

ALASKA  
SEVERAL MONTHS PRIOR

What are you doing?” Harvath asked. It was late, and everyone else in the lodge had already gone to bed.  
Lara was holding up her phone. “I don’t have any pictures of you.”

“And this is the look you want?” He was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt. Razor blades were in short supply. He had decided to go full-on mountain man and was growing a beard.

“You look tough.”

He smiled, and Lara took the picture.

“What did you look like as a little boy?”

“Pretty much like this,” Harvath replied. “Except my beard was longer.”

She smiled. “Did you look like your mother or your father?”

“Who cares?”

“I do,” she said, refilling her wineglass and taking a seat next to him on the couch. “There’s so much about you that I don’t know.”

“What’s to know? Handsome. Well travelled. Exceedingly talented with a barbecue.”

“You forgot *humble*.”

“No, I didn’t. I said it right before *handsome*.”

Lara’s smile broadened. His sense of humor was one of the many things she loved about him.

She wanted to know him better, though—on a deeper level. After her husband had drowned, she never thought she would feel like this again. Then, Scot had appeared and her entire life had changed.

“I’m serious,” she said, setting her wineglass on the rustic wooden coffee table.

“I know,” he replied. “I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that.”

She reached over and playfully backhanded him in the chest.

He shook his head. “Police brutality. That’s the first report I’ll be filing once this is all over and we get back to civilization.”

*Civilization.* She had never really considered how fragile a construct it was.

They’d been watching the news, and thankfully, the spread of the virus had slowed. *Dramatically.* That was the good news.

The bad news was that there was still unrest in many cities and travel had been suspended. No one used the words *martial law*, but that’s what it was.

She could only imagine what life in many of America’s cities was like right now. She was thankful that Scot had gotten her family out of Boston and that he’d had a place for them to go.

The Angry Eagle was a gorgeous retreat set against some of the most breathtaking wilderness she had ever seen. The owners, Jon and Anya, had gone overboard in making them feel welcome.

Within minutes of meeting them, Lara understood why Scot liked them so much. It went beyond his relationship with Jon as a fellow SEAL. They were just good people. People you knew immediately you could trust.

They also seemed to share Scot’s sense of humor, and no matter what the situation, they always had a great joke or turn of phrase. It went a long way in helping her parents remain calm.

Though they hadn’t spoken much about Boston, she knew they were concerned about their friends. Some were lucky enough to have immediate family to help take care of them. Others were not so lucky. She tried to reassure them that everything would be okay.

For their grandson’s sake, they put on a good front. He was just a little boy. They had spun the entire trip for him as a grand adventure. Scot had taught him how to fish and had given him a small kit that allowed him to assemble his own wooden pocketknife. Marco was having the time of his life.

Lara found comfort in that. As disrupted as the world was, for the time being, her family was safe and they had everything they could possibly need. And watching her parents come to love Scot, as she did, was the icing on the cake.

Taking a sip of bourbon, he rested his glass on his knee and said, “My dad.”

Pulled from her reverie, Lara looked at him.

“You asked who I resemble,” Harvath continued. “I resemble my dad. A lot, actually. He was an extremely handsome man.” And before she could say anything, he added with a smile, “Humble too.”

Lara laughed. “I’m sure he was. What’s your earliest memory of him?”

He thought about it for a moment before responding. “We had a big tree in the backyard and an inflatable kiddie pool. I wanted a rope swing so I could pretend it was a vine, and leap off of it into the water like Tarzan. One Saturday morning, we drove into San Diego together and bought one.

“It was a long, shiny white nylon rope with huge wooden beads knotted off for handholds. The seat was a circular piece of wood, painted bright red. I’d come tearing out of the house, swing on that rope and drop right into my tiny pool. I actually believed I was Tarzan.”

“How old were you?”

“Four or five. Right around Marco’s age,” he replied.

“And what did you want to be when you grew up?”

A new smile spread across Harvath’s face. “A pirate.”

Lara smiled as well. “Seriously?”

“One of my dad’s best friends in the SEALs was a crazy guy named Pat Brinkman. They called him Pat the Pirate. I actually thought he was a real-life pirate. The stories he told me made a career in piracy sound like the best life choice imaginable. Set your own hours, be your own boss, lots of time out on the water. It sounded fantastic.”

“And your parents let him get away with that?”

Harvath counted on his left hand. “Santa Claus. The Easter Bunny. And Pat the Pirate. Three legends you didn’t mess with in my house.”

“You had a good childhood, then.”

“My dad was deployed a lot, but when he was home, we made the most of it. He loved the movies. We used to go to the theater together, just the two of us. He also had a wood shop in the garage, and we’d do projects together.”

“But you had a falling out. High school, right?”

“Senior year,” he said. “I had an opportunity to ski professionally. He wanted me to go to college. We agreed to disagree.”

“Meaning, you stopped talking to each other.”

Harvath nodded and took a sip of his bourbon.

“And is that why you became a SEAL? Because of your dad?”

Harvath took several moments to collect his thoughts before replying. Finally, he said, “After my dad died, I didn’t care about skiing anymore. I actually wanted to go to college.”

“So what made you join the SEALs?”

Harvath smiled. “Believe it or not, Pat the Pirate.”

“Really?”

“By the time I neared graduation, Pat had been out of the Navy for a few years. He was living on an old sailboat at the Del Mar Marina at Camp Pendleton. I don’t know why, I just got the bug to go see him, so I drove down from LA.”

“You just showed up?”

“With a bag of fish tacos under one arm and a case of beer under the other.”

“I’ll bet he was surprised to see you,” said Lara.

Harvath shook his head. “He’d been waiting for me. He said that not a day had passed since the funeral that he hadn’t looked up, expecting to see me walking down his dock.”

“What did you talk about?”

“We talked a lot about my dad. Then we talked about fishing. Then we talked about what I was going to do when I got out of college. Pat bet me that not only couldn’t I get into the SEAL selection program, but even if I did, that I’d never make it all the way through.”

“So he used reverse psychology. He tricked you.”

Harvath shook his head again and took another sip of his bourbon. “He bribed me.”

“With what?”

“He told me if I became a SEAL, he’d leave me his sailboat in his will.”

Lara couldn’t tell if he was pulling her leg or not. “You became a SEAL in order to get a sailboat?”

“You should see his boat.”

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing.”

Harvath smiled.

“You’re pulling my leg.”

“Only a little,” he replied. “Pat didn’t have kids. My mom and I were

the closest thing to family he had. And seeing how he'd spent years encouraging me to become a pirate, the least he could do was leave me a ship."

Lara reached for her wine. "Something tells me, Pat the Pirate probably would have left you his boat anyway."

"Probably."

"So what's the real reason you became a SEAL?"

"By the time I was old enough to appreciate who my father was and what he had done, we had already gone in different directions. It took spending that evening with Pat to realize how much alike my father and I really were.

"I didn't join the SEALs to prove something. I did it because I wanted to see what I was made of. Was part of it me following in my dad's footsteps? Maybe. But I'm a competitive guy. I like a challenge. For some reason I just felt that if I didn't try it, I would look back on my life and would regret it."

"Plus, there was a pirate ship in it for you," Lara added.

Harvath laughed. "Good old Pat."

"Is he still around?"

"He's somewhere, out at sea I suppose, waiting for everything to die down."

"I'd like to meet him someday," she said. "And see your boat. I've always wanted to take a cruise."

Harvath looked at her. "You've never been on a cruise before?"

Lara shook her head.

"When all this is over, that's what we're going to do. I'm going to take you on a cruise. Just the two of us."

She smiled and moved closer to him on the couch. "I'd like that. In fact, I've always wanted to do a European river cruise. You know, where you get to visit lots of cities."

"Perfect," he replied, putting his arm around her. "That's what we'll do."

Neither of them had any idea how long it was going to take the world to return to normal, but it was important to have something to look forward to.

He pulled her close, and they fell into a comfortable silence, listening to the logs in the fireplace crackle. As long as they were together, nothing else mattered.

Little did she know how quickly the world would return to "normal" and the decisions that they would soon be forced to make.