

The Ghosts in the Mirror Affair

A Sean Kruger Short Story

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December 1990

Al Jahrah, Kuwait: 1:00 PM Kuwait Time

The sergeant exhaled slowly, an exercise employed to reduce his heart rate. His concentration was focused on the cross-hair of a Leupold M scope mounted on his Barrett M90. His target, at some point during the afternoon, would exit a door exactly 985 meters away. The roof of the ancient apartment building, where he and his spotter lay hidden behind the parapet, was engulfed in a gentle breeze permeated with the pungent aromas of cooking from an outdoor market four blocks to the north. Heat shimmers were visible through the scope creating an illusion the door frame was dancing.

The sergeant's concentration was total. He did not smell the charcoal as it roasted Kharoof, hear the banter of street vendors as they bartered their cuisine, nor feel the temperature rise on the flat roof where he lay. With his consciousness focused on the task at hand, he blocked out the constant patter from his spotter, who was announcing wind direction and speed.

The target was an Iraqi general in charge of the invasion force. Arriving an hour earlier, he was now in conference with other Iraqi commanders behind the closed door. Intelligence reports placed the general at this particular mosque on this particular day. The sergeant and his spotter were inserted into the town two days prior and now waited for their target to show himself. The sniper started his vigil when his spotter saw the general enter the mosque. He had

not moved since. Seventy minutes later, the sergeant saw the tell-tale signs of the general's entourage preparing for departure as two Range Rovers, with dark tinted windows, pulled up in front of the building.

The sniper spoke in a low whisper. "It's time, call the chopper—this will be over in a few minutes."

His spotter immediately contacted the helicopter extraction team. It would swoop in, land, and extract the two men from a location several hundred meters south of the apartment building.

With his breathing controlled and steady, the crosshair of the scope remained on the door. At first, the movement was imperceptible, but the door swung open and the general stepped out into the bright afternoon sun light. He was tall for an Iraqi, well over six-feet tall, his thick black mustache pronounced through the Leupold scope. Squinting as his eyes adjusted to the sunlight after being in the dark mosque, the sniper saw the man's mouth move, but at this distance, no sound was heard.

Concentrating his aim two inches above the mustache, he allowed for distance, wind and thermal currents. He gently squeezed the trigger. The M90 bucked as the .50 caliber round left the barrel. In a practiced move, the sergeant brought the scope back to target. He saw the bullet just before it entered the General above the left eyebrow. A little to the left of his point of aim, but not bad for a hot afternoon. He smiled slightly as panic scattered the guards. The general's now headless body slumped to the stairs, blood spreading on the steps leading into the mosque.

He lifted the Barrett off target and crawled away from the side of the building. It was time to depart, not gaze at his handy work. While he did not expect anyone to catch them, there was no point in tempting the gods of war.

Ten minutes later, they were in the hold of the Blackhawk as it raced across the desert toward their base in Saudi Arabia. His spotter was describing in graphic detail the shot and the aftermath to the extraction team and pilot. The sergeant closed his eyes and once again saw the look of disbelief as the General, in the last microseconds of his life, realized what had happened.

Another ghost would stare back at him from the mirror.

Twenty Years Later

August 2010

FBI agent Sean Kruger ducked under the yellow tape surrounding the crime scene and paused. He glanced up at the buildings surrounding the area, observing thousands of windows and multiple rooftops. He shook his head at the daunting task and walked toward the body covered by a blue tarp.

“What’ve you got, Preston?”

NYPD Police Detective Preston Alvarez stood from kneeling by the body and shook Kruger's hand. "No one heard the shot. Witnesses are telling us the man's head just exploded." Alvarez spoke with an accent Kruger couldn't place, probably a combination of the diverse cultures of New York City. He was as tall as Kruger's six-foot frame, but several years younger. His blue-gray eyes had seen a lot in his sixteen-year career as an NYPD detective. This was the second time Kruger had the privilege of working with him.

Kruger looked up at the buildings surrounding the body and was quiet for several moments. “Any idea where the shot came from?”

"From the placement of the body and splatter marks, we think it came from there."

Alvarez pointed to a tall structure across the busy street and down three blocks. It was a Marriot hotel. "I've got uniforms over there searching."

Kruger nodded. "Makes sense. Easy access, easy egress." He turned his attention back to the body. "Any ID?"

"I was waiting for you."

Kruger chuckled. "Why, so you can slide the case over to me?"

Alvarez returned the smile. "I would do no such thing. However, if you are so inclined I would not complain."

Laughing out loud, Kruger patted Alvarez on the shoulder. "Preston, I appreciate the professional courtesy. This will make the fifth one in three different states. If your guys are done taking pictures, let's find out who he is."

Kruger accepted the latex gloves handed to him by Alvarez and pulled back the tarp. He took a deep breath when he saw the damage to what was left of the man's head. Ignoring this, he searched the inside of the man's suit coat and then his pant pockets. When he located a wallet, he stood and opened it.

Alvarez was standing next to him as Kruger extracted an ID card.

"Aww, shit"

Kruger looked at the detective. "I would agree. They've all been ex-military officers."

Kruger stared out the window of room 29112 on the twenty-eighth floor of the Marriot. A small round circle, eight inches in diameter, was cut into the glass pane of the window. City sounds and the wind swirled from the small opening.

Alvarez handed a piece of paper to Kruger. "Hotel manager just told me the individual who rented the room used this credit card."

Kruger took the paper and stared at the name and then at Preston. "Are you kidding me? Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"Ima Goode Shotski. At least he has a sense of humor." He paused and looked back at Preston. "No one questioned the name?"

Shaking his head, Alvarez looked at the paper. "It's New York City, man."

Kruger stared out the window again.

"How far would you say the shot was, Preston?"

Alvarez walked over to the window, looked down, and shook his head.

"A long way."

"Yeah, it has to be at least 800 yards or more." Kruger continued to gaze out the window. "Plus all the updrafts and downdrafts from wind swirling around these buildings."

"Didn't think of that. Hell of a shot."

Kruger nodded, his arms crossed and his hand on his chin. "Yeah, a hell of a shot." He was quiet for several moments. "Not too many individuals can make a shot like that. Think it's time to ask an expert."

FBI Training Facility, Quantico, VA

Kruger shook the hand of Special Agent Rick Flores as they stood in his office just outside the long range sniper training facility at Quantico.

"Agent Sean Kruger, it's an honor to finally met you."

“The honor is mine, Agent Flores. Please call me, Sean.”

“Everyone around here calls me, Flores, but Rick will do. What can I do for you today, Sean?”

“I’m sure you’ve heard of the five retired military officers killed by long range rifle shots?”

Flores nodded.

“This last one was a tricky shot.”

“How so?”

“When we measured the distance it was 904 yards.”

“With the right equipment, not too difficult of a shot.”

“This shot was from twenty-eight stories up and in the middle of Manhattan on a warm and fairly windy day.”

Flores gave a long whistle. “Huh.”

Kruger nodded. “Yeah, huh.”

“Let me think about that for a second. What time did the shot occur?”

“Around 1:30 p.m.”

“Huh.”

“The sidewalk was busy, the victim was exiting a restaurant when he was shot.”

“At least he had a last meal.”

Kruger ignored Flores’ dark humor.

“Where did the bullet hit? Center mass?”

“Head shot.”

“Uh, boy.”

“What?”

“Not too many guys have that kind of skill set. The shot is possible, with the right equipment, but the thermals and wind eddies make it difficult.”

“How so?”

“Think about it for a second. A bullet is a physical object, while its forward inertia is substantial, the total mass isn't that large. Wind, thermal eddies, and downward trek make calculating the trajectory challenging. It is possible, but I would say near impossible.”

“So, you're saying not that many individuals possess the skill to make a shot like that?”

“I'd say there are fewer than a dozen men in the US qualified to make the shot.”

“Narrows our suspect file.”

Flores gave Kruger a grim smile. “Maybe. There may be more we don't know about.”

Kruger stared at Flores for several seconds. “And that means?”

“There could be individuals we don't know about. Men and women trained in Russia, China, England, France, Germany, etc. I'd say your list of suspects is a lot more than a dozen.”

Silence dominated the conversation.

“Shit.”

Flores nodded.

It was just before nine p.m. when Kruger returned to his hotel room. His thirteen and fourteen hour days were starting to wear on him. He glanced at his watch and picked up the handset of the desk phone. Punching in his home number it was answered on the fourth ring.

“Hello.”

Kruger smiled, it was his sixteen-year-old son, Brian. "How did the baseball game go tonight?"

"Hey, Dad. It was awesome. Wish you could have seen it."

Closing his eyes, Kruger's posture slumped. "Yeah, tell me about it." His cheery voice masking his despair.

"I got two hits and a RBI. We won two to one. It was basically a pitcher's duel. Oh, one other thing."

"What?"

"I started a triple play that won the game for us."

"Hey, don't hold back, tell me about it."

"Well, it was the bottom of the ninth, like I said, we were up two to one. The other team had a man on first and second. Jimmy Potts was pitching. He looked nervous, Dad. Real nervous. So coach called time out and went to the plate. Since I was on third, I walked over to listen."

"What did the coach say?"

"It was hilarious, Dad. Coach just told him whatever happened, he had pitched a great game and should be proud. He patted him on the shoulder and walked back to the dugout."

"And?"

"Next pitch, the batter hits a grounder to me. I tag the base, throw a bullet to Paul at second, who tags the base and shoots it to Jose at first. Triple play, we win."

Kruger took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Did grandpa get a video?"

"Yeah, he transferred it to a disc so you can watch it when you get home. By the way, will you be here this weekend?"

Not sure where the investigation was headed, Kruger hesitated. “I have plans to be. Why? What’s up?”

“Grandpa’s our team manager, ya know. He’s got us in a tournament in Harrisonville and we’re the number one seed. We could win a tournament, Dad. It could be awesome.”

“I will definitely be home on Friday.”

“Good. Uh—grandma wanted me to tell you Sharon Crawford called.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, she left a message for you to call her.” Brian hesitated for a second. “Are you going to marry her, Dad?”

Kruger laughed. “No—what gave you that idea?”

“She’s pretty, you talk about her a lot and grandma says you need someone in your life.”

“Grandma worries too much.” Kruger’s cell phone vibrated. He looked at the caller ID and frowned. “Hey Brian, I’ve got a call coming in from my boss, I’ll see you Friday.”

The call from Alan Seltzer, Kruger’s immediate supervisor, informed him a courier would deliver a packet to the hotel for him early the next day.

With room service coffee, bagel, and strawberry jam, Kruger opened the package. It contained seven files with the words “Your Eyes Only” stamped on each. Frowning, he understood why they had not been emailed.

Each file contained information on a current United States sniper. Two were Green Berets, one was a Marine, three were Seals, and one a member of the FBI Hostage Rescue Team. Kruger dialed Seltzer office phone. It was answered after one ring.

“Did you get a chance to read the files?”

“That’s why I’m calling. Why these particular guys?”

“They all have the talent and training to make the shot from the Marriot.”

Kruger was silent. “Do they have alibis?”

“No, that’s why we included them. We eliminated military men currently overseas and anybody from the FBI teams currently elsewhere.”

“Alan, there have been four other killings besides the one yesterday.”

“We know that, but you need to talk to them. It might help you develop a profile.”

“Have you read the investigation summaries of each shooting?”

“No.”

“I’m not convinced it’s one person doing the shooting.”

“When did you come up with that theory?”

“Autopsies indicate a different caliber in each shooting.”

“So?”

“It’s an inconsistency I don’t like.”

“That’s why you’re the one leading this investigation, Sean. You don’t take the easy route.”

Shaking his head, Kruger took a deep breath. “Alan, I’m going home for a few days. I haven’t seen my family for three weeks. I’ll get back on this Monday.”

“I won’t mention the longer the delay, the colder the trail will be.”

“The trail’s already cold. A few more days will not make a difference.”

Silence was his answer.

“Very well, call me Monday.”

Glancing at his watch, he called the Bureau travel agency.

Monday morning found Kruger at his home office desk reading the sniper files for the third time. Having put the investigation on hold for the weekend, enjoying an exciting baseball tournament, cooking on his grill, and spending time with his son, Kruger was back on the case with enthusiasm.

Accessing the bureau's phone directory on his computer, he found the number he needed and punched it in on his cell phone. The call was answered on the fifth ring.

"Flores."

"Rick, Sean Kruger. You got a second?"

"Sure, what's up?"

"I've been thinking about what you said last Wednesday."

"I said a lot of things Wednesday, remind me."

"You thought there might be more than a dozen men with the right skill set. How many men over the course of the past few decades were trained as snipers by the military?"

Silence.

Kruger waited. He heard Flores take a deep breath.

"Not sure I could answer your question with any certainty. I did my training at Camp Pendleton while I was a Marine. The other training sites for the Marines are Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and here at Quantico. The Army does their training at Fort Benning. A lot of guys have been through those facilities in the past three decades."

"Kind of what I'm thinking."

"You have an epiphany over the weekend?"

Kruger chuckled. "No, I got to watch my son's baseball team win a tournament. Forgot all about the case. I was going over some files this morning and needed some clarification, that's all."

"I, on the other hand, thought about your problem over the weekend."

Kruger chuckled. "And?"

"I know a former sniper you need to talk to."

"Where and when?"

"Well, he's not too far from Kansas City."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, he's got a cabin somewhere in southern Missouri, I believe it's near the Mark Twain Forest. It's isolated and hard to find. I know how to get in touch with him, so I'll let him know you're coming. I was his spotter in Operation Desert Storm."

"Really."

"Yep. He's the best I've ever worked with."

"Thanks, Rick."

"No, problem. I'll call you when it's arranged and give you directions."

The call ended and Kruger smiled. An actual sniper as a consultant. Interesting. His gut told him they were looking in the wrong direction. He punched in a number on his phone.

"Seltzer."

"Alan, the men in the files you gave me are not our shooters."

"How do you know?"

"Logistically improbable."

"Okay, walk me through it."

“First the five shootings have happened in five major cities across the country. Dallas, Houston, LA, San Francisco, and now New York City. The files you sent are for individuals still on active duty. It would be practically impossible for anyone on active duty to be in a position to be in that many cities in so close a time frame.”

“Okay, I’m following you.”

“Plus, I just spoke to Rick Flores, thousands of men have been through sniper training in this country over the past three decades. Not counting the ones from the Vietnam era. Although those guys are getting up in years, there were a lot of them. Somewhere, in the past, our sniper has crossed paths with his victims. I need a deep dive on the victims.”

“We have a couple of agents looking into it, so far they haven’t found a connection.”

“They’re looking in the wrong direction.”

“Okay, I’ll assign a researcher to you. Not sure who it will be right now, but they’ll be in touch.”

“I also need a Forensic CPA assigned to the case.”

“Uh, huh. Anyone in particular?”

“Yes, Sharon Crawford.”

“Thought so. Why?”

“All of the victims were officers, Majors and above. I need her to look into their finances.”

“I’m not following you.”

“I think we’ve been looking at this all wrong. The victims are the key.”

“Okay. Are you going to call her?”

“Yes.”

Sharon Crawford looked up from a map of southern Missouri. Kruger's Mustang was heading east on Highway 60.

"Have we passed Birch Tree?"

"No, I saw a sign a few miles back, we're about five miles away. Why?"

"Turn south on Missouri 99."

Kruger nodded and looked over at her. Sharon Crawford was in her early thirties and a five-year veteran of the FBI's forensic accounting department. She and Kruger had worked several cases together and he found her to be intelligent and highly skilled at her job. A job he would have found tedious and boring. She was slender and tall, an inch shorter than Kruger. She wore her dark-brown hair short, which accentuated her slightly oval face and hazel eyes. During work hours she was professional, wore no makeup, and had a stern demeanor with blocky unflattering glasses.

Today the glasses were gone, she wore tight fitting jeans, an open collar silk blouse, and a hint of makeup. Kruger found her extremely attractive.

One day at lunch he asked about the contrast, she told him, "When I first started with the agency, I wasn't taken seriously. After all, who ever heard of a female forensic CPA? A friend suggested I change my appearance to fit the stereotype of an accountant. It worked and I've been doing it ever since."

Over the past year, he and Sharon had seen each other socially on the occasion he was close to the Washington DC area. He wasn't sure where the relationship was going due to the distance between Kansas City and Washington, but right now, they were together.

"Have you ever been in Missouri?"

She shook her head while concentrating on the map.

“I have a GPS unit, you don’t have to stare at the map?”

Looking up, her brow was furrowed and her jaw tight. “I like knowing where I’m at.”

“I can tell you where you are, you’re approaching the middle of no-where.” He grinned at her and returned his attention to the road. He slowed the Mustang to make the turn onto Missouri 99.

A slight smile appeared and she chuckled. “Sorry, I’ve never been in a place like this.”

"Beautiful isn't it."

“If you like hills, trees, towns that are basically wide spots in the road, and a total lack of civilization. Then it’s beautiful.”

“Sharon, this is rural Missouri. Have you been in upper state New York?”

She shook her head.

“It looks similar.”

She sighed. “Sean, we’ve been in the car for over six hours, when will we get there?”

He glanced at his GPS unit attached to the front windshield by a suction mount. “We’re about fifteen miles from our next turn. That’s when our journey will finally get to the middle of no-where.”

The gravel road sloped down. When the Mustang reached the end, Kruger stopped, shifted to first, and set the parking brake. He did not see a structure, only a mound of dirt with grass on it. To the left of the mound was a row of solar panels and reaching toward the sky behind them, a wind turbine. He opened the door and stood up. Trees surrounded the large

clearing the mound of grass occupied. Over the top of the mound, Kruger could see a long grass clearing stretching toward the southeast.

Sharon exited the car and stood. "Are you sure this is it?"

"No, but those solar panels and turbine are powering something."

A man appeared on the right side of the mound. He was of average height, lean, lined tanned face, and a week old beard. He wore jeans, an olive green t-shirt, and scuffed hiking boots. Kruger recognized him from a picture sent to him by Flores. This was Michael Wolfe.

When the man was twenty feet away he stopped. "You Kruger?"

Kruger nodded and then inclined his head toward Sharon. "This is Agent Sharon Crawford. We appreciate you talking to us."

Wolfe looked at Sharon and nodded slightly. He returned his attention to Kruger. "Only reason I agreed to speak to you is that Rick Flores asked."

"I understand. All we need is your assessment of several shootings."

Staring at Kruger, Wolfe remained a statue for several moments, his face a blank canvas. Finally, he motioned for them to follow and he walked back toward the rear of the small rise.

When they got to the far side of the mound, it revealed the front of a structure buried into the side of a hill. An overhang shielded the door and windows. Wolfe opened the door and after they entered, he followed.

Wolfe pointed toward a room off the entrance. "We can talk in there. Want some coffee?"

"Yes, we would. It's been a long drive."

Wolfe only nodded.

Sharon hesitate. "Excuse me, do you have a restroom?"

Frowning, Wolfe pointed to a hall. "Of course I have a bathroom, down the hall second door on the left."

When she returned, Kruger and Wolfe were sitting at a small table. Three mugs of steaming coffee occupied the top. Both men were staring at each other.

Sharon interrupted the staring contest. "Thank you, Mr. Wolfe."

"Names, Mike."

"Thank you, Mike." She sat down next to Kruger.

"Okay, Agent Kruger. What do you need assessed?"

"Names, Sean."

Wolfe chuckled and leaned back in his chair. "Flores said you're okay. I don't get a lot of visitors out here."

"I can understand why. Is this house totally self-sufficient?"

"Yeah. Solar and the wind provide enough power I don't need propane. Because it's an earth sheltered structure, the temperature inside is a constant sixty-seven degrees. When I do need heat or cooling, I have a geothermal pump. Water comes from a deep well."

"What do you do, Mike? Flores didn't tell me."

"I'm a consultant."

Kruger grinned. "What do you consult on?"

"Stuff."

Sipping his coffee, Kruger remained quiet for a few moments. "Did Flores fill you in on why we're here?"

"Yeah. Who were the targets?"

Taking another sip of coffee, Kruger's eyes did not deviate from Wolfe face. "Retired General Howard Carlson, Colonel Adam Sherman, Colonel Rachael Frazier, Major Nathan Tucker and Lieutenant Colonel John King."

Wolfe threw his head back and laughed out loud. When he finished, he took a sip of coffee. "Have you looked into their backgrounds?"

"We have several agents working on it."

"Well, they won't find the reason they were the targets."

Sharon tilted her head to the side. "Why do you say that?"

He was silent as he took a sip of his coffee. "Because, during Desert Storm, those five were part of a group of officers who ran an operation that got our guys killed."

"Should I consider you a person of interest, Mike?"

"Probably. I have the skills and the motivation. But, not the opportunity."

"How's that?"

"I've been in Venezuela for the past month."

"Doing what?"

"Consulting."

Kruger grinned. "Can you substantiate your alibi?"

Wolfe grinned and nodded.

"Tell me about the operation."

"They were smuggling antiquities, mostly out of Kuwait and some out of Iraq."

"Did you report it to the authorities?"

Wolfe cocked his head to the side. "I was a sergeant. They were the authorities, Agent Kruger."

"Wrong chose of words."

Sharon leaned forward on the table. "How did it get our guys killed?"

"Not only our guys but members of the coalition. I heard the Israeli's were pissed about it too."

Kruger leaned forward toward Wolfe. "I'm listening."

Wolfe stood and went to the coffee pot. As he was pouring he said. "There were seven of them. The five you mentioned were underlings. The brains behind the operation was a three star named William Little. They called him Big Bill behind his back and General to his face." Wolfe sipped his coffee with a faraway stare.

"You haven't told us how it got our guys killed."

"Big Bill would identify a location and send in a unit to capture it. He didn't give a shit if the location was heavily fortified, he wanted it captured. Guy's got killed. Once the location was secure, his team would send in men to liberate any antiquity it might possess. He picked the locations by how much stuff he could loot. Most of the spots weren't even strategic."

Kruger was silent. Sharon said, "The army didn't say anything about it?"

"Hell, no. Schwarzkopf didn't give a shit, he was more interested in his 100-hour ground offensive."

Kruger asked. "Did this occur during the offensive?"

Wolfe shook his head. "No, these little operations were conducted during the so-called air offensive. It was all hands on deck for the ground war. Which by the way wasn't much of a war.

It was just a lot of vehicles driving through the desert shooting at shit. By that time Big Bill and his team had their fortune stashed off the coast of Kuwait and headed for Switzerland.”

Kruger sat back in his chair. “Do you think these five assassinations are related?”

“Yeah, Big Bill is tying up loose ends.”

“Would one man be responsible?”

“Probably not, I’d say you have five different shooters. Those guys and gal made a few enemies over there.”

“How do we find out?”

“Follow the money.”

Kruger and Sharon talked to Wolfe for another hour and left just before five in the evening. It was the end of August and dark clouds were rolling in from the northwest. Wolfe followed the Mustang with a series of security cameras placed every hundred feet along the gravel driveway. When it turned onto Highway 90 and headed back north, he rubbed his face with his hands. “My alibi in Venezuela should hold unless you get too curious, Agent Kruger.”

Kruger turned west onto Highway 60 and glanced at Sharon. “Want to get a couple of rooms in West Plains and head back in the morning?”

Sharon nodded. “What did he mean when he said we might have five different shooters?”

“I kind of suspected as much. Ballistics indicated a different brand of rifle was used in each assassination. Snipers generally stick to one brand of gun and the same caliber. It’s easier to understand the characteristics and abilities if you use the same rifle all the time.”

“Do you think he was lying to us about Venezuela?”

Kruger shrugged. "I don't know and I'm not sure I care. I'm more interested in looking into the retired three-star general."

When they got to the hotel they agreed, after cleaning up, Kruger would stop by her room and they would go to dinner.

He knocked on her door an hour later. As the door opened and he entered, he noticed her only attire was a towel. After he shut the door, the towel fell to the floor.

Four Days Later

The conference room in the Kansas City FBI office was able to accommodate more than twenty individuals at a time. Today, it held two. Sharon Crawford and Sean Kruger. Since neither were based in this office, neither had a cubicle. The conference call was scheduled for three o'clock. At five minutes to three Charlie Brewer, the Special Agent in Charge of the Kansas City field office walked in.

"Who's on the call?"

"Seltzer and Rick Flores."

"Do you need me?"

"Not really. But, you're welcome to stay."

"We've got a situation in St. Joe needing attention. Believe I'll pass on the conference call."

After Brewer left, Kruger turned to Sharon. "This is your show, I'm not going to say anything unless you need me to."

Sharon pursed her lips and shook her head. "I believe I can handle it, DAD." She was back in her CPA attire today.

Kruger chuckled and dialed the number on the Polycom Sound Station. The call was answered on the second ring.

“Good afternoon, Sean and Sharon.” Alan Seltzer’s voice reverberated from the box. “Rick Flores is here with me. We’ll let you two start the call.”

Sharon referred to her notes and spoke. “After Agent Kruger’s and my conversation with Michael Wolfe, we took a different track with the investigation. As we have reported, Wolfe exposed the relationship of the five victims. All were involved with a scheme, during Operation Desert Storm, to acquire and transport antiquities out of the Middle East.

“Agent Kruger has determined, with subsequent research, these antiquities were indeed transported to a location in Geneva, Switzerland and sold at a private auction. With the assistance of our friends at Interpol, we have determined that most of the auctioned pieces went into private collections. The funds raised by this auction was somewhere in the range of fifty to seventy million dollars. Since the auction was private, actual dollars were hard to determine. But, using various bank records Interpol provided, we have determined the range.”

Sharon paused to wait for questions.

Seltzer said, “Did the records from Interpol indicate who those funds went to?”

“No, they were transferred to a numbered account and, from what we were told, swiftly disbursed to other accounts around the world.”

“Huh,” was Seltzer’s only response.

Sharon continued. "In 1992, three-star general William Little retired, one year short of having twenty years in the military. An unusual occurrence. Subsequent inquiries with the IRS indicated he reported an inheritance of forty million dollars that year. The source was stated to be a great aunt in Belgium."

Flores laughed. "Wish I had a rich aunt like that."

Seltzer said, "No one found all of this suspicious."

"Apparently not." Sharon referred to her notes again. "He wasn't well liked at the Pentagon and the over-all reaction was good riddance."

"Where is he now?"

Sharon looked at Kruger and nodded. He answered the question. "He has an estate in Madagascar. Which, by the way, does not have an extradition treaty with the United States. Did we mention the check he sent with his tax return bounced? He left the country the day he mailed his tax return and has not been back."

"Why is all of this coming out now?" Seltzer sounded frustrated.

Kruger answered. "Because he kept under the radar during his tenure with the army. After he was posted to the Pentagon, everyone discovered he was self-serving and fairly incompetent."

Flores asked. "How did he get promoted to three star? That takes some doing, man."

Taking a deep breath, Kruger responded. "The army was struggling with racial diversity in the seventies and eighties. The color of his skin helped with the promotions. Plus, he was in the top of his class at West Point. He never really had any challenges until Operation Desert Storm and by then he had an exit plan."

Seltzer spoke next. "Where does this leave us, Sharon?"

"With no extradition treaty with Madagascar, we don't have many options."

Kruger was silent, choosing not to say what was on his mind.

Seltzer continued. "Sean, what about the shooters?"

“While there is no definitive proof, there is circumstantial evidence each assassination was conducted by a different shooter.”

“What is the circumstantial evidence?”

“With help from Interpol and the TSA, we can identify four known snipers entering the US days before the shootings. Two were trained by British SAS, one by the French COS and one by Israel’s Mossad. We have no evidence they were present during the shootings. But, they left the US immediately after the shootings occurred. Their collective services told us they were retired and pursuing other employment.”

“Assassinations?”

Kruger didn’t answer.

“I take your silence as a yes.”

“We don’t have any evidence to support a position like that.”

Flores laughed.

Seltzer was silent for several moments. “So we’re at a dead end?”

Sharon answered. “I would say so. Agent Kruger found evidence the sixth member of General Little’s team was killed in an automobile accident in Geneva right after the auction took place eighteen years ago.”

“So, Little is the only surviving member?”

“Yes.”

“Convenient.”

Sharon nodded. “I would agree.”

“Are you two closing the file?”

Kruger responded. "Without evidence the retired snipers were responsible for the shootings, I don't see any other path."

Seltzer said, "What about the Manhattan shooting? You didn't mention anything about it."

Kruger frowned. "Interpol didn't have anything to share with us on that one. We suspect he's an American, but we have no proof."

"Okay, don't put any more resources into the investigation. Sharon, when will you be returning to Washington?"

"Tomorrow."

"Good, we need your assistance on other matters."

The call ended and Kruger looked at Sharon. "You want to have dinner tonight?"

"Yes, one more night together."

A Week Later

Kruger parked his Mustang at the end of the gravel road next to the grassy mound. Wolfe was standing outside the house waiting. When Kruger walked up to him, they shook hands and went inside.

"Michael, I appreciate you talking to me again."

Wolfe nodded but remained quiet.

"Did you know William Little is living on the Island of Madagascar near the city of Toamasina?"

Not letting his surprise at this revelation show, Wolfe kept his face neutral and lied. "I'd heard rumors. Why?"

"We can't touch him."

Wolfe nodded again. "No extradition treaty. Right?"

"Right, no extradition treaty. I haven't told anybody about this, but I was able to confirm four large transfers of money out of a bank account in the Caymans to four separate numbered bank accounts in Switzerland."

Wolfe was silent.

"The account in the Caymans was owned by retired Major Nathan Tucker. As you know, Tucker was the man shot in New York City."

Again, Wolfe did not respond.

"We think Tucker's assassination was separate from the first four."

"Oh, and why is that?"

"We can't find a trace of the shooter in New York. The others were foreign nationals who each entered the country legally a few days before a shooting and left the same day of the shooting. Not really evidence, very circumstantial, but it does indicate a pattern. Wouldn't you agree?"

Wolfe nodded.

"The other piece of evidence we found was a transfer of funds to the account owned by Tucker two weeks before the first shooting. Those funds came from a numbered account in a Swizz bank known to have received funds from a private auction of antiquities in 1992."

Chuckling, Wolfe shook his head. "Why are you telling me all of this Agent Kruger?"

"Professional courtesy. You pointed us in the right direction and I wanted to thank you."

"You could have called to say thank you. Why drive six hours to tell me all this?"

"Six and a half, actually." Kruger shrugged. "I didn't have anything else to do today."

"Somehow, I doubt that. So, why?"

“I checked your alibi in Venezuela.”

Wolfe’s expression remained neutral.

“Very convincing. Well planned and well thought out. You only made one mistake.”

“Oh? Tell me.”

“The credit card account you used at the Marriott in Manhattan was cloned from an American Express account last used in Caracas, Venezuela by a Mexican diplomat. The name on the card used was bogus, but the card worked. It was cloned at the hotel where you were staying.”

Wolfe laughed. “Now how would I have done that?”

“Easy, do I need to explain?”

Taking a deep breath, Wolfe crossed his arms over his chest. “So, what are you planning to do with this assumption of yours, Agent?”

“Not a damn thing.”

Wolfe’s head ticked to the side. “Why?”

“I can’t touch Little. He’s out of my reach. You can.”

“I’m a consultant, Sean.”

Kruger gave Wolfe a half smile. “Yeah, so you’ve said.”

May 2014

Island of Madagascar

The crosshair of the Leopold Scope was centered on a tall man entertaining several guests on his expansive patio. Security guards patrolled the grounds next to the party. The patio was behind a 10,000 square foot mansion on the island’s east side, south of the coastal city of Toamasina. The sniper’s hide was in a sand dune off the beach 1600 meters from the patio.

There was a gentle inland breeze coming off the Indian Ocean. Michael Wolfe adjusted his scope to compensate for the wind.

The tall man entertaining on the porch was retired three star General William Little. Little had been basking in his wealth for twenty-two years and no longer worried about five ex-colleagues and his late trusted co-conspirator, Major Tucker, spilling their story to the FBI. Now in his mid-sixties, he was a politically powerful man on this island off the southeast coast of Africa.

Wolfe knew all of this. Four years earlier, FBI Agent Sean Kruger had revealed the man's location. A fact he had not known at the time. Time and planning were his allies. He was officially at a conference in Dubai, unofficially, he was in Madagascar under one of his many false identities.

Little was laughing at something when the trigger broke on the Barrett M82A1 sniper rifle. The .50 BMG round reached its target 1.87 seconds later. As Wolfe watched, the general's head disappeared in a cloud of mist.

Satisfied with his efforts, he crawled back down the mound and ran toward a Jeep hidden in the dunes one hundred meters from his hide..

Minutes later he drove toward a small airport south of Toamasina where a small private Lear Jet owned by the Mossad waited for him. A slight smile appeared on his tanned and lined face, the ghosts he saw in the mirror every night would be gone the next time he looked.