

Chapter 1

Everyone in West Berlin lied. Jillian should have figured that out sooner, probably before coming out on this window ledge.

Had she been targeted? She'd been warned about that in her pre-deployment briefing. The Stasi were targeting everyone. Even if they didn't suspect the signals intelligence mission that had brought her to East Germany, they could be interested just because she worked at the university.

Jillian should have done a lot more thinking before following Marco tonight. Instead she'd acted irrationally, which was out of character. And West Berlin was not the place to take unnecessary risks.

Yet here she was, out on a window ledge, freezing in a shiny cocktail dress, and spying on the supposed Italian artist she'd been sleeping with for half the time she'd been in this city. She wanted desperately to rewind time, or at least get out of there, but someone had come into the hotel room between her position and her escape route through the hall window. She had no choice but to wait until it emptied while hoping that no one two stories down on the street would notice her.

Shivering, she grimaced. She now felt ashamed of how she'd behaved over the last two months, but at the time it had been so invigorating. It was the first experience she'd had where her body was paramount, where sensations made her re-examine what it meant to live, and where her brain finally, finally, turned off. She had always known that it was never going to last, but she never imagined sleeping with Marco would lead her here.

She groaned as she leaned her head back against the concrete wall of the hotel, not losing sight of the two feet of ledge she had to work with.

This had all started a few days ago when, in the midst of idiotic euphoria, she had stepped out of the shower to hear Marco swearing a blue streak. He had dropped a cast-iron frying pan on his foot. The pain was genuine, which was why his response was as well. The words were colorful and anguished and not Italian.

Jillian was very familiar with Italian expletives, having grown up with an immensely proper Italian mother who would, in infrequent and taxing situations, haul off in the language of her youth. It didn't offend anyone because no one knew what it meant—something Jillian had found quite useful. Now, in her twenty-fifth year, she knew how to curse in Italian like a true native.

She had retreated back into the bathroom instinctively. *Why would he pretend?* she wondered. The words had sounded similar, maybe Spanish, so why lie? The dread rose up, constricting her throat. Because everyone in West Berlin lied. If she wasn't who she seemed, how could she expect anyone else to be?

She was a collection specialist for the CBNRC, the Canadian foreign signals intelligence agency. She'd been placed undercover at the West German Science Institute in order to facilitate the delivery of raw satellite intercept back to national HQ. Signals intelligence is not human intelligence, and the CBNRC did not produce spies in the conventional sense. They worked with the National Security Agency in the United States, not the CIA, and deployed signals intelligence

(SIGINT) officers were only there to ensure the machines kept running and the intercepts weren't compromised.

Her job in West Berlin was more important than her sex life, but she hadn't been able to figure out how to extricate herself from this relationship without Marco becoming suspicious. The chemistry between them was very real, and up until three days ago, the infatuation had been as well. She couldn't very well tell him she was breaking up with him because he'd sworn in the wrong language. She would just be drawing attention to herself. So she'd decided to follow him to try to find a better reason to end things.

Tonight was New Year's Eve, with celebrations and parties everywhere. It was easy to blend in. This was critical, as she had no experience following anyone, much less someone who might be very skilled at tailing others. She figured that if she was caught, she could play the jealous lover and throw a fit.

Now, on a concrete ledge on the wall of a small, distinguished hotel in some platz, it sounded stupid. Following Marco into the hotel. Watching where his elevator stopped and racing up the stairs. *What was I going to accomplish?* And then even more stupidity: deciding to climb out the window in the hallway on his floor and crawl along the ledge to find him. *Why?* Thank goodness her ledge looked out over the river, away from the festivities in the adjoining square. Even though she was less visible to passersby on the street below, she felt horribly conspicuous and amateurish. She desperately wanted to go back to her apartment.

If this were a movie, she would be doing something useful, or at the very least skillful. But the windows were closed, so she couldn't hear anything inside his room anyway. Now she was stuck between two rooms that were occupied and would have to wait until someone fell asleep so she could crawl back to the hallway window. *Great, she thought, it's starting to mist. Could this night get any worse?*

She wanted to go back to her work collecting the satellite intercepts and sending them home. It was a good job. It was cool and important. She was a small part in the machine that made the world better. She wanted it all to stay that way. Just being in West Berlin was crazy enough, a slice of excitement to offset the years she would likely spend in Ottawa with the CBNRC. She didn't need to be doing something so dangerous.

The lights finally went out in the room next to her. She'd give it ten minutes, then creep across to the hallway window. She started to count to six hundred.

She didn't hear the window go up beside her.

"Jillian," a man whispered as a hand gripped her arm.

She jumped and lost her balance. The grip tightened as she scrambled to get back on the ledge, one foot slipping off and panic invading every cell in her body.

"Jesus. Hold on. Pull your foot back up." Another hand came out to grip her other arm. "It's okay. I've got you."

Jillian managed to get her foot back up on the ledge as the hands yanked her up. The momentum sent her careening through the window. She scraped her shoulder on the frame and landed on top of the body attached to the hands.

She scrambled up, wishing there was more light and wondering what the hell was going on. It wasn't Marco. It was some stranger from the room that she'd crawled past. "Who are you?"

How did you know I was out on the ledge?" She paused to think, then said, "Were you trying to kill me?"

The body slowly rose from the floor. "No. I should have known you'd panic."

"Who wouldn't?"

"People who spend more time than you do out on ledges trying to listen to conversations that have nothing to do with them."

A frisson of unease shot down her spine. "Who are you?"

"Someone who wants to take a walk with you."

"Off a short pier?"

The man shook his head. "I have no interest in killing you. But I know all about you, Jillian Myers. I know what you are doing, both here at this hotel and at the West German Science Institute. And now, because I know you have questions, I will tell you this isn't the place for them. Take a walk with me—back to your apartment, if you'd like. But I have a favor I'd like to ask of you."

She could barely swallow. At no point in her life could she remember being as nervous and helpless as she was in this moment. In an incongruous instance of gallantry, he offered his arm as they left the room and walked back down the hall.

She studied him in the light of the elevator, a space that he seemed to fill. Tall, but not overly so. Decent looking if slightly battered. Dark hair and dark eyes, but that could have been an effect of the two-person elevator they were in. The lights passed at each floor like streetlights along a highway. He smelled good.

"Did you bring your laundry detergent over here with you?" she asked.

He looked at her for the first time since they got in the elevator. "Try not to look nervous as we go through the lobby. Keep your eyes on me. Once we're through the front doors, we'll head left, toward the river."

So no one would see her fear but him.

How had it come to this? She'd begun a passionate affair with someone who was likely a spy, and now she was caught up in the very dark side of the city. Stupid. Every third person in this city was probably a spy for someone. He put his arm around her shoulders and slowed their pace to leisurely. They would look like lovers to anyone who happened to glance their way. She wanted to vomit.

He leaned in. "My name is Quentin Foster. I'm American. I work for the CIA. And we would like your help."

She was out of her league. Way out. She had never been prepped for anything like this. *What am I supposed to do? Trust him? And how the hell does he know about me?*

"I've been following the man you know as Marco for months," he continued. "He's a Cuban national sympathetic to the Russians because he hates Americans. He's involved with some very interesting and nasty people here."

"Of course he is," Jillian said with dismay.

"How did you meet him?" the man called Quentin asked.

"Don't you already know?"

"No. I don't spend every waking hour following him."

Jillian didn't know what she should do. The story of her and Marco wasn't exceptional, and she would likely be better off trying to convince the CIA of that. "We met in a bookstore. One I never went to before, but my advisor at the school suggested I go because they have books that would be useful for maintaining my cover."

"What is your cover exactly?"

She decided she should tell him this too—so he wouldn't blow it. "Student. Studying underwater seismic activity."

"Really?"

"Yes. My advisor is the only one who knows it isn't true. I've learned a great deal about ocean earthquakes lately. Anyway, Marco was there, and I thought he was hot, so I started chatting with him. One thing led to another, and we started hanging out."

"Did he ever show interest in your cover story?"

"No. I'm not entirely stupid."

"Right." Quentin stopped to think for a second. "If everything you've said is true, you are in a position to really help us."

Jillian closed her eyes. She wasn't sure if this was her life. Strolling down the river in West Berlin, cold, in a cocktail dress, and being asked to leverage a Cuban lover to spy for the Americans while maintaining her job delivering signals intelligence out of the country for Canada. Perhaps she should have pursued medicine instead.

"I don't believe this is happening to me. Is this real?"

"Very."

She turned her head, looking out at the water. It didn't feel real. "Can I say no?"

"Of course," he said. "Do you want to know more about him?"

"No. I don't ever want to see him again. I really just want to do what I came here to do."

"Didn't you come here to help your country?"

She saw the trap. "There are many ways to do that."

He backed off a little and fell into step beside her as they continued through the cold wind swirling off the river. It was quiet. The occasional reveler passed by them, clearly intoxicated and therefore giving them less than any interest. Jillian didn't want to be noticed. She wanted to be back in her apartment, huddled under her blankets and planning how to get through and past this day. She didn't ever want to be out on a ledge again.

He stopped suddenly. "It won't be much. I promise. It won't interfere with your collection duties."

Oh my god, how much did he know? Collection was sensitive, even with the CBNRC. No one talked about it. The program she was working on was surrounded by several layers of classification. She couldn't talk to any of her friends at work about it. She couldn't tell her dad about it. She couldn't talk about it with anyone but her contact at the embassy and her boss. This guy was creeping her out, and she knew paranoia wasn't far off. How did she know he was who he said he was? Maybe he wasn't CIA. Or American. This could be a test. Or he could be working with Marco.

She forced herself to think. *He has to be from an allied country to know what I'm doing here. If he is working for an adversary, then the collection program would be more interesting than a Cuban spy—unless he's going to lull me into a false sense of security. If that were the*

case, though, then saying he was CIA and in need of help would hardly be the best way to do that.

She thought of something else. “Do you have permission to be doing this? Because I haven’t received any orders from anyone. Why wouldn’t someone from my agency be setting this up? Approaching me in the middle of the street seems a bit...unsanctioned.”

“You were on a window ledge,” he said. “And I’m asking you directly because time is of some consequence at the moment. I can’t wait for the paperwork to go through.”

She stopped and looked at him. “So there is a paper trail?”

He met her gaze with no identifiable expression on his face. “Of course.”

Like she’d be able to tell if a CIA officer was lying. “What I really want is to go home and go to bed and pretend this never happened.”

He shoved his hands into his pockets without taking his eyes from hers. “Don’t you want to know what he’s done? Why this is so important?”

Yes. But she feared it was going to be a slippery slope into purgatory. “I’m not a spy. I don’t have any training for that. And I don’t want to die or anything.”

He smiled. “You won’t.”

Ass, she thought. He obviously thought she was ridiculous. And stupid. “You can’t guarantee that. Whatever Marco has done, whatever you want to stop him from doing, it’s not as important as the intercepts. He’s just one guy. Do you know what it takes to set up a reliable collection system in West Berlin?”

Jillian couldn’t risk the collection program. Not for anything. It had been, according to the few details she knew of it, incredibly difficult to set up. So there were two risks: losing the collection itself, and being able to set up a program like this again should this one ever be discovered. She also knew that this guy from the CIA wasn’t going to walk away easily. She tried imagining him saying, “Well, hey, good try. Sorry about breaking my cover for you. If you see me around town, don’t acknowledge me at all.” *Yeah, right.* An approach like that and he wouldn’t be over here at all. He would be out of a job.

He continued to walk beside her, hands deep in his pockets, shoulders hunched against the cold. She was long past freezing, having settled into a protective numbness. She looked across the river, which seemed to eat up the lights shining on it. No pretty reflection, no romantic mystery.

“Have you ever been East?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“What we are standing in is the front line between life and insanity. The East Germans are doing their best to promote the utopia of socialism, but they have realized that any system built on absolute ideals can only be enforced through paranoia and totalitarianism. It is driven by men desperate to consolidate their power, with the opaque machine of a police state at their disposal.”

She knew that—or that feeling, at least. She knew the threat of Soviet communism was real. She knew with equal certainty that it was a system that destroyed hope. That was the thing worth fighting against. It was why she was here, and it was the reason she had taken her electrical engineering degree and joined the CBNRC, much to the dismay of her mother, who wanted more for her daughter than a lifetime of bureaucratic obscurity.

Jillian's conviction that people must continue to take up the fight, that freedom was something worth protecting, had brought her to West Berlin. There was some personal risk maybe, but she felt it was more than compensated for by both the excitement of the post and the value of the collection. She genuinely believed that whatever minor personal sacrifices she made were completely worth it, because she was accomplishing something noticeable and good for her country. Lofty stuff—and she didn't dance around in thoughts like this every day, but it would be hard to go to Berlin for anything less.

"I don't understand why you're even asking me anything," she said at last.

"I haven't asked you anything yet," he said. "You don't even know what I want."

"I can only surmise it's something significant for you to break your cover and put a collection program that benefits both our countries at risk."

"I told you it wouldn't jeopardize what you're doing here."

"So says your crystal ball."

He sighed. "Can I tell you a story?"

She took a long look at him. All she could see was that he looked overwhelmingly tired. "Is there somewhere you can tell me indoors?" she said as she rubbed her bare arms, tired of shivering.

"Why this place?" she asked, grateful to be out of the cold mist. They were in a wine cellar. She could hear the sounds of the bar above them, the thud of feet, the scraping of chairs.

"I know the owner." He shrugged. "The walls are concrete, and we're close to the river. With the noise above, it's ideal for privacy. Do you want something to drink?"

It seemed a bit weird, but she wouldn't mind. "Sure," she said.

He pulled down a bottle seemingly at random. He picked one of the corkscrews hanging along the wall, pulled out the cork, and offered her the bottle. She took a sip. It was sweeter, like port. She took another, then gave the bottle back to him.

"So, you were going to try to convince me of something?" she said.

"You had to know that sleeping with anyone in Berlin was risky."

No, she thought, *even though a fifteen-year-old could have deduced it*. "Yes. Fraught with unintended consequences, like drinking wine with someone in the CIA."

"A good chapter for your memoirs."

"There is at least that," she said.

"Well, they'll declassify your deployment in thirty years or so, just when you're ready to take that long look back." He paused to take another drink before handing her the bottle. "You should drink a little more so everyone will believe you when you say you were drunk and got lost."

"I'm not going back to my party tonight, then?"

"I'd say you made that decision when you climbed out on the window ledge."

"Why don't you tell me that story?" She sat down on the stone steps at the entranceway.

He settled back against the wall. "Once upon a time there was a man named Miguel. He fought alongside the Castros during the Cuban Revolution, motivated by an intense hatred of the

capitalist exploitation he saw in the brokered deals between his government and the Americans. This system never seemed to work for the people.”

“That sounds a bit paternalistic,” Jillian said.

“I’m not defending what we did there,” he answered. “Freedom and capitalism are not the same thing. It was a dance with the devil in more ways than one, and too many people lost sight of the values that were supposed to flow along with the money.”

“Marco can’t be Miguel. He’s not that old.”

“He’s not. He’s his little brother. Marco watched his brother get killed by some idiot American mercenary who had joined up with Batista’s men.”

Jillian frowned. “It sounds too uncomplicated.”

“It almost always is. Marco got involved in the Bay of Pigs and developed his Russian contacts. The dream of Cuba has always been better than the reality, so his reasons for leaving could be as basic as boredom.”

“So he came to Berlin to work for the Soviets?”

“Originally, I think. Freelance espionage. But he’s up to something else entirely now.”

“Like?”

“There are more than two sides operating in Berlin.”

She was surprised. It was naive of her maybe, but his words opened up a possibility she had not contemplated. “And Marco is working for the third side?”

He paused again. “That’s the point of no return. The answer to your question is as classified as the contents of your collection program. If I tell you, you will be vulnerable in ways that you are currently not.”

“You said my life wouldn’t be in jeopardy.”

“You don’t need to know any more to do me the favor. I told you these things so that you would understand why Marco might be of interest to the American government.”

She shook her head. “You haven’t told me anything, actually. But I’m saved by the fact that I don’t really want to know.”

Another lengthy pause filled the cellar as she contemplated what the outcome of the next few moments might be. She took another sip of the wine, trying to figure out which parts were genuine and which parts were manipulation. If this guy had been following Marco for months, then he was an observer of her entire relationship with him. She was definitely at the disadvantage, for this man knew both who she was and who she had been pretending to be.

“Will you help me, Jillian?” he said at last.

“I’m a terrible actress.”

“One more evening, then you’ll never have to see him again.”

“What did you think before you approached me tonight? Did you think I would do it?”

Quentin took his time answering as Jillian continued to sip away at the wine. “Yes. You have more reasons to do it than not.”

“For my country?” Jillian asked.

“That,” he said, “or even to get back at Marco.”

Hmm. Interesting, she thought. “For what?”

For a brief moment Quentin looked unsure. Jillian realized that although he may know a lot about her, he didn’t know her at all. He could only make educated guesses based on typical

behavior patterns and basic human psychology. He was now trying to understand her better so that he would know how far he could ask her to go.

“You could get back at him for lying to you,” he said.

“I think I was fairly compensated for that, considering I lied to him. Plus, really, it was nice of him not to involve me in his spy games.”

“They aren’t games, Jillian.”

She had her own opinion about that, having seen more than once how human intelligence operations managed to screw up the valuable leads they got from signals intelligence. “I’m not angry at him, Quentin. In fact, I’d say I was more angry at you.”

“Why did you follow him tonight? What made you climb out on that window ledge? If suspecting him was enough to make you want to end it, then why didn’t you? You obviously realize the consequences it could have on what you are doing here. Why bother?”

“Because I wanted to know.” She sighed and felt very stupid. “What do you want me to do?”

“Just give him some misinformation.”

“Then I can break up with him?”

“In whatever spectacular fashion you wish.”

Jillian wondered if his attitude was meant to distract her. “If I get fired for this, I will hold you personally responsible and spend the rest of my life paying cheap psychics to curse you.”

He smiled. “Don’t worry, they won’t fire you. They’ll promote you into management and keep you busy with budgets and strategic planning for the rest of your career.” He held out his hand. “Come on, I’ll walk you part of the way home.”

His hand was rough when she took it. He was stronger than he looked. Then she stood and released his hand to brush off her dress. “You’ll be in touch?”

“Right away.”

She put her hand on his arm, stopping him from opening the door. “Tomorrow. That is your window. Quentin—if that is even your name—I want you to understand that this is beyond anything I ever wanted to do. You have twenty-four hours, and then I’m breaking up with him.”

“You made the right choice,” he said, leading her out the door.

She wasn’t sure. It would be good to be owed a favor, but this could still explode. She didn’t know if she was doing the right thing, if her agency would be supportive or horrified. If she had to say in this minute why she had agreed—to what, she didn’t even yet know—she knew she would have no answer other than instinct and a perverse desire to prove something to the man she had just met, though she knew nothing about him at all. *That*, she thought, *was the most dangerous part of all.*