

HIS PREY



PIPER STONE

CHAPTER 1



Darkness...

Foreboding to some. To him, the ominous shadows were comforting, allowing him complete anonymity in order to perform the jobs he'd been paid well to execute. Tonight was no exception and he was exhilarated, adrenaline flowing. He craved the chase, the moment when he locked onto his target. Every assignment was unusual. Different countries. Powerful individuals. Beautiful women. Incredible food and drink. His skills allowed for careful selection, the very reason he was still alive.

Even though there were strict requirements.

He moved through the darkness, finding the house with ease. The mark had evidently caught wind there was a contract on his life, leaving his usual environment in utter disarray. And somehow, the man thought he'd remain safe in the countryside, a little house in the woods that no one was supposed to know about. Snickering, he eased the gun from his jacket, adding the silencer as he headed toward the rear, all the

PIPER STONE

while scanning the perimeter. Surprises he didn't need. At least the fucker would be alone, an easy target.

The entire back of the house was full of windows, the massive set of sliding doors peering out onto a lush garden. There were no other houses in close proximity, another perk of this particular job. He inched closer, able to see the mark sitting in an overstuffed chair directly in front of a roaring fire.

Like taking candy from a baby.

He moved into the most optimal position, holding the weapon in both hands. A split second before he pulled the trigger, he jerked back, cursing under his breath. The man was supposed to be alone. *Fuck!* He shoved the gun back into his pocket and headed straight through the woods toward the awaiting vehicle. Yanking out his phone, he studied the reception. Just enough. The call was answered within two rings.

"Yes?"

"Mission aborted," he half whispered as he opened the driver's door.

There was a long pause.

"Why?"

"I have my reasons. To be completed at a later time." Ending the call, he tossed the phone onto the passenger seat. He was a cold-blooded killer but even he had his scruples, no matter what the blessed consortium required of him.

He would never complete a contract in front of a child.

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HIS PREY

Monte Carlo

Eight days later

"Do you know what I want?" she purred as she slipped first one then her other arm around Wrath's neck, her red lips glistening even in the shadowed light.

Ricardo 'Wrath' Constantino had been with many women over the years, devouring several varieties, but French girls were usually far more discerning about their tastes in men. Cherry certainly didn't seem to understand that if she accepted several drinks then invited a killer to her condo she could face the ultimate demise. Granted, she wasn't his target, nor would she know of his profession. However, the irony was delightful. "Now, what could that possibly be?" he asked as he brushed the backs of his fingers across her cheek.

"I love your commanding manner. So sexy." Cherry clung to him, her eyes holding the haze of intoxication. "I hunger for a taste of that hard body of yours." She kissed his lips, darting out her tongue and dragging the tip across the seam of his mouth.

He allowed her to toy with him, teasing as she slid one hand down his chest. Sadly, he'd grown bored of the evening. Even winning at Blackjack didn't have any effect on his sour mood. What did entice him was the gorgeous redhead sitting at another Blackjack table, the scarlet dress the perfect complement to her stunning long legs and hourglass figure. He was hungry, having played the perfect gentleman during his time spent in the amazing city.

What he could easily see was that she was an expert at a slight of hand, kiting the system. He was amused as well as

PIPER STONE

table was the largest of the night, one that would easily net her a cool fifty G's. "And what might that be?"

The sound of her voice was alluring, seductive in the soft inflections. "You're a cheat. How do I know this? Because I was hired and trained to spot even those with utter finesse." He allowed the words to sink in, his cock throbbing as her porcelain face flushed, turning a lovely shade of pink.

"How dare you! I'm no cheat," she whispered, reaching for her wine in her usual confident manner.

"And you and I both know you're lying." Wrath gathered his meager winnings and moved away from the table, tossing a hundred dollar chip toward the dealer. "Thank you, sir. This table is far too hot for me."

"Thank you," the dealer said with a smile then glanced at the remaining players, the tip understood.

Wrath slid his hands into his pockets, taking long strides out the main door then leaning against the wall. There would be no more winning for the lovely lady tonight. If his calculations were correct, she would be coming through the door in...

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

The redhead was on cue, bolting through the door. Instead of any concept of fear on her face, she was furious, her eyes scan-