

CHAPTER 4

The game broke up just after 2 a.m. and we retired to the small, smoke-drenched backroom bar. My pocket was considerably lighter than at the start of the evening. I settled onto a cracked leather stool beside Calbert Leon and Danny Kwok. Delany stood behind the bar, rummaging beneath the counter. With a conspiratorial grin, he produced a bottle whose label had faded with age.

"The good stuff," he said, tapping the dusty glass. "Better than the shit we serve the punters." He poured four generous measures, the whisky catching the dim light like molten gold.

"You still workin' for di lawyer?" Leon asked, his voice a low Caribbean rumble. "What's 'er name?"

"Katherine," I said. "She's giving me small jobs. Right now I'm sneaking around after an adulterer. Man's juggling three women like a cheap circus act that doesn't know he's headed for disaster."

Leon let out a deep laugh "Sounds like a maan after mah own heart. Do di lawyer pay much?"

I shrugged. "Just about pays the bills." I swirled the amber liquid in the glass and took a sip. "Doesn't help the bank balance when I blow nearly a thousand quid in one evening playing cards."

The Jamaican took delicate sips of his own whisky, nodding appreciatively as though sampling a fine wine. "Quit bitchin' maan," he said. "You had fun. An' you spendin' dat money you took off Finnigan, so technically it's free cash."

“Good point,” I admitted.

“Was Finnigan the guy involved in that property extortion?” Delany asked.

“Sidney Finnigan was just the hired muscle.” I said. “Frank Slater was the money behind it. They were trying to empty out a shopping precinct in Watford, clear the decks for some big American casino to move in.”

“How did you get involved?” Delany asked.

I put my arm around Danny Kwok and said, “Danny owns one of the businesses in the area.”

“We were together in the same outfit in Hong Kong,” Kwok said. “I left and came here a few years ago to start a restaurant. Rick gave me money to help get started so he’s a silent partner.”

“Sydney Finnigan was using a biker gang to squeeze him and the other businesses in the area,” I explained. “Danny asked me to look into it. I discovered my brother was also involved doing the accounts for them but he got cold feet when he realised it wasn’t legit. He threatened to pull out and report it. That’s when Slater had Finnigan take his daughter to keep him in line.”

“An’ when Ricky ‘ere became an inconvenience, Slater ask me to intervene,” Leon said, as if he’d been asked to settle an overdue library fine

“Intervene?” Delany raised an eyebrow. “You make it sound so civil. You mean Slater asked you to kill him. And here you are playing cards together. Do tell.”

Leon slapped me on the back. “Ah waz curious to see who was enterprising enough to take down t’ree of Finnigan’s men an’ five of Slater’s all by his lonesome,” he said. “An’ Slater ain’t not’ing but a cheap mot’erfucker. He only offerin’ twenty five G to take out mah friend ‘ere.”

Delany laughed. "That wouldn't cover the dry cleaning bill on all those fancy suits you wear."

"Dat's zactly what ah told him," Leon said, grinning, his gold tooth catching the light.

"After being kind enough not to kill me," I said. "Leon helped me get my niece out from under Finnigan's thumb,"

"An' everyone live 'appily ever after," Leon said, raising his glass. "Ceptin' Slater who's at his majesty's pleasure."

I'd like to think Leon helped out of the goodness of his heart but I suspect it was a slow week and he was bored. I don't know what that made us, colleagues or allies of a sort. Perhaps he saw a reflection of himself in me, the way a cracked mirror still knows the face staring into it. A kindred spirit of sorts. Sun Tzu, once said: *'On the ground of intersecting highways, join hands with your allies'*. Those ancient Chinese generals really knew their shit.

"Unfortunately, Finnigan managed to elude the police," Kwok said. "He's in the wind and monumentally pissed off at Ricky here."

"That's not my only problem," I said, pulling out the paper Greenwood had given me at the gym. I smoothed it out across the bar top. "Seems I'm a local celebrity now."

"Fame 'as come a knockin'," Leon said, laughing. "Can ah 'ave your autograph?"

Kwok squinted at the photo. "Not a flattering picture."

"Still good enough to identify me," I said.

"You think this will get back to Zhou Ye?" Kwok asked.

"Possibly."

"Zhou who?" Leon asked.

"Head of a rival triad family back in Hong Kong," I said.

"He lookin' fo' you?" Leon asked.

Kwok answered for me. "Ricky killed his son. Revenge for the murder of our gang's leader. That's why he's laying low here."

Leon let out a long whistle. "You got two men after yo blood. Best idea might be to disappear."

"I can't," I said. "My brother testified against Finnigan and while he is out there my niece and brother are still in danger. I have to find him first."

"Let's hope you get Finnigan before Zhou Ye gets wind of where you are," Kwok said.

"Dey getting' near to finding Finnigan?" Leon asked.

"No." I said.

"What you t'ink?"

"Maybe he left the country," I said. "It's been over two weeks."

"You know 'e ain't left," Leon said. "Finnigan's a mean son of a bitch. Maan will hold a grudge 'til judgement day. 'e want you and yours dead."

I laughed. "He'll have to get in line." A thought struck me. "Has he put the word out?"

The Jamaican grinned. "Ah ain't heard not'ing, maan. An' since you mah new friend, he'll 'ave to pay double what ah normally charge 'fore ah take di job."

"That's comforting," I said.

Leon was a man who navigated life in a straight line, no deviations, no compromises. He never went around things, he went through them. It was how I'd lived my life before coming to England. Now I was trying a more circuitous path, one with slightly fewer bodies left in my wake.

Delany refilled my glass. "I'll ask Frank to listen out for anything. He's not a fan of drug dealers like Finnigan.

"You going to look for him?" Kwok asked me.

“Yes,” I said. “Better I find the fat bastard before he raises the bounty on my head.”

Leon chuckled. “If ‘e gets you, Ah’ll donate anot’er angel fo’ you down at di cemetery.”

“And I’ll name my next child after you,” Kwok added, deadpan.

“You’re all heart,” I said.

“Who’s in charge of the search for Finnigan?” Delany asked.

“A detective named Jack Donaldson,” I said.

“Why not ask him?”

“I think I will.”

The party broke up at four and I headed back to my apartment. Technically it was still Katherine’s apartment but the recent engagement to her policeman meant she had no plans to reclaim it anytime soon. That suited me fine. I was starting to feel at home here.

With the sale of my grandmother’s house pulling in a tidy profit and steady income from the restaurant I held shares in, I was finally financially independent. Katherine’s law firm threw me small assignments which, as she liked to remind me, kept me out of mischief. I wasn’t eager to give any of it up, not for the faint possibility that Hong Kong’s ghosts might eventually find me.