect right away. Instead, a series of clicks met her ears, which told her the call was being rerouted several times before reaching her contact. She knew the drill, though. It was the same on her end, calls bouncing from tower to tower to make it impossible for anyone to trace her. She'd always received great satisfaction from the knowledge that nobody could pinpoint her location, not even her former employer, a man with endless resources. But now, thanks to Sean, she was practically waving a flag around and begging her past to find her.

A moment later, a female voice came on the line. Absolutely delighted and more than a little smug. "Hey, stranger."

Bailey clenched her teeth. "Gwen. I need a favor."

The other woman's peal of laughter only grated harder. "Really, Bailey? Two years without a word, without so much as a *postcard*, and this is what I get? No 'How are ya?' No 'How's the old gang doing?'"

"There is no old gang," she muttered. Gwen knew damn well that Bailey had been a loner during her time at the company. She worked solo. Period. Her only contact with the other operatives had come from occasionally bumping into them on the rare occasions she stopped by headquarters to be debriefed.

"I don't have much time," she added tersely. "I'm cashing in on that favor you owe me. You know, the *carte blanche* you promised me when I rescued your ass from that hellhole in Uganda?"

"I was hoping you'd forgotten about that."

Despite herself, Bailey smiled. "Do I ever forget anything?"

"No. You don't." Gwen paused. "What can I do for you, honeybunch?"

"Before I tell you, you have to promise that you'll do it in a way that doesn't put me on Daniels's radar."

"Still playing cat and mouse with our boss, huh?" Gwen's tone grew mocking, and Bailey could practically see the smirk on her face.

"*Your* boss, Gwen. Not mine. And I mean it—this has to be on the DL. I don't want Daniels to know I'm back on the grid."

"All right. Tell me what you need."

"A detailed layout of Dublin National Bank, Fleet Street branch. Interior and exterior, entry and exit points, ventilation system, anything you can get your hands on. I need to know every inch of the place." She paused. "Also, any intel you might have on the hostage situation that's going down there right now."

There was a pause, followed by another thoroughly amused laugh. "Since when do you get involved in local crime bullshit?"

Bailey ignored the taunt. “You’ll have to go through black channels, Gwen. I mean it. There can’t be a paper trail.”

“Sweetie, we both know I never leave a trail. I’m insulted you’d even suggest it.” Gwen chuckled again. “But I am flattered that you think my sources are superior to yours. You can easily find this information on your own.”

“Not as fast as you can,” she said irritably. “Can you do it?”

“I’ll see what I can do. Call you back in a jiffy.”

Gwen hung up, and Bailey released a sigh. She hated that she’d been forced to reach out to that crazy bitch.

Truth be told, Gwen scared the shit out of her. The woman was charming, highly skilled, and insanely dangerous. Her daredevil attitude reminded Bailey a lot of her colleague Juliet, but while Juliet was all about self-preservation, Gwen had never seemed to care whether she lived or died. The woman operated without a parachute. She lived and breathed danger, got off on the adrenaline of it, and that made her a massive liability.

If Gwen told Daniels about Bailey’s call . . .

No, she had to trust that her old colleague would hold up her end of the deal and refrain from tipping off Daniels. Because if he got wind that she’d surfaced again . . . the bastard would be on the next flight out, coercing her into coming back to work for him. Or worse—trying to lure her into his bed again.

Not that he’d succeed. Bailey was done with the man, professionally *and* romantically. Daniels had recruited her when she was eighteen years old. He’d been her mentor. Her friend. Her lover.

Sleeping with him had been a mistake, though, only serving to illustrate that she hadn’t put her past behind her like she’d thought. She’d left one controlling bastard and replaced him with another, but she’d be damned if she let Isaac Daniels have any power over her again.

Fuckin’ Sean Reilly.

He owed her a frickin’ fruit basket for all the trouble she was going to for him.

\* \* \*

Gwen called back five minutes after the chopper landed in the private airfield outside the city. The car Bailey had arranged for was waiting by the hangar, and she lifted the phone to her ear as she slid into the backseat of the sedan. She’d hired a driver so she’d be able to study any schematics Gwen and Paige sent over.

“I’m e-mailing you the blueprints,” Gwen said briskly.

Bailey hissed out an excited breath. “Are they up to date?”

“They’re the most current plans my source could find. Best I could do on such short notice.”

Bailey responded with reluctant gratitude. “Thank you. Anything I need to know about this robbery?”

“I didn’t find much more than what the news is reporting.” Gwen paused. “But there are a few whispers that this is the work of the Irish Dagger.”



Shit. That was exactly what Bailey had been afraid of.

What the *hell* was Sean involved in?

“Okay. Thanks again, Gwen.”

“We’re square now,” the woman said before Bailey could disconnect. “Next time you call me, it had better be to catch up. Oooh, we should go for drinks and—”

“Good-bye, Gwen.”

Bailey hung up the phone, then accessed her e-mail and downloaded the file Gwen had sent. She spent half the drive into the city going over every detail of the bank.

She found herself praying that the hostage situation would still be under way when she arrived. If the cops made a move before then, Sean might very well be dead.

The peculiar clenching of her gut gave her pause. She wasn’t sure why the thought of Sean dying bothered her so much. They barely knew each other. Well, outside the biblical sense.

But . . . no. She didn’t want him dead. No matter how angry she was at him, she didn’t want to see that cocky bastard eliminated from the face of the earth.

That’s why she was hoping the Garda hadn’t launched an assault. Though on the other hand, there was always the possibility that an ambush would result in arrests rather than deaths. Which was almost preferable—she’d have a far easier time rescuing Sean from police custody than getting him out of a heavily watched bank.

Her phone beeped when they were ten minutes from her rendezvous point with Rafe. Incoming e-mail from Paige, summarizing the positions of every law enforcement member in the vicinity. Paige had managed to get her hands on live security footage of the area, God bless her pretty red head. Nothing about the position of the snipers, though, but Paige’s e-mail said she was working on it.

Bailey scanned the information, then rubbed her temples, trying to ward off an oncoming headache. It was enough to make her wonder if maybe she ought to bring Morgan’s team into the loop. They wouldn’t be able to do much, considering they were nowhere near Dublin, but they would want to know about Sean’s predicament, wouldn’t they? Liam and Sullivan would for sure. She knew the two of them were pretty chummy with Sean.

After a second of hesitation, she shot a quick text to Liam, promised to keep him posted, and then went back to studying the bank layout. By the time the sedan neared the Temple Bar neighborhood where the bank was located, she had a good grasp of the interior and a feasible plan, depending on what Rafe had to say.

The sun had disappeared below the horizon line not long after she’d landed, but lampposts lit the streets and cast shadows on the faces of pedestrians wandering the sidewalks. Her driver took a detour because the Garda had barricaded two city blocks, thanks to the showdown at the bank, so she was five minutes late meeting Rafe. She got out of the sedan on the street parallel to Fleet, heading for the cobblestone alley sandwiched between two darkened storefronts.

“You’re late.” He emerged from the shadows, his dark eyes, dark hair, and dark stubble making it hard to see him clearly.

“Sorry. Had to take a detour.”

They didn’t shake hands. Didn’t hug or exchange smiles. Rafe Meriden wasn’t that kind of man. He always got right down to business without wasting time on pleasantries.

“The negotiator is still in contact with the gunmen,” he said briskly. “He’s taking the calls from inside one of the police cars parked in front of the bank.”

“Has the Emergency Response Unit made any moves?” she asked.

“None. No activity inside either. I overheard one of the gardai say the shots that were heard earlier were warning shots. Gunmen fired at the ceiling when they stormed the bank to get people’s attention. It’s been quiet since then.” He paused. “You saw the girl’s video?”

“Yes,” she said grimly.

Rafe frowned. “You’re certain your guy’s in there?”

Her guy. Hardly. If the cops didn’t shoot Sean, she’d do it herself.

“Yeah, he’s there.” She bent down and unzipped the canvas bag she’d brought from England, rummaging around until she found the case containing her comms. She took out two earpieces, popped one in her ear, and handed the other to Rafe.

The transmitters were motion activated, so she moved her hand over the tiny device to trigger the mic. “Paige, you read?”

“Loud and clear,” came her friend’s voice.

“Did you get the locations of the snipers?”

“Two across the street from the bank, one in the rear.”

“Be more specific,” Rafe demanded. “Where’s the third?”

“He’s on the roof of an apartment building. If the back door is twelve o’clock, our sniper is at six.”

Rafe and Bailey turned their heads inconspicuously toward the buildings to the east of them.

“Brick building,” Paige said. “Second flat from the top has Christmas lights strung on the balcony.”

Bailey glimpsed the blinking red and blue lights. “Got it. Thanks. I’ll get back to you.” She turned to Rafe. “You said there’s a dozen Garda officers in the back?”

He nodded. “What are you thinking?”

“We need to take out that rear sniper, for one.” Chewing on her bottom lip, she pulled up the blueprints on her phone and studied the screen. “There’s a ventilation grate five feet from the back door. I need to get to it without the guards spotting me.”

Rafe whistled under his breath. “You’re a crazy bitch, Bailey.”

“Do you think you can incapacitate the sniper and take his place?” she said slowly.

“Yes.” Rafe narrowed his eyes. “But then what?”

She bit the inside of her cheek, her brain rapidly sorting through details and variables. “You’ll have to create a distraction. Get the Garda’s eyes off the back door just long enough for me to infiltrate the bank.”

“I can do that. I’ve got an associate on standby.”

She didn’t bother asking who this “associate” was. Rafe was even more secretive than she was, and she had *a lot* of secrets.

“Can we trust him?”

“He’ll do whatever I ask.” Rafe paused. “What happens when you get inside?”

“I’ll have to improvise, I guess. But let’s cross one bridge at a time. We need that sniper removed from the equation first.”

Rafe went quiet for a beat. Then he sighed. “You sure this man of yours is worth the hassle?”

Nope. She wasn’t sure at all.

But she’d already come this far, and there was no backing out now.

### Chapter 3

#### *Turtle Creek, Costa Rica*

Liam Macgregor stared at his phone, unable to fathom what he was seeing. Maybe Bailey had gone insane. Or maybe she’d popped some hallucinogens and was tripping balls right now.

Except . . . well, fuck. Bailey wouldn’t make something like that up. And although she had a pretty kick-ass sense of humor, she didn’t joke around when it came to Sean Reilly. The only time Liam had ever seen hostility in Bailey’s normally laid-back demeanor was when she was discussing the man.

He rose from one of the brown leather couches in the compound’s massive, chalet-style living room and switched on the flat-screen television. It took no time at all to verify Bailey’s story. All he had to do was turn the channel to CNN, and there it was. Hostage situation unfolding at Dublin National Bank.

There was no mention of Sean Reilly, though. According to the newscaster, the gunmen were still unidentified, all six of them, but Liam would never dream of questioning Bailey or undermining her instincts. The woman was a former CIA operative and a professional assassin. She’d had more training and battle experience than Liam, and she was capable of things that, in all honesty, scared him shitless.

If Bailey said Sean was in the bank, then Sean was in the bank.

The question was . . . *why*?

What kind of fucked-up craziness had Sean gotten himself into?

Cursing under his breath, Liam strode through the heavy oak doors and hurried up one of the twin staircases in the front parlor. The house where Liam and several of his team members resided was huge, offering

endless hallways and bedroom suites, and that was just the top three floors. The basement housed a sixteen-seat theater, a fully equipped gym, a sprawling game room, and an indoor target range.

Despite its frills, the house was more secure than a military base. The hundred-acre property was surrounded by a twelve-foot electric fence and contained a top-notch security system monitored by two former Delta operatives. Running underneath the property were tunnels with escape points leading to both the jungle bordering the compound to the east and the mountains to the west, and every building was rigged with C-4 in the event that the place was breached.

Liam would consider it overkill, if not for the fact that a private mercenary squad had ambushed the team's former compound a couple of years back. Besides, with the number of people living there, precautions needed to be taken.

He raced up the stairs to the second floor, which consisted of suites belonging to Morgan and Noelle, Kane and Abby, and now Morgan's daughter, Cate. The sarcastic teenager referred to the third floor as Frat Row, since that was where Liam and the other unattached men stayed.

He rapped his knuckles on Morgan's door, but the knock went unanswered. Crap. Where the hell was the boss?

Liam was just moving away from the door when a head popped out of a doorway at the opposite end of the hall.

"Hey!" Abby Sinclair said brightly, looking overjoyed to see him.

He hid his amusement. Almost seven months pregnant and officially sidelined from all jobs for the foreseeable future, Abby had been climbing the walls for weeks now. He knew the lethal operative was bored to tears, and it didn't help that her husband was still working ops, leaving her alone for days or weeks at a time.

"Do you want to watch a movie?" she asked.

He didn't miss the pleading note in her voice, which was pretty fucking shocking, considering Abby usually wasn't very social. But since she'd been benched, Abby was willing—no, she was *eager*—to hang out with anyone who crossed her path. Apparently she was driving their security man nuts by wandering into his domain on a daily basis and trying to take over his surveillance duties.

"Can't," he said regretfully. "I need to track down Morgan. Do you know where he is?"

"No clue." Her honey yellow eyes narrowed. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything's fine," he lied. "Just need to talk to him about this bodyguard gig we've got lined up."

Abby's expression told him that she didn't buy the story, but she didn't grill him further. "Great. Whatever," she grumbled, then disappeared into the bedroom.

He didn't feel at all guilty for lying to her. Kane had ordered everyone at the compound to keep Abby's stress levels at a minimum, which meant not involving her in anything that was potentially dangerous. Like the fact that Sean Reilly was robbing a fuckin' bank.

Liam headed back to the staircase, his foot landing on the top step just as Ash entered the parlor.

“Where’s the boss?” he demanded as he descended the stairs.

The dark-haired rookie grinned. “Gun range. He’s giving Cate a lesson.”

“Kay. Thanks.” Liam started to brush past the younger man, but Ash grasped his arm, the humor in his green eyes fading as he caught the look on Liam’s face.

“What’s wrong—”

Liam shrugged the kid’s hand off him. “Let me talk to Morgan and then I’ll fill you in.”

He hurried down the corridor toward the kitchen, his bare feet slapping the hardwood floor. The steel door outside the kitchen opened onto a concrete staircase leading to the basement, and he took the steps two at a time, cursing at the ice-cold floor beneath his feet. Noelle must have turned up the air-conditioning again. Ever since she’d moved in, she’d been running the place like she owned it. Though he supposed she did, now that she was married to the boss.

Never in a million years would Liam have thought he’d be living under the same roof as the terrifying woman known as the queen of assassins, but life was funny that way.

The walls in the basement were nearly soundproof, but he heard the muffled pops of gunfire as he marched toward the target range. When he walked in, he saw Cate and Noelle at the front of the cavernous room. The younger girl held a nine-millimeter semiautomatic with both hands, aiming it at the target thirty feet away. She fired, then groaned in exasperation.

“Stop going for the head,” Noelle said sharply, frowning at the eighteen-year-old girl. “I already told you, head shots require a level of precision you haven’t mastered yet.”

Cate threw back a challenge. “How am I supposed to master it if I don’t *practice*?”

“We’re focusing on the chest this week.”

“I can hit any part of the chest you tell me to!” Cate protested, blowing a strand of dark blond hair off her forehead. “You know I can. Let me try another head shot.”

“Fine.” Noelle folded her arms over her tight red tank top. “Go right ahead.”

Cate studied the target in concentration, then raised her weapon and squeezed the trigger. The shot reverberated through the huge empty room, the bullet connecting with the white space four inches from the target’s head.

“Fuck!” Cate burst out.

“Language,” a male voice snapped.

Liam glanced over and spotted Morgan leaning against the cinder-block wall, arms crossed as he reprimanded his daughter.

His daughter. Jeez. Liam still had a hard time wrapping his head around it, even though he’d seen Cate almost every day since Morgan had brought her to the compound.

Still, if someone had told him two months ago that deadly supersoldier Jim Morgan would be raising a

teenage daughter, he would've laughed them out of town. But DNA didn't lie, and although Morgan hadn't even been certain that Cate existed before he'd finally tracked her down in Paris over the summer, the man had stepped into the daddy role with ease and confidence that boggled Liam's frickin' mind.

"Don't lecture me about language. *You* swear like a sailor," Cate grumbled at her father, accusation shining in her blue eyes. The same dark shade of blue as Morgan's. And her tone contained the same note of authority. It was damn eerie seeing them together sometimes.

"That doesn't mean I want my kid to have a filthy mouth," Morgan shot back. "It's unladylike."

Cate and Noelle both snorted.

"I have no interest in being a *lady*," Cate informed him.

Rather than answer his daughter, and without looking in Liam's direction, Morgan said, "What's up, Boston?"

Liam wasn't surprised that Morgan had known he was lurking in the doorway. The man possessed superhero senses. He could smell danger from miles away, and he always knew when he wasn't alone in a room.

Without wasting any time, Liam marched over to his boss. "Reilly's in the process of robbing a bank."

Cate's loud gasp echoed in the room, but neither Morgan nor Noelle looked particularly astounded by the revelation, which made Liam's shoulders stiffen.

"You knew about this?" he demanded.

Morgan shrugged. "One of Noelle's informants called about an hour ago to give us a heads-up."

"And you didn't think to tell the rest of the team?"

"What's the point? The situation will have resolved itself by the time any of you even get to Dublin."

Liam gaped at the other man. Morgan's blasé response was grating as fuck, and far more callous than he'd expected. Sean might have abandoned the team right before a critical op, but that didn't mean he deserved to be shunned for it.

"You *know* Sean," Liam said flatly. "He's not a criminal, goddamn it. Obviously he needs our help."

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