

PROLOGUE

ATHENS, GREECE

Deep in the shallows where darkness lingered, a secret disrupted a delicate balance within the hallowed halls of freedom. Whispers in alleyways of depravity exposed shattered fragments of loyalty, tilting the scales of truth and power.

Chase Hardeman was not always a truth seeker, but he'd seen firsthand the depths those in power dove to keep their deepest secrets hidden. At times loyalty blurred the lines, bringing death at his hands. For that, he buried his shame in the graveyards of tormented souls. There was no doubt, he was a sinner, not a saint. So, how does a sinner fight in the shallows? One target at a time.

A grim silence echoed beneath a moonlit sky. Breathing steadied as he tucked the Sig Sauer (SIG) against his chest, moving stealthily through a parlor of the Vihkrov's mega-yacht. Red lasers reflected off the windows, beaming across the interior. With his wetsuit partially on, he stood motionless in a corner, aiming the silencer at a shadow. Two quick shots left the body slumped against a glass door. More shadows appeared dead ahead. No hesitation. All neutralized, inviting an eerie silence back into the night.

Nearly a year out of sight, sailing across the oceans aboard the

Midnight Moon, left him at a crossroads. He'd sworn to never take another life, and yet death reached out from the grave. Slipping below deck, his pace quickened toward the master bedroom. Ears zoned into the slightest sound. On a nightstand, an antique clock jackhammered as the seconds passed.

Carrying an extra twenty pounds of muscle on his bones, sweat seeped down his cheeks and neck. The Stars and Stripes tattoo sleeved on his forearm disguised a crude memory. The unthinkable never should've happened, but it did. And time had never healed—it merely tormented the waking hours.

Snapping out of a downward spiral, one that left empty bottles by sunrise, Chase slipped both arms into the wetsuit, pulled it over his shoulders, and zipped it tight. From a hidden compartment beneath the king-sized bed, he grabbed a leather-bound book, ammo, a rugged hard drive, and a small dented *Speed Racer* tin box. Before returning upstairs to the parlor, he shoved all of it in a waterproof backpack knowing his actions had sent him back to a legend he'd buried in the deserts of the Middle East.

A sense of urgency washed over him as unanswered questions played on an endless loop. When his eyes caught movement, he instinctively aimed the SIG with accuracy, ready to fire, surprised at how easily he'd once again crossed the lines. He eased his index finger off the trigger as a familiar voice stopped him.

“Quiet as an anchor outside,” Dax whispered.

“Everything rigged?”

“As good as it's gonna be.”

Dax stood beside Chase, wearing an identical wetsuit, taking in the scene. For a moment, they stared at the lifeless bodies. A ritual done countless times as part of their covert operations

under the Red Venture Group. Instincts and training returned as naturally as a Greek strolling through the Parthenon. Dax snapped photos of each intruder. With any luck, he'd track down their identities and confirm what they'd both feared. After hiding out on an oligarch's yacht, they were being hunted. Again.

"You know it'd be easier if we just dug our own graves," Dax said.

"It's not too late for you to cash in your chips and go off the grid."

Dax handed Chase a remote trigger. "Who else is gonna save your ass?"

Watching Dax limp across the parlor was a reminder of the battles waged and sacrifices made to keep each other alive. They'd said it thousands of times—while they weren't blood, they were brothers bonded by life and war. Secrets they shared, and the ghosts they fought, were one and the same.

Tonight at the Piraeus Marina, the city of Athens would be shaken by what many would believe to be a terrorist attack, leaving global intelligence agencies questioning whether it was merely retribution against Dmitry Vihkrov and the Kingpin's daughter, Elena. From the moment her eyes pierced Chase's soul, he was captured under a spell. She'd grabbed his heart like no other and more than once kept it beating in the fog of war. Nightmares. Loss. Betrayal. After Mosul, she was the one who brought him through the darkest days—which made his actions on this night indefensible. If they were ever face-to-face again, she'd know it was he who betrayed her trust.

Before stepping outside, he tucked the SIG into the waterproof backpack and slipped the remote detonator into a zippered pocket in his wetsuit. Scanning the dock and the surrounding

marina, there was only one way to avoid the security cameras. He climbed overboard with Dax right behind, lowering themselves into the frigid water. Wading between the docked megayachts, they left no disturbance in the stillness of their wake.

Eight months had passed since she disappeared. Now death was the only way to find proof of life. Chase retrieved the trigger, and with a flip of a switch, the *Midnight Moon* exploded into a fiery inferno.