

CHAPTER 1

Harry Vance finished dressing in the dark bedroom, using his cell phone to find a pair of matching socks. It was past two in the morning and he was trying to leave without waking Anna, so he shouldn't have been so particular. But at the age of fifty-three, Vance had learned to accept and embrace his own bullshit. And he knew his steps felt a little less sure when his socks didn't match.

He walked to the tall window and parted the curtains. The dark streets below were lined with turn-of-the-century apartment buildings and shuttered storefronts, and the day's rain had turned the curbside snowbanks into rivers of gray slush. The sidewalks were barren on this cold January night, but the bars and clubs tucked away in this trendy corner of Berlin were still open, their music and laughter echoing down the dark street.

Vance turned and looked at Anna, asleep under a thick blanket. A space heater hummed at the far end of the room. These old buildings were nice to look at, but they weren't insulated, and nothing worked. Anna thought the building had "character," a word that made Vance want to step into traffic. Well, that's what he got for becoming involved with a younger woman.

He approached the bed and took a closer look at her by the dim light coming through the window. She didn't look like herself when she slept. Her face was relaxed, soft. So different from who she was.

Vance reached his hand out to . . . what? Touch her? Try to wake her? Tell her where he was going? Why would he do something like that? *Because you're an idiot.* Which is another way of saying you're in love.

He withdrew his hand. The point was to not tell her anything. She didn't

like that, of course. And neither did the brass back at headquarters when he froze them out of his investigations until it was time to make arrests. But this was how Army CID Agent Harry Vance had always approached his work. Just do it. Only amateurs and cowards needed outside opinions before the job was done.

So he hadn't told her about tonight's rendezvous, and he'd be back in bed before sunrise. They'd wake up together, maybe a morning roll in the sack, then fried eggs with black bread and coffee, watch the news. Sunday stuff.

Anna rolled over, muttering something in German that he couldn't make out. Her arm flopped onto the empty side of the mattress, which still contained his impression in the cheap memory foam.

He pictured her waking up in the night to use the bathroom or get some water and seeing that he was gone. She'd freak out.

He took out his phone and typed her a text: *Couldn't sleep. Going for a walk. Back by dawn.* He hesitated, then added: *I love you.*

Every word of that was true, though he might have left out a few things. He hit Send and heard her phone vibrate on the bedside table.

He walked to the foyer, where he put on his scarf and wool cap. He eyed a small table piled with yesterday's mail, then slid open a drawer to reveal his Beretta M9 inside a pancake holster.

Vance stared at the pistol. He wasn't doing anything dangerous. Unless, of course, he was closer to the truth than he realized. And you never know you're there until you're there.

He clipped the holster on his belt, then put on his camel-hair topcoat. He unbolted the heavy door and stepped onto the dimly lit landing, closing the door quietly behind him.

Vance descended two flights of stairs, then stepped out into the winter night and felt the sharp snap of cold air on his face. He lit a cigarette and walked north to the Prenzlauer Allee S-Bahn train station, a handsome turn-of-the-century brick building that—like Anna's street and much of the neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg—appeared to have somehow survived the war intact. Though in Berlin you didn't always know what was original and what got pieced back together from the rubble.

He walked down a set of icy stairs to the tracks, which ran along a trench

below street level. He checked his watch as he waited on the platform: 2:27 A.M. It was the weekend, so the S-Bahn ran all night. He watched a young couple huddled inside a glass-paneled shelter as a cold north wind whipped down the platform.

On a typical case, he'd have his partner, Mark Jenkins, with him. But this wasn't a typical case. In fact, it wasn't a CID case at all. He was moonlighting here in Berlin, hundreds of miles from the headquarters of the U.S. Army's 5th Military Police Battalion in Kaiserslautern, a small city near Frankfurt where Vance lived and worked. His colleagues knew he came to Berlin whenever he had time off. They assumed it was for a woman, and they made their jokes. But they were only half right.

He thought about his wife, Julie, back in Kaiserslautern, soon to be ex if the papers ever went through. German efficiency, he'd found out, did not extend to divorce proceedings. She was a good woman and didn't deserve half the crap he put her through. Then again, she'd chosen to stay in the marriage. We all make our own prisons.

Vance spotted the train approaching and took a last drag on his cigarette. He flicked the butt onto the tracks, then took out his cell and texted: *Ich bin unterwegs*. I'm on my way.

After a few seconds he received a reply: *Ich werde da sein*. I'll be there.

The train eased into the station and Vance boarded. He took a seat and looked around as the train pulled out. His car was mostly empty, as was the entire train, the length of which he could see due to the open gangways. He spotted a group of hyperactive twenty-somethings at the far end, probably club-hopping until dawn. He'd done that once with Anna, which was one time too many. She thought she was keeping him young, but she was actually just reminding him of the gulf between them.

The city slid by out the grimy window. He was heading southeast to Neukölln, a neighborhood with a large Turkish and Arab immigrant population, made larger in the last few years thanks to Germany's generous asylum policy toward Syrian refugees. It was a policy that made many Germans proud—and enraged and frightened just as many.

Vance tried to stay out of his host country's internal politics, though as a Chief Warrant Officer in the CID's Terrorism and Criminal Investigation Unit, or TCIU, this rapid influx of refugees had affected his caseload. There

were dozens of U.S. Army installations across Europe, and Vance and his colleagues in the TCIU were responsible for investigating perceived terrorist threats against all of them, as well as threats against any U.S. Army personnel located on the European continent or North Africa, which was his command's area of responsibility.

In truth, most of the flood of refugees arriving in Germany came here to escape the ravages of war and create a better life, and even the criminal element among them largely restricted their activities to nonpolitical felonies. But it was the potential ISIS or al Qaeda operatives who managed to slip through, and also the jobless and isolated young men who became radicalized once in Germany, who kept Vance and his colleagues busy. As they say in counterterrorism, the good guys need to succeed every time; the bad guys need to succeed only once.

Vance looked out the window as the train crossed over the Spree River, and then passed from the former East Berlin into the West. What had once been a fortified wall of concrete, razor wire, dogs, soldiers, and searchlights was now a phantom border crisscrossed by twenty-four-hour train lines and rejoined streets, and you'd have to have a sightseeing guide to find the few shards of the Wall still standing. Vance figured that was probably a good thing. Berlin, more than most places, had to navigate remembering the past without becoming a shrine to its horrors.

He remembered watching the Wall come down on TV. The cheering crowds as people took sledgehammers to the hated structure. East German police and soldiers standing impotent as Germans from East and West defiantly held hands atop the Wall, one people again.

He had been in his first semester of his senior year at Johns Hopkins, thinking about a military career and what his role might be in helping to contain the Soviet menace. And then, in the blink of an eye, the forty-year Cold War was over. The Iron Curtain parted. The nuclear threat lifted. A new world had dawned overnight, and no one knew what to do about it. It turned out the new world was more complicated than the old, and thirty years later Vance was still trying to figure it out.

In a few minutes the train arrived at the Neukölln station and Vance got out. He walked along the elevated train platform, which was covered in graffiti and smelled vaguely of urine. He descended the stairs and ex-

ited onto Karl-Marx Straße, a street that mocked its namesake with a McDonald's.

He walked north along Karl-Marx, passing a number of closed halal groceries, Turkish coffee shops, and Middle Eastern restaurants. Up ahead an Arab teenager in a winter parka leaned against a lamp pole, watching him. Vance wondered if he was a dealer or maybe a corner boy for one of the Arab crime syndicates that operated in this area. Vance—with his barrel chest and a healthy paunch due to his love affair with dark German lagers—didn't fit the profile of a heroin junkie looking for a fix. In fact, he probably looked to this kid to be exactly what he was—a plainclothes cop. As Vance got closer, the boy averted his eyes.

After a couple of blocks, he found the place he was looking for—a five-story apartment building with a hookah lounge on the ground floor called Ember Berlin. There were only a few customers sitting in the dim smoky lounge amidst Turkish tapestries, garish blue lighting, and thumping Arabic pop music.

Vance entered through the glass doors and looked around the lounge. A group of Turkish thirty-something guys were in one corner smoking and laughing, and a couple of old Arab men in tracksuits were sitting near the front door quietly sharing a hookah. The tracksuits scanned him and one of them let out a huge puff of apple-scented smoke.

Vance walked to the back where upholstered vinyl seating ran along the rear wall behind small tables and chairs. He took a seat facing the door and placed his hat on the table. He kept his coat on to make sure no one caught sight of his holstered M9.

A young Turkish waiter walked over and dropped a menu on the table. "Guten Abend. Huka? Kaffee?"

"Türkischer Kaffee, bitte."

The young man nodded and walked off.

Vance checked his watch: 3:05 A.M. He pulled his phone out and looked at the text thread he'd exchanged with the man he was there to meet, Abbas al-Hamdani. He'd received the man's number from a local guy with connections. Hamdani wasn't known to CID, and Vance hadn't done much to verify al-Hamdani's identity other than to request the man send a current photo of himself. Vance looked at the picture. Hamdani was a

heavysset man in his seventies with a bushy gray mustache and large, sad eyes.

He looked at Hamdani's last message: *Ich werde da sein*. I'll be there.

The waiter returned with his coffee and he sipped it as he watched the door. The street outside was empty except for an occasional car or Vespa. After a few more minutes, he sent a text: *Ich bin da*. I'm here.

No response. Vance drank his coffee and began to wonder why he'd left a hot woman and a warm bed for this crap. Then again, the woman—Anna—was the reason he was here in the first place.

His wife used to tell him he had a savior complex. He became overly involved in other people's problems instead of keeping his own house in order. She was right, of course. It was probably why he was a good investigator and a bad husband. After twenty-five years together, he and Julie had each other pretty well figured out. Which was the problem. Marriages, like criminal investigations, tend to be over when there's no more mystery.

His phone vibrated. He checked it and saw a message that said in German: *I can no longer meet there*.

Vance tapped out a reply: *We had an arrangement*.

The reply came quickly: *I cannot be seen with you*.

Vance wrote: *No one knows who I am*.

No response for a moment. Then: *Come to Thomashöhe Park. Up the road. Inside the park by the eastern entrance. This is better security for us both*.

Vance waited to reply. He eyed the two old Arab guys in tracksuits and wondered if they knew Hamdani. Like a lot of immigrant and refugee communities, this place was insular, with complex alliances and resentments that dated back to their native lands, and probably to the beginning of time. Maybe Hamdani got tipped to these guys' presence and didn't want to be seen talking to a white guy at three in the morning. Too many questions.

Vance had insisted on a public place, and Hamdani could have picked anywhere, in any neighborhood. Why here, in his own backyard, if he was concerned about being seen? Something wasn't adding up.

He looked at the map on his phone and saw that Thomashöhe Park was only a few blocks away. His CID training told him that meeting an unknown informant in a park in the middle of the night was a bad idea, but his ego and his Beretta assured him it would be fine. He decided to split the difference

and practice some minimal operational security. He spotted another park due south of Thomashöhe, called Körnerpark, and wrote back: *Meet me in Körnerpark. Near the northern entrance off Jonasstraße. Fifteen minutes.* He'd enter the park at the southern entrance and be there in five. If Hamdani balked, Vance would abort.

After a moment he received a response: *Ok. See you there.*

Vance knocked back the rest of the sludgy sweet Turkish coffee, put on his hat, then dropped some euros on the table and left.

He continued north along Karl-Marx Straße and after a few blocks made a left onto a side street. He walked a block and saw the entrance to Körnerpark, which was sunk about twenty feet below street level and ringed with stone balustrades. A staircase led down into the park, with a chain stretched across it to indicate it was closed.

Vance walked up to the balustrade and looked into the park, which was lit by scattered lampposts. Gridded paths, manicured hedges, and white stone statues gave the impression of a palace garden. The place was nice to look at, but turned out to be a bad tactical choice—a lot of open spaces, and anyone observing him from a distance could easily have the high ground.

He walked to the stairway and paused. A chill wind shook the bare branches of the trees around him, and the fat crescent moon cast a spectral pall over the frozen stone figures in the park.

I want to tell you what happened to my father.

He remembered just how Anna had said it, in her crisp German accent, and how she'd looked at the time—her stark features barely revealed through the dim light of the nightclub where she had taken him on one of their first dates, some trendy spot located in a former East Berlin brick factory. It was a real Anna kind of place—cool and hip but also heavy with the weight of history, where in the gloom beyond the dancers and club lights you could almost imagine the poor bastards in the sweltering brickworks, laboring toward a new world that would never come.

“He was betrayed,” Anna had said between blasts of industrial techno. “And then he was murdered.”

That's when it had truly begun, this obsession of his. And it was why Vance was standing here now, knee-deep in an investigation of a cold case that he had no jurisdiction over, and which had occurred in a country that

no longer existed. Leaving his wife for a younger woman might have seemed like the obvious sign of a midlife crisis. But maybe the real crisis was here, in the freezing night, looking for justice in all the wrong places.

He slid his M9 out of the holster and held it inside the pocket of his top-coat, then ducked under the chain and descended the stairs into the park.