

Glancing towards the apartment to make sure no one was watching, Gully reached into his pocket. "I have a couple of things for you," he said. "First, this..."

He handed Blake a small sheet of paper with two vertical columns scribbled on it. The first column was the alphabet. The second was a series of two-digit numbers.

"It's a single-use encryption code," explained Gully. "We're going to be sending you a coded numerical message by shortwave radio, tomorrow evening at the stroke of midnight. It'll be just like the radio transmission you heard earlier today. Write the numbers down carefully, then use this sheet to decode the message. It will refer to a social gathering. If we tell you everything's fine, then you can relax and stay put. If the message says that the gathering is ending, that means there's trouble and you need to split from wherever you are."

"How will I get this message?" asked Blake.

"I'm coming to that," Gully said. "Here." He handed Blake a flesh-colored disc the size of a nickel.

"What's this?" asked Blake.

"A miniature shortwave receiver, tuned to our frequency," said Gully. "It has a strong adhesive on one side, so you can attach it to the skin under your armpit where it won't be seen. When it's time to listen to the message, peel it off and press the center for three full seconds to switch on the receiver. Then place it inside your ear, non-adhesive side pointing in."

He leaned forward and tapped the disc as it lay in Blake's palm. "If the message indicates a problem, I want you to leave wherever you are *immediately* and make your way into Seattle as quickly as possible. Go to the Open Door Café, two blocks from the Seattle UZ southern entrance, and ask for Matilda. She'll get you inside. Our rendezvous point is the Space Needle. Do you have all that?"

"I think so," said Blake. "Assuming everything's okay, what happens after tomorrow night?"

"We'll rejoin you in New York the day after tomorrow," said Gully. "You're going to fly there on Matlock's personal jet. One last thing..." He handed Blake a money clip. "There's twenty hundred-dollar bills in here. A little mad money, courtesy of the Muni Alliance."

Blake pocketed the paper, the plastic disc and the cash as Matlock thrust his head out of the open sliding door. "Gentlemen," he belated, "dinner is served!"



By the time dinner was finished, it was nearly two in the morning. Neil Cohen had left earlier, wishing everyone well. "I've got to get back to Los Angeles," he told Blake, "but I think the execution has gone very smoothly so far. I'll be pulling for you." Now Blue, Serena and Gully were gathering their things and moving toward the elevator.

"This is where we say goodbye," said Blue, turning to Blake.

"It's going to feel strange, traveling on alone," said Blake. "I figured you guys would be with me all the way to New York."

"We'll be nearby, but for now it's safer if we keep our distance," said Blue. "You're heading onto the big man's turf now." He nodded toward Matlock, who was deep in conversation with Maria. "You'll be fine. He's got plenty of hired guns to watch over you."

"I hope so." Blake looked at Serena, but she avoided his gaze. "I wouldn't be here right now, if it wasn't for the two of you," he said.

"Just be careful," muttered Serena. She turned and gazed pointedly in Matlock's direction, then leaned in to give Blake a quick hug.

*"I don't trust him,"* she added under her breath.

Gully shook Blake's hand, then tapped his ear. "We'll be in touch," he said. The elevator doors closed, and they were gone.



"How thoughtful of Peter, putting us together like this," said Maria. "Now we can catch up properly."

"Very thoughtful," Blake mumbled, his throat suddenly dry. After bidding Matlock goodnight, he and Maria had been escorted to a lower floor, where they were ushered into a luxurious apartment consisting of an expensively decorated living room, a state-of-the-art kitchen, and a single large bedroom with a king-sized bed.

Maria turned to look at Blake in the doorway. "You're as nervous