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EDGE OF HONOR

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CHAPTER 1

WASHINGTON, D.C.
MONDAY

Scot Harvath's six-month honeymoon had been amazing. He and Sølvi had traveled the world and had spared no expense.

Upon landing back in the U.S., he'd introduced her to his favorite ritual. Once they had cleared passport control and customs, he'd sought out the best cheeseburger and coldest beer he could find. *It was good to be home.*

Despite the length of their trip, it now all felt like a blur. After getting married in Oslo, they'd spent a week on the fjord; a "mini-moon" as Sølvi had called it, before buttoning up her apartment and putting in to take an open-ended leave of absence from the Norwegian Intelligence Service.

With those boxes ticked, they celebrated an early Christmas with her family and then hopped a flight back to the States. There, they attended the christening of their goddaughter, celebrated Christmas with friends, and passed a few days as Scot tied up some of his own loose ends.

He had wanted to make a clean break with his past, which meant officially resigning from the Carlton Group—the private intelligence agency he had worked for. Once that was complete, they were free.

After visiting his aging mother on the West Coast, they booked a flight to New Zealand and spent their new year chasing the sun and warm temperatures across the Southern Hemisphere.

In the spring, they headed north to Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand before dropping in on Scot's friends in India.

From there, they traveled to Greece, where they rented a beautiful villa with an uninterrupted view of the sea and swam in the clearest, bluest water either of them had ever seen. On many nights, after multiple glasses of wine, there was talk of never leaving, of making this their new permanent home.

But despite how much they enjoyed the island lifestyle, they eventually grew restless and wanted to get back on the road.

They sailed to Italy next and, after exploring it thoroughly, traveled through Austria, Switzerland, and France before surrendering Europe to the throngs of summer tourists and flying back to D.C.

The crowds notwithstanding, their goal had always been to return by the Fourth of July. Sølvi was married to an American now, and outside of attending a couple of celebrations at the U.S. Embassy in Oslo, she had never properly experienced the holiday. Harvath intended to change that and to give her an Independence Day she'd never forget.

Washington, D.C., was renowned for putting on the ultimate July Fourth fireworks show. Next to an inaugural ball or the White House Correspondents' dinner, the only thing harder to score prime seats for was the annual fireworks display.

You could drag a blanket or a couple folding chairs down to the National Mall, but it would be beyond packed. And if the Park Police caught you with any alcohol what-

soever, you'd be in front of a firing squad by morning. Not exactly Harvath's idea of a good time.

Better would be to score one of the coveted VIP invitations to the watch the display from the south lawn of the White House or the Speaker's Balcony at the U.S. Capitol.

The Canadian Embassy was also known for throwing a nice invitation-only event on their rooftop, but Harvath was hoping to not have to "leave" the United States in order to celebrate America's birthday.

He had put a few feelers out, but with a brand-new administration having just been sworn in, he didn't have the kind of White House connections he once had. He had even less pull in Congress and the new Speaker's office.

The Fourth of July was a week from Friday. All the swanky hotel rooftops and bars had already been sold out. Anyone who owned a boat and planned to watch the show from the water was at capacity. Short of chartering a helicopter and hovering just outside the restricted airspace, he was running out of options.

Making matters worse, Sølvi had received a pair of invites to the Norwegian Ambassador's Midsummer party within days of their D.C. arrival. Apparently, being a deputy director for the NIS, even one on an open-ended leave, had its perks.

The fact that she had scored such a coveted D.C. invitation only amplified his desire to create the perfect Fourth of July experience. He was nothing if not competitive. So too was Sølvi.

She also had a fantastic sense of humor. If she ended up delivering the better summer celebration, he'd have to hear about it for the rest of the year. That wasn't something he was going to let happen. It was red, white, and blue—or bust.

Getting ready for the embassy party, Sølvi had been blasting ABBA. When Scot brought up the fact that the group was from the country next door to hers and that she was appropriating Swedish culture, she smiled and gave him the finger. Closing the door to their bedroom, she turned it up even louder.

Twenty minutes later, the music stopped, and he heard her coming down the stairs. When she stepped into the kitchen, he was blown away.

She wasn't wearing the traditional Norwegian folk dress known as a *bunad*. Instead she wore a very sexy white sheer dress that showed off her long legs and toned, tanned arms.

Her blond hair was pulled back and up in a high ponytail, just the way Scot liked it, allowing him to see a thin blue line of script that ran from the base of her neck to the midpoint of her spine. The words were from French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. *Il est impossible d'apprécier la lumière sans connaître les ténèbres. It is impossible to appreciate the light without knowing the darkness.*

The quote summed up Sølvi perfectly. She had known hardship and heartbreak, both in her professional and her personal lives. Instead of allowing those things to beat her down, she had used them to make herself stronger. It was one of the many things Scot loved about her. The fact that she was off-the-charts smart *and* drop dead gorgeous didn't hurt either.

"Come here," he said, wrapping his arm around her waist and pulling her close so he could kiss her. "You look gorgeous."

"And you look very chic," she replied, kissing him back.

He pulled her in tighter. "We could just skip the party."

Sølvi laughed and gave him one last kiss before push-

ing him away. “Not a chance. I haven’t seen you in a suit since the christening, much less a linen one. We’re going to this party, and I’m going to show you off to everyone. Now grab your shoes so we can get going. I don’t want us to be late.”

“Vikings,” he replied, rolling his eyes. “So strict.”

“You have no idea what strict is,” she smiled. “Believe me.”

Surprising her with one last kiss, he went off in search of his shoes. Ten minutes later, they were on the George Washington Memorial Parkway, headed for D.C.

Because he was driving, he got to choose the music. His Norwegian playlist made her cringe, especially a song titled “Popular” by the Albino Superstars, a duo from a tiny village outside Oslo. The song, which was in English, had been extremely *popular* twenty years ago, back when she was in high school. She knew better than to complain, however, because whenever she did, he only turned it up louder and further exaggerated his lip syncing. It was why, as a playful payback, she threatened to have his windows tinted. They were both cut from the same cloth.

After torturing her for a little bit longer, he handed over his phone and told her she could play what she liked—as long as it wasn’t more ABBA. Sølvi laughed, pulled up her favorite Dinah Washington album, and hit shuffle. The first song up, “My Man’s an Undertaker,” made them both chuckle. Gallows humor had been a psychological survival mechanism in both their respective military and espionage careers.

And while Scot didn’t relish the taking of human life, he had never hesitated when it had been necessary. As his colleagues, who were also practitioners of gallows humor, were fond of saying, Scot Harvath had killed more people than cancer.

Though an obvious exaggeration, Sølvi knew enough about his past to know they weren't off by much. She had also seen him in action. When his friends asserted that guys like Scot didn't get PTSD, they gave it, she nodded knowingly because she understood completely what they meant.

He took few people into his confidence, and unless you knew him well, you'd have no clue as to his background, nor his fluency in violence. For all intents and purposes, he was an extremely charming and handsome man, who made more than his share of jokes and didn't seem to take anything too seriously.

A bit of that nonchalance was on display as they approached what Harvath liked to refer to as "one of the most politically interesting intersections in the nation's capital"—the point at which 34th Street T-boned Massachusetts Avenue.

The residence of the Norwegian Ambassador sat on one corner; the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See—also known as the Vatican Embassy—sat on the other; and directly across from them both, on an almost perfectly round, heavily fortified, seventy-two-acre wooded parcel, was the United States Naval Observatory.

In addition to its many horological and astronomical functions, the observatory campus was best known for housing the official residence of the Vice President of the United States.

As Scot and Sølvi Harvath sat idling in traffic, waiting for the light to change, they observed a large protest taking place outside the gates.

"What's going on over there?" Sølvi asked, reading some of the placards and banners aloud. "*Stick to the plan! The voters have spoken! Keep your promises!*"

Glancing across the street, Scot replied, "Democracy in action."

“Obviously. But what are they actually protesting?”

“No clue.”

She looked at him. “You sound like you don’t care.”

He didn’t. Their honeymoon had been a wonderful break from politics. He hadn’t picked up a paper, turned on a TV, or logged on to a website the entire time. He couldn’t remember the last time that he’d been that relaxed.

“Welcome to D.C.,” he replied. “We get protests here every day.”

“Sure, but this is a relatively big one. Why aren’t there more police?”

It was a fair question.

After scanning the immediate area, he pointed to an unmarked white van with smoked windows and government plates. “The cops have backup. They’re just keeping it quiet. Believe me, they’re not going to let things get out of hand, especially not this close to the Vice President’s residence.”

“In Norway,” Sølvi chided him, “we wouldn’t let them get this close to the vice president’s residence.”

She loved to play this game. Everything, it didn’t matter what, was always better back in Scandinavia.

Scot laughed. “A,” he stated, “Norway doesn’t have a vice president. And B, even if it did, why would anyone in the world’s most perfect country ever protest anything?”

It was an excellent response. “See?” she replied with a smile. “My friends didn’t believe me, but I told them, *He’s teachable.*”

He was about to add “And great in bed” when he noticed two men in hooded sweatshirts and carrying black backpacks step away from the crowd.

Even before they had tossed their backpacks under the van, his instincts had kicked in and he knew what was about to happen. There was no way that he’d be able to punch through the traffic in time.

Instead, he yelled at Sølvi to “Get down!” and, unbuckling his seatbelt, he threw himself on top of her, covering her body with his.

Less than a second later, the bombs exploded, lifting his nearly six-thousand-pound Tahoe clean off the ground.