

## Prologue

“Your fee is substantial. In good faith, even before you completed the first stage of the project, half your fee, \$2.5 million, has been transferred to your account in Switzerland. We...our investors feel that your requirement of the total amount being paid before the job is completed is, well, unreasonable and risky.”

A cynical grunt of amusement at the expected demand could be heard on the other end of the phone.

*Ah, how predictable and arrogant, but you've not disappointed me. Why is it that those who seek the death of another want to negotiate and dictate the terms as if conducting an everyday business deal?*

The amusement quickly turned to annoyance at being disturbed. A voice destitute of emotion answered, “The conditions and fee for my service were explained to you very carefully. They are not negotiable. The balance of the amount is to be transferred as agreed, or our business is concluded.” Apathetic eyes looked at the clock on the mantel of the stone fireplace. “That gives you less than an hour to complete the transaction. You were given the option to call this number one time. You’ve just used that option up.”

Scalzon took an unhurried sip of her brandy. “When I hang up, this number will no longer be in service, and there will be no further communication whether the fee is paid or not.”

Without waiting for an answer Scalzon closed the cell phone, dismantled it, and slipped the pieces in her jacket pocket to be discarded in various trash receptacles along the way to the station. Taking an unopened pay-as-you-go phone from the desk drawer, she carried it with her brandy to the table next to the easy chair by the fireplace. In a matter of minutes she’d removed the GPS tracking device and reprogrammed the cell with a new phone number that she’d easily pirated off the Internet. She knew that odds were that the stolen number wouldn’t be discovered for at least a week or more. It didn’t matter; she was careful and routinely changed phones and numbers every few days.

Picking up the crystal snifter from the table, she wrapped her fingers around it. Closing her eyes, she slowly passed the goblet under her nose. The aroma of the brandy, combined with the mood of Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata” filling the room, delighted her and brought a look of pleasure to her androgynous face.

In an hour the train would depart the station for Zurich. Not for a second did Scalzon entertain the thought that the money — the entire amount required for her services — wouldn’t be transferred into her numbered Swiss account. She regretted leaving Engadin so soon after arriving. The crisp clean air in Switzerland was invigorating, in contrast to the pollution she’d left behind in Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles. She’d looked forward to a few days to relax at her home in the village of Samedan and the stimulating effects and conditioning of hiking and climbing the still-snowy Bernina Massif.

Placing the snifter on the table, Scalzon walked to the desk and opened the laptop. After entering a series of numbers, she said while smiling, “It’s so much easier when we get beyond all the posturing and demands. All they needed to know is that the price they so greedily palter buys the expertise of my service.” Before turning off the laptop, she confirmed her flight out of Zurich for the States and sent a coded message to an arms dealer in Mexico.

After checking the passport and identification she had chosen, she placed them in the bag, along with the few essentials she would temporarily need until she arrived in Zurich. There she would buy what she needed to change her appearance before boarding

the plane for the States the next morning. Picking up the pictures that lay on the table, she casually ran her finger across the face of one of the women before throwing them into the fireplace. "So very beautiful...much too beautiful to die."

The mountain air was crisp and cool as Scalzon stood on the platform at the station in Samedan listening to the train whistle echoing up the valley. She fingered the fob of the chain and slipped the watch out of her pocket and opened the hinged cover. *Good, right on time.* Just as she picked up her valise someone called out a name. Turning, she saw Hans, the postmaster. The small Samedan post office was housed in the train station. He had a few pieces of mail in his hand. "I saw you buying your ticket and forgot to give you your mail, Karl." Looking at the valise, he said, "You are going on another business trip so soon? We haven't seen you much this year."

"Unfortunately, yes. I have business to attend to, but I hope to be back soon."

"I can keep your mail if you'd like and you can pick it up when you return?" The postman thought he was addressing Karl Mercer, a middle-aged banker from Zurich who owned a small cottage outside the village that he used a few times a year.

Scalzon brushed one finger across the graying moustache, a gesture meant to discreetly check the disguise. "That would be kind of you, Hans. When I return, I'll bring you a pound of the special blend tobacco you like." The train pulled in, and people hurried to board.

Delighted the postmaster clapped his hands together. "Thank you. I'll look forward to it." Hans waved as he turned to go. "Have a good trip."

Arriving at the busy and crowded Zurich station, it was easy to slip into the Männer toilette, shed her disguise, and quickly morph into another. Before walking a few blocks to a small hotel, Scalzon shopped in several of the station's many shops and purchased a laptop, briefcase, a larger suitcase, and clothing. The last stop was at a pharmacy to purchase what she would need to prepare for the trip to the States.

The next morning, dressed in a pullover shirt and light olive-colored pants and jacket, the clean-shaven man boarded the plane at Zurich International Airport carrying his laptop and a briefcase. When the plane landed in California, sixteen hours later, the most sought-after assassin in the world disappeared into the crowds and sprawling city of Los Angeles.