

# REMEMBER MY NAME

SAM BLAKE



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# Chapter 1

*IF SHE'D TURNED her phone off, instead of realising he hadn't hung up and listening in, perhaps nobody would have died.*

Later, this was the thought that leaped around in Cressida Howard's head, consuming everything else like wildfire, spreading as it found and engulfed every lie, each one tinder-dry.

She would – eventually – accept that this wasn't about her. It was all about him. His choices. His decisions.

And her. That woman.

But right now, she didn't have the benefit of hindsight.

'I'm going out.'

Cressida looked up sharply at the sound of her seventeen-year-old daughter's voice, her mind still reeling from what she'd heard. Emily-Jane didn't wait for a response as she passed the partially open living room door, her heels loud on the polished maple of the hall floor.

'When will you be back?'

On autopilot, Cressida raised her voice as she heard the front door open, the sound of the sea breaking on the rocks beyond the house spiralling in on a gust of wind almost drowning Emily-Jane's equally automatic reply.

'Don't know, won't be late.'

‘Where ... Em?’ Cressida started to ask, but the dull thud of the front door closing cut off her words abruptly. A moment later she heard the engine of Emily-Jane’s Mini roaring into life and the sound of the wheels spinning on the gravel as she turned her beloved cream car in the drive and went through the gates.

Staring blankly at her phone, Cressida slowly realised that her only child was leaving the house at 9 p.m. on a dark October evening – a school night, *and* it was only Monday – and she had no idea of where she was going. Had Emily-Jane mentioned that she was meeting friends tonight? Cressida felt as if she was trapped in some sort of vacuum, an airlock between what had been and what came next, every movement, every thought, laboured. And her husband’s words were moving around her brain like a slow-motion movie of a giant moth flapping around a flame.

*‘I won’t be home. Got to work late ... I’ll stay at the 1796. Talk tomorrow, I have to go ...’*

She’d hardly had a chance to reply. Had had her finger hovering over the *end call* button when she’d heard a clatter at the other end, as if he was putting the phone down. And then the sound of a door opening and a woman’s voice, her accent Italian or Spanish. There had been a rattle, as if a glass containing ice had been put down next to the phone. And then her husband’s voice again – low and throaty.

‘Good evening, Nina.’

The pause had been too long, then a sigh ... of pleasure? It had been a long time since she’d heard him sound like that.

*‘Nina ...’*

He’d almost sounded annoyed.

She'd hit the *end call* button then, her blood rushing to her face, pounding in her ears as she fought for breath, her chest constricting as her heart rate increased.

And then Emily-Jane's voice had blended into the maelstrom of confusion in her head, and a pain, acute like a stiletto, had pierced her chest.

As if it could sense her mood, a gust of wind and rain hit the curved Victorian bay window like spit shot. Cressida leaped up to close the curtains, rattling the heavy cream brocade along the brass rail with as much force as she could, shutting out the night and the storm that had been brewing all day, the sound of the curtain rings shattering the stillness of the room.

Her arms still raised above her head, she hung on to the draw rods, her brown eyes closed tightly, focusing on steadying her breathing.

Shock began to build into rage. She took a deep breath and slowly tucked her shoulder-length blond hair behind her ears. Turning to look into the room, at the white marble fireplace with its ornate gold mirror reflecting the light from the chandelier, the huge cream sofas, the glass-topped artisan coffee table where her white wine stood untouched, Cressida crossed her arms tightly.

She wasn't taking it this time.

*What had Nina been doing to him to make him sound like that?*

She'd ignored her suspicions before, all the times before, the times when he'd been inexplicably delayed, when he'd vanished 'back to the office' at the weekend for an 'important meeting'. She'd kept herself busy, focusing on their beautiful house, on Emily-Jane, on the school runs and juggling hockey meets and cross-country with work – the speech therapy sessions she gave

that were so vital to her clients. On being the perfect mother, the woman who could do it all.

Then her colleague had proposed setting up their own speech therapy clinic, Phoenix Associates, and she'd become totally absorbed in moving out of the public medical system into private practice, in starting something of her own. Things were easing off now that Emily-Jane drove herself to school, that they had a team of therapists dealing with everyone from tiny children to elderly stroke patients. She only worked three days a week now, had time to swim in Laurence's ridiculous Disney nightmare of a pool, to get to the gym, to entertain his business associates ...

Cressida bit her lip, folding her arms even more tightly, gripping the baby-soft wool of her oversized cream sweater. She'd been busy, had been happy to get on with her own life while Laurence consolidated his family hotel business. He'd been devastated by his twin brother's death ten years ago, changed by it. He'd become more focused, more ruthless, and he'd thrown himself into work, continuing their plans to move the Howard Group hotel bookings to a high-tech lifestyle platform that would (he'd said), as they brought their partners on board, become the go-to for everyone, whether they wanted to buy flowers or book a flight. It had been Pierce's brainchild, and the reason they'd been in Silicon Valley in the first place. They'd been on their way to a funding meeting when a driver, already drunk at 11 a.m., had jumped the lights at an intersection, hitting them side-on, at speed.

Despite his horrific injuries, Pierce had survived for three days, giving his wife Sinéad time to get to the hospital. He'd come around long enough for them to say their goodbyes. It had been a nightmare for all of them, but Cressida had always felt

that a part of Laurence had died with Pierce. He'd come back a different person. She'd understood. She'd made allowances, but he'd become more and more distant.

He'd been so quiet when he'd first come home, disappearing for impossibly long walks along the seafront. She'd wondered then if he was meeting someone, but those walks had given him time to think, he'd said. He'd said he wanted to keep going – he needed to keep going. Pierce's ideas would make them millionaires. Dublin was becoming the tech capital of Europe and now was the time to build. There would be long hours and he'd have to travel a lot, he'd said. He'd keep building what they'd started together, and it would grow exponentially, he'd said. He'd said a lot of things.

And now he'd said a name.

*Nina.*

Cressida took a long slow breath and, heading across the room, reached for her wine, sipping it, savouring the delicate fruity flavour. She lifted the glass to the light, looking at the teardrops caught on its crystal sides, and took another sip.

First she needed to find out who this Nina was. And then she would work out what to do about her.

## Chapter 2

**B**RIONI O'BRIEN TURNED the page of her book, the movement making her heavy fuchsia-pink fringe fall into her eyes. It was more of a forelock at this stage, and the length reminded her that she needed to get it cut before she returned to work next Monday. But that was a whole week away.

She adjusted the throw on her knees, stretched out on the worn sofa and sighed, enjoying the gentle creaking of the wooden house in the onshore breeze, thankful that she and her sister Marissa had put in underfloor heating when they'd refurbished. Outside she could hear waves breaking on the sweep of smooth sandy beach below the house. Normally gentle and rhythmic, they had been steadily increasing during the afternoon as a storm built. One of the things she loved about Wexford, about this place – as well as its splendid isolation on the edge of the sand dunes – was how, when you were in it, you felt like part of the landscape, an integral part of the universe. Never more so than when the weather closed in.

Brioni yawned. It was only ten o'clock but she'd been for a swim and then for a walk this afternoon, down the beach to the headland, back up along the scrubby fields and home. There had been a bite in the wind that had left her cheeks numb, but she'd



bought fish and chips on her way past the pub at the very end of the lane. Unwrapping the paper, she'd sat down in the shelter of the doorstep, savouring their heat and salty tang. As she'd looked out to sea, her rainbow-striped woolly hat pulled down over her ears, the squat single-storey house had protected her from the worst of the wind.

She was tired now but it was good tired, a physical exhaustion that was different from the mental fatigue she got from working on screens all day, looking at rows and rows of code. She'd thought her undergrad years had been gruelling, but it was nothing to the hours she was putting in juggling working at Riverview and doing her MSc. They were sponsoring her tuition, and they paid their software developers handsomely, provided free meals, workout rooms, sleep pods, even, but their staff were expected to put the hours in.

Brioni had never been so grateful to get to Wexford as she had been this weekend. She wasn't due in work until a week today – next Monday – and she had an assignment due in the following Friday. Right now she needed time to recharge. She rubbed the back of her head, normally smooth shaven in a double undercut, but all she could feel was bristles. It didn't matter; she didn't plan to see anyone except the locals until next weekend, and they were so mesmerised by the pink hair, her piercings and the vague American accent she'd picked up, that they'd hardly notice a bit of regrowth.

Brioni picked up the mug she'd put down on the rough wooden coffee table beside her, about to take a sip of her raspberry tea when her mobile began to ring from underneath the throw.

Pulling it out, she smiled at the name on the display – Marissa. 'Hi, big sis, how's things?'

‘Good ... just a sec.’

Brioni heard her sister close a door and move further into the house. She could picture it, the cosy pine kitchen littered with brightly coloured children’s toys. They seemed to be on every surface, the home in West London that Marissa now shared with DCI Mike Wesley a total contrast to her own house in Highgate, with its designer folding patio doors and the clinical white decor. That house was an investment now, a place from her past that was haunted by memories of her husband Steve. A place neither of them wanted to revisit.

‘Did you get the heating going OK?’

Brioni heard the sofa creak as Marissa sat down with a sigh. She was obviously tired, but these days Brioni could hear the happiness in her voice, like the soothing middle notes on a piano. Whether she was ferrying teenagers to school or Daisy to nursery, she ran their blended home like a summer camp where there was always something to eat and something to do, the radio was always on in the kitchen and someone was laughing. Brioni smiled; it was such a contrast to the time before Mike, it sometimes made her well up. Marissa’s life had been constricted by secrets.

She cleared her throat before she answered.

‘I did, not a bother. I’ve decided to stay the whole week. I’ve been swimming every morning so far and walking every day. It’s so quiet down here out of season, you can almost hear the hares chewing the grass.’

Marissa laughed. ‘And we were so desperate to leave.’

‘I know. Be careful what you wish for. You should try and get back more often, Daisy loves it.’

‘I know. But the whole air-travel-with-a-toddler-and-all-their-kit thing is a bit of a struggle if we’re going to get rained on for

weeks. At least there's masses to do here when the weather's bad. She barely sits still for two minutes, I don't think I could manage it unless I could persuade Mike to take a week off, too, and he loves the heat.'

'Good point. Is he busy at the moment?'

'He's always busy. As he says, crime is a growth industry. But listen, I called because I was wondering if you could do me a favour? Well, it's for a friend actually, in Dublin.'

'Tell me more.' Brioni shifted on the sofa, tucking her feet underneath herself. She could hear a hesitation in Mar's voice which meant that this wasn't a simple ask. 'Tell me – who, what, when ...'

'It's a bit of a long story, but there's this woman I met at a fundraiser at the London Irish Centre. Her husband's in hotels, they have a couple in London as well as their flagship hotels in Dublin – the 1796 in the city centre and the Reynolds Regency House in Ballsbridge. They sponsored the raffle at the London Irish event, I think. Anyway, we got talking. She's lovely, her name's Cressida Howard. You can look her up, her husband is Laurence Howard.'

Brioni picked up her laptop from beside the sofa and opened it, her fingers flying over the keyboard as she searched for Marissa's friend.

'The 1796 is right near my office, very fancy. It costs a fortune ...'

'That's it. Right beside Grand Canal Dock. But the hotels are only part of his portfolio.' She paused. 'He's the founder and CEO of Ferryman. Their corporate headquarters are right next door.'

'Oof. Big. The Amazon for lifestyle.'

'I know. I didn't realise when I met her, we were just chatting. You know when you connect with someone? She must have

googled me because she sent me this lovely card after the event, just saying she'd read about ... well, everything, and if I ever needed anything, to call.'

'That was lovely.'

'I know, most people run the other way when they find out how Steve died, but ... Anyway.' Marissa cleared her throat. 'We've been in touch ever since on and off, and she's just called me. She was really upset. She needs some help.'

'Fire away. What can I do?'

'She thinks ... well, she knows her husband's having an affair, and she wants to get as much information about his movements and this woman he's seeing as she can. I told her about you when we met and she remembered. She suspects it's not the first affair but she's never had proof before, and now she needs to know everything so she can divorce him. Ferryman is worth millions and she says he's the type that would fight her for every penny.'

'More, actually.'

Brioni scanned the web page in front of her – an article about an investigation into the Ferryman empire. The company she worked for was a tech giant, but Ferryman was even bigger.

'Precisely. So he can get the best lawyers and the minute he knows she's on to him, he'll cover his tracks.'

'Why doesn't she hire someone? There are great investigators out there.'

'You know Dublin, it's too small. Something will leak. She doesn't trust anyone at this stage.'

'She wants me to do some digging and see what's going on?'

'Would you? You can find out anything online and you won't leave any tracks. Cressida's worried if she even looks at this woman's Facebook page she might accidentally like something

and then she'll know she was looking. And ...' Marissa paused. 'I just keep thinking if I'd talked to someone sooner, looked for help, well, things might have been different.'

'Mar, don't. None of what happened with Steve was your fault. Powerful men think they control everything, that they don't have to follow the same rules as everyone else.'

Brioni could hear Marissa sighing at the other end.

'I know. Which is why I want to help Cressida. It's a big thing to reach out, and I'm worried there's far more she's not telling me. I know ...'

Marissa broke off about to say more, but Brioni could hear the emotion in her voice welling up like a wave.

'Don't worry, of course I'll help. One man taught a lesson is one more for the sisterhood.' Brioni kept her voice light but she was far from joking. She'd had her own bad experiences, like every woman, and she wasn't the sort of person who could stand back and let someone struggle when she could do something about it. It wasn't in her DNA. 'Does she know anything about who he's seeing?'

Marissa paused and Brioni heard her sigh again, but this time it was tense.

'She's called Nina.'

Brioni felt her eyebrows rising as Marissa explained.

'Yikes. That wasn't very nice.'

Brioni rubbed the tattoo on the inside of her wrist, a single black line looped on itself and uncurling into a straight line. A *unalome*, the Buddhist symbol of harmony coming out of chaos. She'd had it done in Thailand, just days before she'd been mugged. There were times when Brioni felt as if she attracted chaos, but she was sure helping out Marissa's friend couldn't be too complicated. And it sounded intriguing.

‘I told her you’d have a go. She’d love to meet you. She lives in Dalkey but said she can meet you in Dublin if it’s easier – it might be more discreet. She said she’ll cover all your expenses, whatever you need. She wants to pay you.’

‘No need for that. I don’t know if I can get what she needs yet. And you know me, I can’t resist a challenge.’

Brioni’s mind had already started ticking, thinking about how she’d tackle this one. The whole point of being here in Wexford was to get away from the city, from work, from the pile of laundry in her tiny apartment, but Dublin was only a two-hour drive, and she could be back tomorrow evening. As well as the heating, the other thing they’d installed when they’d remodelled the beach house was super-fast Wi-Fi, so she didn’t need to be in the city to do her research.

‘Is she around tomorrow? Mid-afternoon? I need a haircut anyway.’

## Chapter 3

IT WAS STARTING to rain in Dublin city centre as Cressida left the car park and skipped across the road to the alley that led through to Dawson Street. Chill drops stung as they hit her face. Winter was definitely on its way; she hated the cold but today's meeting wouldn't wait. Her stomach churned as she wound her red cashmere scarf tighter around her neck and pulled up the collar of her coat. She'd arranged to meet Brioni in a cafe called the Bestseller on Dawson Street, part of the elegant Georgian shopping quarter in the centre of the city. The cafe was old-fashioned-looking, with a red and white stripy canopy over the broad pavement, second-hand books and mismatched vintage china displayed in the bowed Victorian shop window. Possibly the last place on earth that Laurence would ever visit.

A rich aroma of coffee hit her the moment she opened the door. Brioni wasn't hard to spot. Even from the entrance, Cressida could see her bright pink hair glowing at the back of the cafe. She'd chosen a discreet table for two on the raised level beyond the counter, the dark polished wooden stairs and rail posts echoing the mahogany bookshelves that lined the walls.

Concentrating hard on her laptop, Brioni apparently didn't hear Cressida's approach, despite the sound of the high heels of

her boots on the wooden floor. But she looked up when she heard her name, her smile broad.

She looked younger than Cressida had expected, in her mid-twenties, but as Brioni stood, her hand extended, Cressida could see the likeness to her sister. Marissa had said that there was a big age gap between them – almost eight years? Cressida wasn't sure, but whatever it was, they both obviously had very good genes.

'How did you know it was me?' Brioni's grin was mischievous, a diamond stud in her nose catching the light as she smiled.

Cressida laughed, immediately relaxed by her confidence.

'Your sister gave me a clue.'

'I'll never be able to join the secret service. Sit down. The coffee's amazing.'

Unwinding her scarf, Cressida slipped her bag onto the floor beside the table and sat down on the chair opposite Brioni. Nestled in the corner, Brioni had chosen a table where they could see the door. Pulling up the sleeves of her navy turtle neck sweater, Cressida leaned into the edge of the table so Brioni could hear her without her raising her voice.

'Thank you for this. I appreciate it.'

'No need to thank me until I've got the info you need. Mar gave me a bit of an outline.'

Cressida rolled her eyes, then leaned down to her bag to pull out her leather planner. Just as she was opening it, the waitress arrived. They ordered quickly and Cressida glanced up to make sure she had her back to them before she flipped the planner open.

'I wrote everything I could think of down for you. His date of birth, mother's maiden name – Marissa said you'd need Laurence's email addresses – I've included his Gmail, too. I don't



think he's changed his passwords in years, his computer has a thumbprint recognition thing so he thinks no one can get into it.'

Brioni raised her eyebrows in surprise at Laurence's naivety and Cressida nearly smiled. She didn't have to say anything; it was almost as if she was channelling Emily-Jane's thoughts on her father's lax attitude to online security.

'He hires people in for all the tech stuff. He honestly thinks he's untouchable, and because of all of Ferryman's firewalls or whatever you call them, he thinks no one could hack him.'

Nodding slowly, Brioni looked at the pieces of notepaper that Cressida handed her. Laurence Howard's birthday was at the end of January; he was coming up to the big four-oh. Perhaps this was all about some sort of mid-life crisis.

'These are great. Very thorough. So, you want more on who this woman is, and where they were the other night?'

'I think I'm ultimately going to have to hire someone to follow him, to take pictures, but I need more information to be able to do that. And it's so hard to find someone to trust. When they find out who he is, they'll know he's going to pay to stop anything getting out and charge me the earth.' Cressida pursed her lips. 'I daren't take the risk of alerting him until I've got as much information as possible. I know him. If he finds out, he'll make it look as if I'm hysterical.'

Across the table, Brioni screwed up her nose thoughtfully.

'Don't worry. Let's see what I can find. I can get inside his laptop and use his webcam so you might not need to have him followed at all. But if you do, we'll think of something.'

Cressida smiled at the sincerity in Brioni's voice, her eyes stinging with tears. Marissa had been right about her sister's willingness to help, Brioni hadn't even hesitated – and she'd refused to be

paid for her time. But Marissa's own previous experiences with deceitful men had to be a major factor. And she'd mentioned Brioni had had some bad experiences of her own, had set up a support network through the Students' Union at her university in London. Momentarily lost for words, Cressida took a deep breath, trying to hold on to her emotions. She was about to speak when the waitress arrived with their coffees.

'Thank you, we'll be fine now.' Cressida smiled to her gratefully, trying not to look as if she was dismissing her. As the waitress left, Brioni's words sank in.

'How can you get into his webcam?'

Brioni's mouth twitched into a smile. 'Spyware.'

'But he has top-level virus protection. His whole company depends on internet security, it's a global retailer.'

Brioni's eyes flashed with a hint of mischief.

'Virus protection is only good against known threats. There are lots of ways to get in with something completely new it won't recognise. I write programs, all sorts of programs, and I spend a lot of my time breaking into big systems to find their weaknesses. It's part of my job.' She took a sip of her coffee. 'I'll work it out. But once I'm in, I'll have control of his system. I'll be able to look at all his email, and see what he's doing – watch Zoom calls or Skype – and as long as his camera isn't covered, I can see what's happening in the room.'

'Good God, really? That could be illuminating.'

Brioni grimaced. 'And I can screenshot it at my end.' She paused, picking up her spoon to stir sugar into her coffee. 'Has this happened before?'

Cressida sighed. 'Maybe, but I was never very sure before. Suspicious, yes, but he can be very attentive, was always at school

plays, never forgets my birthday.' She took a steadying breath. 'I'm thirty-six and we've been married half of my life.' She could feel herself welling up again. 'He's away a lot. Trips to America and Europe to meet with brands and retailers. He set up the company with his twin brother almost straight out of college, so he's been working incredibly long hours for a long time. And it paid off.'

'It's a brilliant idea – the no-brainers always are. All your lifestyle choices in one place? You can't go wrong.'

Cressida took a sip of her coffee and nodded. 'He brought in friends when they started – guys he and Pierce were at boarding school with who had set up their own companies or, like him, were developing family businesses. Philip French's company specialises in flights and holidays; hotels – that's Laurence obviously. Eoin O'Reilly was a chef and when he met Aisling they developed a whole range of homewares and interiors products. And Richie Murphy grew his father's tailoring business, bringing high-end fashion to the mass market but keeping the bespoke feel. When Laurence and Pierce came up with the idea for Ferryman, having them on the board meant they had a huge market share before they'd even launched the site. It's truly global now. He's incredibly young to have this level of success, but sometimes the circumstances are just right.'

'Even I use it.' Brioni sipped her coffee.

'I think everyone does.'

'And have you any idea who this woman is? Nina?'

Cressida shrugged. 'I've never heard the name before. I really don't know who she might be.'

'Don't worry. I'll find out everything I can. It's Tuesday today, I should have something for you by Thursday, I'd guess.'

‘That fast?’

‘Well, it depends how easy it is to get in, but I’ve got the week off, so I’ve got lots of time.’

‘Thank you so much.’ Cressida bit her lip. ‘If I hadn’t heard her voice, I don’t think I’d care so much. But that pushed me right over the edge.’

## Chapter 4

KATE SPICER ADJUSTED her navy silk blouse, leaving the top button undone, making sure there was just enough cleavage showing before pulling her make-up bag and hairbrush out of her handbag. The en suite shower room adjacent to Laurence's office was spacious, but whoever had designed it had put in a basin with no surround. While it looked fantastic and complemented the black marble walls, it was deeply impractical.

She felt sure it was a man.

The whole Ferryman building felt very male-designed. Thankfully she'd insisted on a female designer for the spa rooms at the ultramodern 1796 and its period sister hotels on the south side of Dublin, in Cork and in London. Laurence had let her put in whatever she wanted.

There were some definite advantages to this relationship. And she never took it for granted.

Reaching for a hairband, Kate smiled to herself as she pulled her long blond hair back and tipped her foundation on to her brush. It had been a long day and she had a full evening ahead – another launch, another beauty brand. She'd dithered over the invitation, but as Laurence was always saying, it did them good to have her appearing in the social pages alongside TV stars and

models. She just needed to freshen up before she left. She began to work the foundation into her skin.

Outside in the main office, Kate could hear Laurence laughing on the phone. It was almost lunchtime in LA, so he'd stayed late to take the call, which suited her perfectly. He liked to get the salon and spa figures weekly, and the longer they could spend going over them uninterrupted, the better.

He laughed suddenly and she tuned in to what he was saying.

'Shouldn't be a problem, I can always bring the board around to my way of thinking. Especially for the right incentive. Not that *they* need to know the details.'

He laughed again as she put the lid on her foundation. He'd imbued the word *incentive* with an emphasis that screamed big numbers and secrecy. *Now what was that about?* Over the years Laurence had always been so generous, making sure she never wanted for anything, buying her jewellery and clothes. Kate knew she said it at least five times a day, but anything that was good for Laurence was good for her.

Outside in the office he laughed again.

'Of course, I'll get Nina to send you samples of the deep dive data we have. She understands all that stuff. Confidentially, of course, I don't need to say that. She'll encrypt it all.' He paused. 'Yes, I'm sure it can all be cross-referenced. She'll be able to talk to your people about that. I know we don't use it as much as we could, we'd need a team of data scientists to develop programs to do it, but I'm sure your team will be able to get what they need. With the right guys on the job you can mine the hell out of it. You'll be able to see what John Smith in Kansas is having for breakfast, what sort of porn he likes, where he goes on holiday and what brand he feeds his dog.'

There was a pause as he listened.

‘Yes, that’s right, the on-site advertising isn’t an issue, your product dovetails beautifully. It’s a no-brainer, and there’s plenty of room in the market for another comms provider, but you don’t need me to tell you that.’

In the bathroom, Kate quickly applied her blusher and looked for her mascara. She could tell from his voice that the conversation was winding up. She could also tell that he was very happy about whatever they were talking about.

Reapplying her eye make-up, she speeded up. She could hear him arranging a meeting in LA now. He ended the call as she reached for her lipstick, but then she heard him on the phone again.

‘Nina? Yes, come up, will you? Have you got that data?’ He paused, then laughed. ‘Seriously? Excellent. That’s exactly what I was looking for.’

Kate pushed the lid back on her lipstick and, glancing in the Hollywood-lit mirror, rubbed her lips together.

*Now, who was Nina?*

She must be working late to still be in the building at this time of night. Perhaps she was working on something specifically for Laurence? Kate quickly smoothed her hair, momentarily puzzled. She hadn’t heard the name before, but then there were hundreds of people working in this building now, and the Howard Group of hotels was just one sector of the businesses that Laurence controlled.

As Kate pushed open the door to the bathroom and switched off the light, Laurence swung around in his chair to face her. His tightly cut hair was starting to grey at the temples – stress probably – but his blue eyes were bright, their colour emphasised

by the sky blue of his shirt. Sometimes if she looked quickly, her heart would jolt – they hadn't been identical, but it was as if Pierce was still here. His sleeves were rolled up; Laurence had slung his jacket over the leather sofa opposite his expansive desk when they'd arrived earlier. He leaned back in the chair to look at her as she came in to perch on the edge of the desk.

'Is that smile for me or the deal you've just done?'

His face twitched. 'Were you listening?'

She shook her head, her smile amused, 'No, but I can tell from the look on your face you're up to something, and loving it.'

'Aren't I always up to something?'

She leaned forward to straighten his tie. 'What plot are you hatching now?'

He smiled enigmatically. 'Let's just say there's a player in the mobile phone market whose interest in expanding into Europe has been reignited. I told you Richie Murphy introduced us a few months ago – he spends a lot of time in the States.'

'SpeakEasy? Again?' She looked at him questioningly as he sat back, not answering, but she could see from his expression that she was right. 'But I thought you also told me the board vetoed hooking up with them?'

'They did, even Richie when it came to it, the bastard, but he's never been able to make an independent decision in his life, follows the others like a bloody sheep.' He paused, his tone smug. 'Let's just say, a few things have fallen into place since then, and their offer has become a lot more attractive.'

Kate raised her eyebrows. Something big must have changed. He'd been furious when the other three directors of Ferryman had thrown out his suggestion of a partnership. Between SpeakEasy's coercive high-pressure sales techniques and data privacy issues,



they felt any association with the American phone giant could compromise the Ferryman brand. She had kept her mouth shut but she'd had her doubts about them, too. SpeakEasy had gained their market share in the US through some extremely questionable practices and political support from the right wing.

Kate opened her mouth to speak, but a knock on the door sent her off the desk and over to the sofa to pick up her jacket. She threw him a smile as she slung it over her arm and went to open the door. A woman with dark glossy hair which reached halfway down her back was outside. Turned away from the door, she had a mobile phone to her ear and seemed to be speaking in Spanish.

Kate turned to throw Laurence a smile. He raised his eyebrows. 'Have a good evening, don't do anything I wouldn't do.'

She rolled her eyes at him. The woman still had her back to her. Kate raised her voice.

'Laurence is ready for you now. Come through.'

Kate inspected the woman closely as she turned, obviously surprised to see her. She wasn't very tall, was wearing five-inch black patent heels, but she was stunning, her cheekbones sharp, her olive skin set off by a bright pink silk blouse and black pencil skirt. Kate took a step back and held the door open to let her in, raising her eyebrows over the woman's shoulder at Laurence as she slipped out of the door.