

Chapter 22

It was Monday, two weeks had passed since Weylin's breakfast meeting with Dobbs. Although his comical exit could hardly have been forgotten, Dobbs' parting words were no less memorable. Vulnerable? Well, we'll see about that, Weylin had thought.

"Martha," he called over the intercom, "ring the security office and see if Chief Ryan can come up here."

"Yes sir."

Fifteen minutes later, Ryan was seated in a chair opposite Weylin's desk. "I understand that the construction crew should be here this morning to get started on the security gates," Weylin commented.

"That's correct," Ryan agreed, "I have the cones up to divert our arriving employees."

"Just to be clear, the guard houses and gates are going up at the beginning of the roads to the main entrance and loading docks. It's your responsibility to staff those checkpoints, understood?"

“It’s gonna slow traffic to a standstill,” Ryan complained.

“I know, but eventually we’ll install an automatic electronic system that should speed things up. However, for the time being, I want your armed and uniformed agents to be exceptionally visible.”

“Are you still concerned about the antiabortionists?”

“Yes, but not only them. I’m hoping to discourage others who might want to jump on the bandwagon.”

“You know, they can still demonstrate outside the gates and even attempt to crash through them.”

“That’s true, but with the gates in place, any unauthorized entry will be viewed as a trespass. The police will have no dilemma dealing with that scenario.”

“What do you want us to do until the work is completed?”

“Put two men, or more if necessary, at each gate to check the ID’s of all entrants. All of our vendors have their own company’s ID’s and they should be allowed to pass. Anyone else should be stopped. All Condor employees will be instructed to notify your office of any potential transient entrants that they may have authorized.”

“Anything else?”

“Yes, how many security agents do we now have on staff?”

“Twelve during the daytime shift and four at night.”

“All armed?”

“Yes.”

“Hire as many as necessary to allow for a tight perimeter coverage during both shifts

and make certain that the premises are well lit throughout the night.”

“When do you want this to begin?”

“Yesterday. Now, if you can’t find suitable people, you have my permission to temporarily bring in an outside agency.”

“Anything else?”

“Nope, I think that should do it,” Weylin said, as he rose from behind his desk, adding, “call me if you have a problem.”

As Ryan left the office, Martha stepped halfway through the doorway. “I know you have a lot to do today,” she said, “would you like me to order lunch, maybe a pastrami sandwich from that delicatessen you used to like?”

Pastrami, damn, that brings back memories of Macy and days gone by, he reflected. “Thanks, Martha, but I could use some time away from the desk. Besides, today is Monday, cowboy steak day in the dining room,” he said. “Oh, by the way, I couldn’t find my copy of today’s New York Times.”

“It was delivered after you arrived this morning, I’ll bring it in.”

Weylin entered the bustling corporate dining room, walked straight to his reserved table, unfurled the newspaper and sat down. A waiter approached and asked for his order. “Steak, rare, tossed salad and mineral water,” he said, his eyes glued to the newspaper.

“Yes sir,” the waiter replied, as he turned and left.

What else is new? he mused, while glancing at a front page article that declared: *New York's Increasing Traffic, a Health Hazard*. Curious, he rapidly scanned the article, the first in a series chronicling traffic related mishaps. As he continued to read, he was struck by the author's choice of a traffic related event: *The untimely demise of a wealthy patron of New York's trendy Le Mystique restaurant appears directly related to the City's ever increasing traffic problems. An emergency vehicle en route to the restaurant was unable to cut through yesterday evening's traffic, despite its flashing lights and blaring siren. The victim, in the company of her husband, was allegedly enjoying her dinner, consisting of pressed duck and a fine Cabernet, when she experienced the onset of abdominal discomfort and numbness followed by severe breathing difficulties. A doctor present at a nearby table attempted CPR but was unable to provide sufficient oxygen. He commented, that had the ambulance arrived in a timely fashion, their mechanical device might have saved her ...* Sounds like some kind of allergic reaction, Weylin reasoned, by virtue of his medical background. Lunch arrived and he put the paper aside.

Over a cup of coffee, he searched for the paper's food and wine column. Armond had mentioned that the columnist had been impressed with the Cabernet and promised a favorable review. It was there, replete with a multitude of flowery descriptive terms. Wow, he thought, I hope the hype lasts until next year's release.

The day passed quickly and uneventfully with the exception of a small fire in the genetics laboratory caused by a careless technician. At five o'clock, he was already seated behind the Ferrari's steering wheel with full intention of returning home for a relaxing evening. A barricade along the usual route, however, called for a detour to the street leading to Villa Torino. "Must be fate," he mumbled to himself, while spying a parking space directly in front of the family owned restaurant. He parked and entered. It was empty at that early

hour and the owner suggested a table in the rear with a view of the wall mounted television.

He ordered the evening special of red snapper Livornese, along with a glass of barolo and sat back to watch the news while he waited. A local station, having just completed the evening traffic report, segued to the death at Le Mystique: *The death of a wealthy diner at New York's exclusive Le Mystique is causing quite a stir in that downtown community. When questioned, police sources claimed that it was too soon to determine the cause of death, however, a health department official stated that there was no evidence for food contamination. The mayor has promised an immediate investigation into the traffic issue and has personally extended his condolences to the unfortunate family. And now, on to the tristate weather ...*

The owner exited from the kitchen with Weylin's order, placed it on the table and asked if he would like some company. Weylin, having established a conversational relationship with the man over the years of his patronage, welcomed the offer.

The owner rose from his chair opposite Weylin's, poured himself a glass of wine from the bar and returned to his seat. "This City," he said, pointing to the television, "it's becoming impossible to get in and out."

"Yeah, I read about that death this morning."

"You know, I heard from a friend who delivers fish to that new bistro, Julio, in Tribeca, that one of their customers had the same problem a few nights ago. It didn't make the news, however. I guess he wasn't important," he chuckled.

Weylin stopped picking at his snapper, his face a vision of concern. "What do you mean by 'the same problem'?" he asked.

"A waiter told him that the man had finished his ostrich filet and had ordered a bottle

of a newly arrived Cabernet. The sommelier uncorked the bottle and began to pour it into his female companion's glass but she stopped him. He then filled the man's glass. The man tasted the wine and kept the bottle at his side of the table. Soon after, the waiter noticed the man rapidly leave his seat holding a napkin to his mouth and heading for the bathroom. When he didn't return, the companion asked a waiter to look for him."

"Well?"

"They found him on the floor of the bathroom, dead, covered in vomit."

"What makes you think it was the same as Le Mystique. He may have choked on his own vomit."

"Because, when he passed the bar on the way to the restroom, the bartender asked if he needed assistance. The man said that he couldn't feel his mouth or tongue and kept walking."

"Wow, that is strange," Weylin said. "Sounds like a coincidence, however."

"No, I don't believe in coincidences."

By Wednesday morning, the construction crew's reign of destruction was well under way. A long snarl of traffic waited to enter either Condor's main entrance or loading docks. Weylin, anticipating the logjam, left his condo forty minutes earlier than usual but to no avail. Fortunately, Bob Ryan was at the makeshift gate and spotted the red Ferrari from a distance. He stopped the traffic and created an opening for Weylin to pass through.

Weylin rode the elevator to his floor and as he approached his outer office, noticed Martha seated at her desk eating and drinking coffee. “Did you sleep here last night?” he asked, in a jocular fashion, as he stopped at her desk.

“The security people warned me yesterday. I was at the gate at seven this morning.”

“Smart move,” he said, while winking, “but don’t expect overtime.”

Following breakfast, he returned to his office and began the daily review of messages, operational reports and production analyses. Deeply engrossed in the mass of files strewn across his desk, he was startled when the intercom buzzed at eleven-thirty A.M. “Dr. McCain, it’s Mr. Ryan on line one,” Martha announced.

“Yes, Ryan, what is it?”

“I hope your sitting down.”

“Oh no, what now?” Weylin said, while rubbing his neck.

“Our friends are back en masse and more seem to be arriving by the minute.”

“The antiabortionists?”

“You guessed it.”

“Well, they’re outside the construction perimeter aren’t they?”

“Yes, but the crew won’t work with them nearby and from the size of the assembly, no one can get in or out.”

“Call the police.”

“And tell them what? They’re not trespassing and they’re peacefully occupying a public right of way.”

“Well, it’s pretty cold out there. Maybe they’ll get tired and go away if we just ignore

them.”

“What about delivery trucks?”

“That is a problem,” he agreed. “OK, send one of your people out to their organizer. Tell them we won’t interfere with the demonstration at the entrance but that they have to make allowance for the delivery of life saving medications to the general public and let the trucks through. Otherwise, we’ll call the wire services and accuse them of interfering with the delivery of medications to the needy.”

“OK, I’ll give it a try but we may have to get rough.”

“Be careful, I don’t want to give them any more reasons to demonstrate.”

With the problem now in the hands of Bob Ryan, following a quick lunch, he returned to the files in his office. At two-fifteen P.M., while reaching for a folder on the far right side of the desk, he accidentally knocked an empty coffee mug to the carpet. While leaning towards the ground to retrieve it, he heard the faint tinkle of glass. Straightening, looking towards the window, a ray of bright yellow light could be seen passing through two medium sized holes in the deep green tinted window. “Oh shit,” he cried out, as he instinctively dropped to the floor beside his desk, while visions of a building rattled by automatic gunfire, bloody bodies and the smell of fear and spent gunpowder played before his eyes like the scene he’d once been part of. Reaching up, he pulled the phone and intercom to the floor and buzzed the outer office. “Martha,” he shouted, “get away from your window right now. Find a phone and call the police immediately,” he added, knowing that a 911 call would tie up his own line.

“Why ... what happened?” she asked.

“A bullet just went through my window. Hurry.”

He quickly dialed Bob Ryan’s cell phone. “Ryan, it’s Weylin McCain. Somebody just fired through my window.”

“Are you sure?”

“There are two holes real close to each other. Probably a high powered rifle.”

“Get out of your office. I’ll have my men scour the area and we’ll call S.W.A.T.”

“My secretary is already calling 911.”

“Don’t worry, I can get right through to them.”

Avoiding the presentation of a visible profile to the outside world, he crawled through the doorway, standing only when he was far from a window. That was a trained sniper, he remarked to himself, had to be to shoot from the ground up through a twelfth story window expecting to hit something. I wonder if it has anything to do with that e-mail. Makes sense, they could have used the demonstration as a diversion.

He walked to the boardroom and took a seat at the end farthest from a window. Having memorized Vincent’s FBI office phone number, he slid the telephone towards him from the middle of the table and dialed. “Operator, this is Dr. Weylin McCain. I must speak to special agent Black.”

“His line is busy, would you like his voice mail?”

“No, it’s an emergency. I’m a personal friend, can’t you interrupt?”

“I am not authorized to--oh wait, it just cleared. I’ll put you through.”

“Vincent, it’s Weylin, I’ve got a problem.”

“When don’t you?”

“I’m not joking, it’s serious.”

“OK, but if it’s like the last one, I’m out of the private detective business.”

“Somebody just fired two shots through my twelfth story office window in the middle of a protest demonstration.”

“Out of my jurisdiction, call the local police.”

“Remember that e-mail I asked you to look at?”

“Yeah?”

“I sent it to another friend ...”

“The Russian father or daughter?” he interrupted.

“How do you know about them?”

“Give me a break, Weylin, we’re not the dummies you may think we are.”

“OK, sorry. Anyway, he thought the message may have come from an individual attempting to warn me about some vague intentions of the Armed Islamic Front.”

“How did he extract that interpretation?”

“The words, *Art Information Forum*.”

“So, you’re concerned that they may have sent a sniper to clip you?”

“Yes--Vincent, are you there?” Weylin asked, following an interval of silence.

“I’m thinking. I know for a fact that you withheld information during the Olera affair but I kept it under my hat. Putting it all together, it’s possible. I’ll notify the local FBI office right away and I’ll keep you informed. If I were you, though, I’d keep a low profile for awhile. Rent a car and put that red thing in the garage.”

“Thanks Vincent,” he said, calming some. “By the way, have you had a chance to try

the wine?”

“Not yet, I’m waiting for a special occasion.”