

CHAPTER

1

BAGRAM AIRFIELD
AFGHANISTAN

I'm going to murder him!" Kendra Michaels jumped out of the open jeep and stalked across the tarmac toward Jessie Mercado, who was standing in front of the waiting C-130 transport plane. Her eyes were glittering with rage as she hissed through bared teeth: "You're not going to talk me out of it, Jessie. I'm going to kill Adam Lynch."

"I wouldn't presume to interfere," Jessie said soothingly. "I'm sure he deserves it. But might I point out that you're the one under arrest and he seems to have all these military types at his beck and call? It might be a bit awkward." She glanced at the name tag of the army private, who couldn't have been more than twenty, scurrying desperately after Kendra. "Isn't that right, Private Dalrymple? I'm sure your superior has told you that she's not allowed to kill Adam Lynch."

The soldier was having to catch his breath as he reached them. "I don't know anything about Adam Lynch, ma'am. I take my orders from the general." He gazed reproachfully at Kendra. "You shouldn't have tried to run away from me, Dr. Michaels. No one is trying to hurt you."

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

“Only trying to toss me out of this country,” Kendra said coldly. “And I didn’t *try* to run away, I succeeded.” She glared at Jessie. “If you’d had your motorcycle, I would have been able to get away from my jailer here and gotten back to those poppy fields where I might be able to do some good.”

“After you kill Lynch,” Jessie murmured. “Sorry, the MPs made me leave my Yamaha at the hangar.”

“I’m not your jailer, Dr. Michaels.” Private Dalrymple looked pained. “I’m your official escort. And I was ordered to show you every courtesy until I could turn you over to General Kotcheff here at the base.”

“So that he could ‘courteously’ kick me out of Afghanistan?” She was still steaming as her gaze shifted back to Jessie. “This kid showed up at my hotel room an hour ago to tell me that my visa had been revoked and that I was being put on the next transport back to the U.S. Can you believe that?” Her eyes suddenly narrowed on Jessie’s face. “Oh, yes, you can believe it. I don’t see any signs that you had your very own jailer toss all your belongings into a suitcase to put on this transport. That means they’re not kicking *you* out, even though we came here on the same mission. That’s why you’re here. I *knew* that Lynch was responsible. He was pissed off at me. And he was the only one who had the kind of influence and contacts to get this done. Lynch sent you, didn’t he?”

Jessie nodded. “He said that you were angry and you’d run out of his hotel room before he could look at that wound in your arm. He asked me to check it out.”

“He was the one who was angry. I was trying to reason with him. He was yelling at me.” But she hadn’t dreamed he’d been this pissed off. “And it’s only a flesh wound.”

“Then you won’t mind if I take a look?” Jessie was suddenly standing next to Kendra and pushing up the sleeve of her cotton shirt,

HINDSIGHT

carefully lifting the bandage to examine the small wound. “You’re right, this is practically a nonissue. He was worried for nothing.”

“That’s what I told him. It hardly bled at all. You can see that.” She threw out a hand to indicate Private Dalrymple. “That’s all, so will you tell this . . . this . . . escort to take me back to my hotel.”

“Not quite all. I’m afraid I can’t tell anyone to do anything.” Jessie made a face. “They wouldn’t even let me keep my motorcycle, remember? You’re stuck. You’re right, Lynch did do this, and I have no idea why. It probably had something to do with that wound. I’ll try to get it out of him later. I only came because you’re my friend and I didn’t want you to face this alone.” She added dryly, “Though Lynch also mentioned he needed someone to keep you from causing a major uproar that would draw more attention to you.”

“And he thought you’d do it?” she asked silkily. “He was right not to come himself, I’m feeling lethal. But I’m not pleased that you decided to let him get away with this.”

“*Let him?*” she repeated ruefully. “You know better than that, Kendra. Adam Lynch is the black ops specialist everyone calls when they want to bring down a regime. He has more influence than half the governments and mega-corporations that hire him. What made you think I could stop him?”

Kendra knew that was true, but it didn’t make her less irritated. “It would be nice if you’d made the attempt. The three of us came here to get a job done. I was so damn close last night, Jessie.”

She soberly shook her head. “I didn’t have the right to make the call. Lynch doesn’t usually go off half-cocked, and when he phoned me this morning, he was close to exploding. He didn’t tell me what happened in that poppy field last night, but you scared the shit out of him.”

“I only did what I was supposed to do, what I’m fully capable of doing. He had no right to step in and stop me.” Kendra was growing

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

more angry. “Would he have stopped you? Hell no, he would have treated you with the respect you deserve. Because you had two tours here in Afghanistan and a background as a private investigator—I couldn’t agree more that you’re super qualified. But that doesn’t mean that it’s fair to ignore the fact that I might have my own capabilities.”

“Bullshit.” Jessie grinned. “You know damn well Lynch respects your ‘capabilities.’ His problem is that he’s a good deal too involved with certain other qualifications you display that have absolutely nothing to do with what’s going on in your head.”

She didn’t want to hear that right now. “Then he should concentrate on what’s important. The truth is that he never wanted me to come here anyway and he’s using this as an excuse. And you should never have agreed to carry his water for him. This has put me in an intolerable position, and I won’t—”

“Intolerable?” A booming voice behind Kendra caused her to whirl to face a tall officer with iron-gray hair who was getting out of his jeep. Both his stripes and the fact that the young private was at full attention indicated that this was the Brigadier General Kotcheff for whom he’d been waiting. He was gazing sternly at Kendra. “That’s a very harsh word when we’re trying to make this departure as comfortable and easy for you as possible, Dr. Michaels.” He turned to Jessie. “You’re Ms. Mercado? When I spoke to Adam Lynch, he told me that you’d make our task easier. I don’t see any signs of that.”

“Then you’ll have to take it up with him,” Jessie said. “I’m sure you won’t have any objection to doing that. He’s so easy to deal with.”

Kotcheff’s stare became even cooler. “That’s not been my experience. But we’re always willing to work with him when he requests a favor. It usually pays dividends.”

HINDSIGHT

“Does it?” Kendra took a step toward him. “And interfering with my rights as an American citizen is worth that payoff? What the hell happened? Look, together with Adam Lynch and Jessie Mercado, I’ve been investigating Brock Limited, a government contractor that’s been sharing space on your base. That investigation has led us from San Diego to Kabul in search of evidence that would reveal the corruption Brock has been spreading throughout the world. You can’t do this. I’m not finished with my job here yet.”

“You are as far as we’re concerned. I’m afraid you’ve been a disruptive influence.”

She gazed at him, stunned. “I’ve only been here for three weeks. Even I couldn’t disrupt much in that time.”

“You underestimate yourself,” Kotcheff said sourly. “It appears that you caused something of an upset last night in Nurestan Province. In a war-torn country like Afghanistan, that sort of behavior can’t be permitted. You’ll have to leave.”

“What? Nurestan? There’s no way you could possibly know what happened there last night.” She paused. “Unless you were told.” She took a step even closer to him. “Perhaps by our friend Adam Lynch?” Her hands knotted into fists at her sides. “Dammit, you can’t *do* this to me.”

“On the contrary, I can do anything I please on this base. You’re the one who has no business here.” His lips twisted. “From your dossier, it seems you’re only a music teacher without even the credentials that Ms. Mercado possesses.” He yanked his thumb at young Private Dalrymple standing beside him. “Even this private has far better skills and qualifications than you. I find it incredible that you were even given a visa in the first place.”

Lord, he was arrogant. “Music *therapist*. I’m very proud of working with those children. But I do also have an affiliation with the FBI.” She was trying to hold on to her temper, but she was afraid it

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

was a lost cause. “And I’m beginning to find it fairly incredible that someone actually thought you could command this base.”

“Oops! Easy, Kendra.” Jessie turned toward the general and said quickly, “It’s true that Kendra works closely with the FBI and definitely has qualifications they find irreplaceable. I imagine even you might have found that out if you’d done more than just scan her paperwork. She deserves your respect. It would be smart of you to show it.”

“You’re giving me orders?” A faint flush stained the general’s cheeks. “You’ll be lucky if I don’t send you out on this plane with her. I’m done with this discussion. The FBI has no jurisdiction outside the U.S. You and your colleagues were only here because someone in the Justice Department pulled strings for you.” He added, “And you’re going home for the same reason.”

Kendra stared at him. “And isn’t it odd that Lynch has so many dealings with the Justice Department?”

“I don’t find it at all unusual. I hear he has influence in a number of quarters.”

“Give it up, Kendra,” Jessie murmured.

“The hell I will.” She had to make one more try. “Give me time to figure this out, General. I just need another few days. There must be a mistake.”

“Figure it out stateside. Our planes run back and forth every day, Dr. Michaels.”

Kendra glanced up to the plane’s forward door, where a young soldier was looking expectantly at her. She shook her head and muttered a curse beneath her breath. “I can’t *believe* this is really happening.”

“Believe it,” the general said. “And accept the United States Army’s wishes for a safe flight home.” His smile was both snide and dismissive.

HINDSIGHT

Kendra wanted to turn and run, but she knew that would only result in a pair of handcuffs and a trip to the stockade.

Shit.

General Kotcheff impatiently motioned toward the plane. “Dr. Michaels, you can get on this aircraft under your own power, or four MPs will pick you up and place you aboard.”

Jessie instinctively took a protective step closer to Kendra. “They’re not fooling around. I know you’re pissed off, but try to hold it together.”

“I am.” She watched as her duffel was loaded into the plane’s cargo hold. “Not easy.”

Jessie shook her head. “I’m sorry, Kendra.”

“It’s not your fault. It’s Lynch’s. Even if we’d come up with nothing, I wanted to see this through to the end. I hate it that I almost had them.” She added fiercely, “But don’t you give up on it, Jessie. I gave Lynch the key to finding those documents. You get it from him and go after those bastards.”

“You know I will.”

Yes, Kendra knew that Jessie was as dedicated and passionate as she was about arresting the crooks who had not only cheated soldiers who’d given their lives and service here in Afghanistan but had actually condoned murder. The knowledge didn’t help; Kendra still wanted to be here with Jessie when she brought them down. “Yeah, just do it soon. Tell Lynch that I didn’t go through what I did last night to have him take his own sweet time about doing a search.”

“I’ll tell him. Do you have any other message for him?”

“Flip him off for me. Both hands.”

Jessie chuckled. “I can do that.”

“On second thought, no. No message. Tell him to not try and get in touch with me.”

Jessie’s smile faded. “Kendra . . .” She shook her head. “That’s not going to fly. We both know it.”

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

“I’m serious. I’ll reach out when and if I’m ready. Until then, I don’t want to hear from him.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Dr. Michaels.” General Kotcheff gestured to the plane, a self-satisfied smirk on his face.

“I’m going, dammit.” Kendra threw her arms around Jessie. “Stay safe, okay?”

“Absolutely.”

Kendra pulled away, turned, and gave a curt nod to General Kotcheff. She started toward the plane. But he was still smirking. It was just too much to bear. She suddenly whirled back to face him. “What an asshole bully you are. I can tell you’re enjoying this. Do you know how much I hate bullies? I’ve known so many people like you.”

“You know nothing about me, Dr. Michaels,” he said coldly.

“Don’t I?” She slowly stepped back toward the general and looked him up and down. “I know you’ve been spending a lot of time at Kolula Pushta Road lately.”

Kotcheff blinked. “Who told you that?”

“No one. I’m only going by what I see despite the fact that I’m just a lowly music therapist. You don’t wear your uniform there, which is probably a good idea. I think it’s good you go there, relax, and blow off steam. What’s your average?”

He was staring at her indignantly. “Excuse me?”

“You enjoy bowling.” She let the words rattle out swiftly, accurately. “And fishing. I think you probably have your own boat back home, maybe on Lake Huron? You fish, but you also do some diving.”

Kotcheff’s jaw dropped.

“You grew up in the South but later moved to Michigan. Your family is still there. You saw them recently, in the past few weeks. They must miss you. It’s lucky they don’t realize what an asshole

HINDSIGHT

you are when it suits you. They'd be shocked and disappointed. But you're also diabetic, so I hope you're taking good care of yourself here."

Kotcheff was now glaring at her in horror, struggling to speak.

Should Kendra go for it? Hell, yes. "Oh, and one more thing." She was smiling recklessly as she took another step closer to him. "You're a by-the-book kind of guy, so I'm surprised and impressed you're rebellious in one aspect of your miserable, boring existence: You're wearing bright red underwear."

Kotcheff immediately looked down at his crotch in alarm.

"Don't worry, General. Your fly isn't open."

Kendra bounded up the stairs to the plane's forward door, which immediately closed behind her.

"What the hell?" The general was staring after her, stunned. "How could she know all that?" He turned indignantly to Jessie, who was bent double, tears of laughter running down her cheeks. "Stop laughing, damn you."

"I tried to tell you. I could see it coming." Jessie was trying to stop laughing, but she couldn't do it. "But you deserved it. Good for you, Kendra." She caught another glimpse of the general's baffled expression and broke down again. "Dear God, your face..." She took a deep breath. "How could she know it? Kendra was blind until she was twenty, and by then, like all blind people, she'd trained her other senses to be ultrasharp to compensate. When she underwent a stem cell operation that gave her sight, she became the complete package. She takes nothing she sees for granted. She notices *everything*. Do you wonder why the FBI considers her irreplaceable?" She started to laugh helplessly again. "And do you still think your

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

Private Dalrymple here is more qualified than her? I really must get his input on that bright red underwear!”

She shouldn't have mentioned the red underwear, Kendra thought as the C-130 took off. It had probably been the crowning blow as far as Kotcheff was concerned. She'd held on as long as she could, but he'd been so damn obnoxious. She'd be lucky if that pompous asshole didn't scramble some F-18s to shoot down the plane. Yet she hadn't been able to resist that last parting shot. She had been so angry and frustrated . . . and hurt.

Face it: Not about the smirking general, about what Lynch had done to her.

Yes, she had tried to smother it, but there had also been hurt mixed up in all those other emotions she had felt toward Adam Lynch today. How could there not be after these years when they had been friends and partners, solved cases, laughed, gone through terror, watched each other's backs, while constantly growing closer and closer?

Until only recently when that inevitable sexual explosion had almost torn her apart.

Don't think about it. She had been right to try to take an immediate step back after that mistake. She had a career, friends, and a mother, all of which filled and enriched her life. She had no need of Lynch and he clearly had no need of her if he could betray her as he'd done today.

Her satellite phone was ringing. She glanced down at the ID.

Adam Lynch.

She let her voicemail pick it up.

Four minutes later her phone rang again.

HINDSIGHT

Lynch.

Screw him.

She turned her phone off.

She leaned back and closed her eyes. Concentrate. She couldn't let Lynch do this to her. Try to think of a way to pull enough strings to get her visa reinstated so that she could go back to Kabul . . .

"Dr. Michaels, you have a telephone call." She opened her eyes fifteen minutes later to see a very irate copilot glaring down at her. He thrust his phone at her. "I have orders from General Kotcheff that you're to take this call. I'd appreciate you doing it immediately so that I can have my phone back." He added sarcastically, "There just might be an emergency."

He turned on his heel and strode back to the cockpit.

Kotcheff? He must have been even more pissed off than Kendra had thought.

She lifted the phone to her ear. "You're not going to get an apology, Kotcheff."

"I don't believe he expects one," Adam Lynch said. "He's too busy gathering the shards of his dignity around him at present. Bright red underwear, Kendra? Seriously? Now, I can wait for you to tell me how you knew the rest of it, but I really have to know about the red underwear."

She stiffened. "I'm hanging up, Lynch."

"I don't think so. That copilot would only get another call from Kotcheff, and that would further indicate what a disruptive influence you can be. You might never get your visa reinstated. Wouldn't it be simpler to just talk to me and get it over with?"

"No." But she had to consider her options. It wasn't smart to let stubbornness get in the way of long-term goals. "Nothing is ever simple with you, Lynch. Particularly the outrage you've managed to concoct this time." She paused. "You talk, I'll listen. Then I get

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

to hang up and forget about you. I only have one question I want you to answer: How the hell did you have the nerve to go to these extreme lengths just to get me thrown out of Afghanistan?”

“With equally extreme trepidation. You can see how terrified I was if I had to send Jessie to keep you from blowing up the base.”

“I noticed you decided to cower at a safe distance and let her take the flak. You didn’t even tell her what happened last night. Were you afraid she’d agree that I was right and not let you get away with this?”

“There was always that possibility. Jessie is super sharp and she wants to bring down Brock Limited as much as you and I do. She might have thought that I was wrong.” He chuckled. “Ouch. That hurt. Naturally, she’d be wrong, but there’s still a sting to my ego.”

“*Gigantic* ego,” she amplified. He was taking this too casually. She could almost see him sitting there, those movie-star good looks, the blue eyes dancing with mischief. “But you went too far this time, Lynch.”

He was silent. “I don’t agree. I only hope I went far enough.” He paused. “And the reason I sent Jessie was that I was too busy trying to pull this situation out of the toilet to come myself. I had to work fast to get you safely out of the country.”

“Which should never have happened.”

“The hell it shouldn’t.” His voice was suddenly rough. “There was no way I was going to let you be a target for those sons of bitches. The Taliban were probably already sharpening up their scimitars by the time you left my apartment.”

“You don’t *know* that. I got the first clue we’d found since we arrived here in Afghanistan that Brock Limited was actually making deals with the Taliban for weapons. All you had to do was follow up on it.” She added fiercely, “And I should have gone with you. I had the right.”

HINDSIGHT

“Yes, you did.” He didn’t speak for a moment. “You’ve done a great job since we got here, and under normal circumstances I’d have let you go for it.”

“*Let me?*”

“Wrong word. Just calm down and let me go over my side of what happened last night so that you might see why I did what I did.”

“Not likely,” she said bitterly.

He ignored the comment. “Look, from the moment we arrived in Kabul, you were on fire. You were doing everything you could to find evidence that Brock Limited had been involved in corruption since they opened their headquarters here. Not only that, but you were looking for documents that Brock’s main headquarters in the U.S. stashed away here.”

“So were we all,” she said defensively. “Why are you acting as if I was the only one?”

“Because you were the only one on fire,” he said quietly. “You couldn’t help it. That’s the way you operate. And you were smart, you were careful, but you had a skill that Jessie and I didn’t have. It was natural that you were driven to use it.” His voice hardened. “But why the *hell* couldn’t you wait for us before you went after them?”

“Because I wasn’t sure I was right. I thought I smelled that same damn cinnamon scent at the Brock headquarters as I did in the Tangi Valley, where the Taliban has a strong presence. I had to check it out to make sure I wasn’t mistaken.”

“And got yourself shot by a sentry.”

“It was only a scratch. And I got away without anyone getting a glimpse of me. Anyway, I got the verification we needed. And we might be able to nail them.” She added hotly, “I was careful. I did everything right. So why the hell am I on this damn plane?”

“You got shot. I’d hardly call that doing everything right. I’m not giving them another chance at you.”

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

“I told you, they couldn’t have known it was me.”

“They’ll know *someone* is investigating the conspiracy that they desperately want to keep secret. The first thing Brock and the Taliban will do is scatter and dissolve any sign of collusion. It’s probably being done already. The second thing they’ll do is start an investigation of their own. They’ll move very fast, Kendra.”

“Then we should move faster. We can find the evidence we need.” She was frantically trying to salvage an opportunity that seemed to offer so much hope. “Bring me back there, and I’ll start to—”

“It’s not going to happen, Kendra. No way on Earth I’m going to yank you back here and make you a target.” He paused. “We’re going to shut down the operation for the time being.”

“What? No!”

“Yes,” he stated firmly. “Right now there’s no actual proof we got that close to any cozy arrangement existing between Brock and the Taliban. As I said, they’ll probably scatter and be cautious for a while. We need them to feel safe enough that they’ll come back and let us get that proof. Temporarily, I’ll turn our mission over to the CIA to see what they can dig up. Jessie and I will stay here for a little while and continue to look as if we’re still searching for clues, before we supposedly throw in the towel in disgust. You will have already officially given up the search, and Kotcheff’s records will show that you left Kabul three days ago.”

He was rattling off plans with his typical efficiency, but she wasn’t happy with any of it.

“I don’t like it. It’s giving up. There has to be some other way to do it.”

“And I don’t like the idea of anyone thinking that you know too much and they have to put you out of commission,” he said grimly. “That was a flesh wound, but you left blood at the scene. The Taliban might not be up to tracing your DNA through that blood,

HINDSIGHT

but the Brock medics would have no problem.” Lynch continued crisply, “Listen to me, here’s how it goes. You left Kabul three days ago and promptly forgot the place ever existed. In fact, you were immediately involved in an FBI case that had absolutely nothing to do with Brock Limited or Afghanistan.”

She tensed. “Is that an order?”

“I wish it could be,” he said wryly. “I’ll have to settle for calling Griffin with the FBI and begging him to find some way to cover for you.”

“Ridiculous. You never beg Griffin for anything.”

“Until now,” he said softly. “I’d beg him to keep you safe.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel all warm and fuzzy?” she asked coldly. “It’s not working. I’ve no intention of forgiving you. Getting me thrown out of Afghanistan was completely unnecessary. You could have found a way to handle the situation that left me with dignity intact.”

“I admit I wasn’t overly concerned with your dignity at the time. I was more worried about Brock or the Taliban finding out that it was you who’d made that connection and coming to look for you.” He paused. “And to be honest, I’d do it all again if it meant that it had the same result. Afghanistan can’t exist for you any longer. It’s not safe. Forget about it.” He suddenly chuckled. “Saying that, I’d judge it would be very wise to make my exit quickly before you verbally strike me down. I’ll be in touch. Have a good flight, Kendra.” He cut the connection.

Always the last word, Kendra thought as she looked down at the phone with frustration. Even as furious and upset as she was with him, he’d still managed to do it.

As well as disturbed her and turned her life upside down with his orders and this latest outrageous action. He always thought he knew best because all those corporations and governments believed he walked on water. Yes, he was brilliant and able to pull strings that no

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

one else even knew were there, but he wasn't always right. He was sending her home where she was presumably safe, but what about Jessie Mercado and him? They could still both be in danger. They had started this mission together, and they should finish it together. But now he was arbitrarily putting it on hold and sending her off to pretend she was working with Griffin and the FBI again?

No way. He might have been able to ban her from Afghanistan, but he had no control of her once she was back on U.S. soil. She worked with the FBI only at her own discretion, not Lynch's. She'd go back to teaching her students until she decided what she wanted to do next.

The phone was ringing.

A text.

DON'T THINK I'VE FORGOTTEN ABOUT THE RED UNDERWEAR.
IT'S STILL INTRIGUING ME. BUT I'LL LET YOU EXPLAIN THAT THE
NEXT TIME I SEE YOU. CONTACTED GRIFFIN. HE'LL BE WAITING
EAGERLY FOR YOU THE MINUTE THAT C-130 LANDS.

LYNCH

Damn him!

NAVAL AIR STATION
NORTH ISLAND
CORONADO, CALIFORNIA

The first person Kendra saw when she climbed down the steps of the C-130 was FBI Special Agent in Charge Michael Griffin, who was standing beside a black SUV several yards from the aircraft.

HINDSIGHT

“Hello, Kendra. You don’t look too happy. I wonder why.” He smiled sourly as he took her elbow and nudged her toward the SUV. “Could it be that you’ve gotten your fill of Adam Lynch this time? Join the club. Now you know how I feel when I have to deal with him.”

“But I notice that you still come when he calls you. You’re a busy man. There’s no way you have time to show up yourself to pick me up.” She looked at the troops being processed out of the transport plane. “Nor go through all the hassle of dealing with the military and the Justice Department to slip me out of here with no problem when my documents are, shall we say, questionable.”

“Lynch has been pulling in favors since you left Afghanistan to make you fade into the landscape as soon as you hit the tarmac.” His lips twisted. “I’m just one of the primary pieces in the main puzzle. He had to offer me a mega-favor to get me to take you under my wing.”

“Well, I won’t bother you for very long,” she said coolly as she stopped in front of the SUV. “You can drop me off at my condo and I’ll handle my own repatriation from here on. But by all means take advantage of whatever favor he offered you. Stick it to him. He deserves it.”

Griffin looked at her in surprise and then chuckled. “He really did piss you off,” he said as he opened the car door for her. “Would you care to elaborate?”

“Isn’t getting me thrown out of Afghanistan enough? He thinks he owns the world. Let him pay for it.” She climbed into the car. “Just get me off this base and let me go back to running my own life. Your work is officially done.”

“Well, not exactly,” Griffin said. “Lynch always strikes a hard bargain. In order to get my particular payoff, I have to produce results that will make him content.” He gestured to the bustling military hubbub going on around them. “This was only the beginning.”

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

She tensed. “What are you talking about?”

“It appears that he’s apprehensive about your well-being and wants me to take the heat off you until he can do it himself. I believe you discussed it?”

“He discussed it. I didn’t agree to anything.” She gazed directly into his eyes. “Drop me off at my condo.”

“You’re being very difficult.” He sighed. “I can assign you surveillance but apparently that won’t be enough. Lynch wants to make sure that whatever you did in Afghanistan won’t be traced back to you.” His brows rose as he asked curiously, “What *did* you do?”

“Nothing that should have put me in this position. I’m surprised Lynch didn’t share it with you since you seem to be such friends.”

“You shouldn’t be. Lynch doesn’t share anything with anyone, except maybe you. He told me what he needed and that you probably wouldn’t want to give it to him. He told me to get it for him.” He grimaced. “He made me feel like a pimp. I reminded him that I was head of this office and I’d do what I damn well pleased.”

“Yet here you are.”

He shrugged. “He made me an offer I couldn’t refuse. So my team spent the last eighteen hours focused on getting him what he needed. He made it clear that this meant making it look like you’ve been working on an FBI case during the past week . . . a project you’ll continue for the foreseeable future. Now, what would make you want to do that?” He chuckled. “I guarantee you’ve never been this carefully researched before.” He started the car. “It became almost a game to my agents.”

“Which I regard as the ultimate violation of my privacy.”

“It was done very respectfully. You have an awesome reputation.”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Well, you’re not always polite, but they do respect you. And your friend Agent Metcalf likes *and* respects you.” He darted a glance at

HINDSIGHT

her face. “And he’s known you long enough that he’s able to see things other agents might ignore. He knew what would push your buttons. Yes, I think Metcalf might have won the grand prize.”

“I like Metcalf. But I have no intention of joining your happy little group. I’ll go back to teaching my music students until I find a way to get back to Kabul. And there’s no way you can convince me to do anything. Give it up, Griffin.”

“I haven’t begun to fight yet,” he murmured. “Let’s play our own game, Kendra. You want me to take you to your condo? No problem. There’s a manila folder on the floor at your feet. Pick it up and open it. It’s the case that Metcalf thought might tip you over the edge. Read it. Study it. Then tell me whether you want me to drive you home. Or whether you want me to take you to the regional office so that you can talk to Metcalf.”

Kendra hesitated, then slowly picked up the folder. It was probably a mistake. She should probably just refuse to open it and ask to be taken home. Griffin was brilliant and had no compunction about manipulating people to suit himself. If he thought he had something that might intrigue her, then he probably did.

But she was curious, dammit. She wanted to know why Metcalf had thought this case would interest her.

She slowly opened the folder.

She inhaled sharply as she looked down at the photo on the first page.

“Kendra?” Griffin said softly.

She couldn’t take her gaze from that photo.

Griffin tilted his head, his eyes narrowed on her face. “Your condo or the regional office?”

The bastard knew he had her.

“Neither.”

“You have someplace else in mind?”

IRIS JOHANSEN & ROY JOHANSEN

She held up the photo. “Take me here.”

“It’s late. It’s already getting dark.”

“I don’t care.”

“Your time will be better spent at the office, getting brought up to speed. Tomorrow we can go out there, and—”

“Now.” Kendra flipped the pages of the file. “Or you can drop me off at my condo and I’ll drive myself. But one way or another, I’m going there tonight.”

Griffin sighed. “Okay. Fine. I’ll have Metcalf meet us there.”

“That’ll work,” she said jerkily, her eyes already devouring the text. “I’ll read the report on the way.”