

"I know," Zita said, measuredly.

"You know?" 855 growled. "Then what are you doing here?"

"Due diligence," Zita replied. "Even if you weren't directly involved, if someone put out a hit on Calvin or Phillips, you would have heard about it. You being you."

"I'm not a rat, Miss Basir. But..." 855 exhaled slowly. "In this case, the truth doesn't hurt anyone, so I'll just tell you.

There was no paper on Jay Phillips or Ezekiel Calvin. At least, none that I saw. And as you say, if there had been, it would've come across my desk. Me being me."

Zita nodded.

"In which case... this wasn't Glas or Smith either. None of the usual suspects."

Zita made a show of playing this out in her head.

"Okay, so, if this wasn't a professional hit, does that make it a personal one?"

"Maybe," 855 ventured. "Or maybe it's just somebody who doesn't want a paper trail. Working with a middleman can be dangerous in the killing business."

"Or a middlewoman," Zita smirked.

855 tweaked the blade ever so slightly. A calculated move, Zita thought. 855 did not want them getting off-topic.

"You answer to Laura Tawn, yes?"

Zita could tell it was a rhetorical question.

"You go back and tell her she needs to look elsewhere for this."

Zita considered this, listening carefully to the rhythms of his speech. Every word indicated that he was telling the truth.

"Then where should I be looking?"

855 didn't answer.

And, suddenly, Zita realized she couldn't feel the knife anymore. Whirling around and stepping away, Zita crouched in a combat ready stance. But she was staring into an empty kitchen. Her pistol lay on the countertop, and next to it was its ejected magazine and the single round that had been in the chamber.

Zita shook her head as she grabbed her weapon and slammed the magazine home. She hadn't even heard him remove it. When she reached the kitchen door, 855 whispered in her ear again...

"Nice watch. Dangerous to wear in this neighborhood."

She swung around, her weapon seeking a target, but 855 was nowhere in sight. 855 knew that one of an assassin's greatest tools was his ability to instill fear; and today, he had been at the top of his game.