

## Chapter 2

### The Transaction

#### THURSDAY

Marina and Sonja arrived about two hours before the scheduled transaction and reconnoitered the warehouse. Marina checked the Professor's proximity-sensor recorder. There had been no recorded entrances or exits from the warehouse since Wednesday afternoon—other than those times exactly corresponding to Marina's and Sonja's entrances and exits. *This was a good sign*, Marina contended.

At eight-fifty-five p.m., Marina was sitting on a small box, concealed inside her overturned, spacious seven-foot crate. She changed out one of the latex gloves that both she and Sonja had worn when they were working in the warehouse. Her right glove had torn and exposed her index finger—which could leave a tell-tale fingerprint. After changing the glove, Marina attempted to hang the Professor's door-proximity sensor on a nail in the side of the crate—when suddenly the word *Front* began flashing in red on the sensor. *Shit! They're coming in the front door.* Marina set the device on the floor and listened intently as she peered through a slit in her spacious crate. She heard the footsteps of numerous persons approaching from the direction of the front door.

The warehouse's limited lights blinked on, and six men walked purposefully from the entrance hallway to the center of the warehouse—the only reasonably illuminated area. The lead man, relatively short in stature, carried two oversized briefcases. *That should be the Asian*

*Associates' representative, with the two-million dollars in the two big briefcases*, Marina conjectured. The second man, medium height, carried what looked like a modest-sized cosmetic case. *That has to be the Cathy Enterprises representative, with the merchandise inside the cosmetic case. Pretty small merchandise for two-million dollars*, Marina considered.

The tallest and shortest of the men were impeccably dressed in suits and vests. *The taller man was Richard Morris, Marina's client; the shorter, more portly gentleman—Marina correctly guessed—was the Asian Associates' lawyer*. The fifth man—dressed in well-tailored tan slacks and a cream-colored sport shirt—dragged a three-foot, cube-configured wooden crate to the center of the illuminated area and slapped at it with a handkerchief, dispelling several years of dust.

The Chinese gentleman set his cosmetic case on top of the crate and unlocked it. The sixth man, from the Asian's group, was a portly man dressed in khaki pants, shirt, and jacket. He approached the makeshift table, opened the cosmetic case and, with some difficulty, lifted a three-inch-diameter, golden-colored sphere from the case. The sphere was ostensibly quite heavy. He held the sphere above his eye level, as if attempting to achieve better illumination or see through it. He rotated the sphere on the tips of his fingers, examined it minutely and replaced it back in its indentation in the case. Next, he retrieved a vernier caliper from his coat pocket and measured the diameter of the sphere he had just replaced; then he continued, measuring the diameters of what appeared to be two other similar spheres in the case. He wrote something on an electronic notepad and replaced the calipers in his pocket.

He then extracted a thin, light chain from his jacket pocket and threw one end over a low-hanging metal strut; he adjusted the lengths of the chain ends and secured them with a spring clip. From another pocket, he retrieved

what appeared to be a small, portable, high-precision strain-gauge scale. He attached the scale to the hanging chain and placed one of the golden spheres in a fabric sling attached to the scale. He waited for the scale to reach equilibrium and scratched a few more numbers on the electronic pad. He repeated his performance with the two other spheres.

Then he cupped a sphere in both hands. He gazed upward toward the ceiling, then closed his eyes as if he were concentrating—contemplating some phenomena within the sphere...as if he were communicating some message to the sphere...or the sphere were communicating some message to him. He continued to silently contemplate the golden sphere for several minutes. Everyone watched in silence. Eventually, a very broad smile spread across his face, and he carefully replaced the sphere in the case. He said something to his Asian colleague, which Marina could not hear; then he removed a second sphere and repeated the enigmatic ritual. He later duplicated the performance with the third sphere.

Finally, he turned to his Asian associate and nodded his head in assent.

The Chinese gentleman carefully closed and latched the cosmetic case and removed it from the makeshift packing-crate table. The Asian placed one of the large briefcases on the crate and opened it. The Chinese expert, *Tan-Slacks*, stepped forward and lifted a stack of banded currency from the briefcase and began examining it with a magnifier and several chemical sticks. For the first time, the men began to converse among themselves. The currency examiner expended considerable time rooting through dozens of banded packages at random locations in the briefcase. He then requested the second case be opened and repeated his time-consuming examination.

While the currency examination was being conducted, the Chinese gentleman and the Asian engaged in conversation. The two men wandered toward the dark

west end of the warehouse—outside of Sonja’s range of view and outside of Marina’s zone of interest—which was riveted on the proceedings in the middle of the warehouse.

Concluding his investigation, the currency examiner carefully rearranged the currency in the last briefcase, shut the lid, closed two catches and slumped to the floor. The man in khaki, showing some concern, approached the currency examiner, keeled over beside him and sprawled on top of him.

Richard Morris—Marina’s client—exclaimed, “What the hell...” as a small black hole magically appeared in the middle of his forehead and *he* crumpled to the floor. The portly lawyer screamed and turned to run, but he contracted a black hole in the side temple of his head before he could take his first step.

Marina was frozen with incomprehension and horror. Apparently, a massacre had taken place in a matter of seconds, before she realized what was happening...and could react.

Marina burst from the side of her crate just in time to see a small black figure, wearing a ski mask, race—with incredible speed—to the center of the warehouse and throw a rifle, with a telescopic sight and a large silencer, onto the floor beside the bodies. The black figure grabbed the three cases and raced toward the front door. Marina raised her gun, attempting to fire at the fleeing figure, but it was already out of sight around the corner in the hallway leading to the front door. Marina screamed, “Sonja—STOP HIM!” Marina heard a *loud crash* as she raced toward the front door.

As Marina rounded the corner leading into the hallway, she saw Sonja dragging the unconscious black figure by one handcuffed wrist toward a steel I-beam column, where she propped the inert figure into a sitting position and cuffed the other wrist behind the column.

“He’s out, colder than a mackerel,” Sonja shouted. “Marina, keep your gun on the hallway, in case there are more of these bastards.”

Marina took cover behind an I-beam column and pointed her gun down the hallway. "What the *hell* happened?" Marina asked.

Sonja finished cuffing the black figure and quickly moved behind the I-beam column with Marina. "I don't know; I was totally stunned and just didn't compute when the bodies started dropping," Sonja admitted. "I finally woke up when you yelled, and this bastard came racing toward the front door with the three cases. As he ran past my cubical, I slid that bench in his path." Sonja indicated a long, low wooden bench lying on its side with a freshly broken leg. "He tripped on the bench and became *airborne* along with the three cases. He smashed his head into the front door; I thought that cosmetic case was going to go right through the front door." Sonja nudged the case with the toe of her shoe. "Wow! It's heavy as hell...but doesn't seem to be damaged in any way."

"I wonder if anybody is alive back there?" Marina questioned.

"I don't know—I think we'd better do a little exploring...but damn carefully. Cover me, Marina, while I check the bodies."

Marina and Sonja moved cautiously down the hallway, hugging the left wall. They listened carefully for any sounds. Marina stared at the four corpses heaped in the center of the warehouse, and her eyes moistened with tears.

"Where is the Asian...and the Chinese gentleman?" Sonja inquired.

"I'll bet they're those dark lumps near the side wall in that far corner," Marina responded, pointing toward the extreme west wall of the warehouse about a hundred feet away—where one of the few surviving ceiling lamps illuminated two dark forms.

"Cover me while I check." Sonja strode in an erratic pattern and took cover behind several I-beam columns as she approached the dark shapes that Marina had indicated.

Experiencing no sounds, movement or gunfire, Sonja approached the dark forms, checked the two bodies and searched their wallets for identification. “They’re both *very* dead,” she yelled to Marina.

“They were probably the first ones to get it,” Marina yelled back.

Sonja scurried to the center of the warehouse and checked the bodies of the four men. After several seconds, she bellowed to Marina, “The assassin was an excellent marksman. They’re all *very* dead too.” Sonja again searched wallets and pockets for identification. Then she picked up the rifle and carried it with her as she returned to where Marina was standing. “Damn fine optics in this scope.” She examined the silencer. “It’s a unique overkill configuration that I’ve never seen before, probably one of a kind, probably turned out on a high-quality lathe—not a mass-production item.”

Sonja was still wearing her thin-latex surgeon’s gloves. Sonja had conjectured several days earlier that this job had unsavory aspects; she reinforced an observation by their dead banker-client—Richard Morris—that this deal was being transacted like a drug deal. Marina reminisced Sonja’s advice: *Wear gloves—because, if things should go sour and someone decides this was not a kosher deal, we may wish not to have our fingerprints all over the warehouse. Richard is the only one who knows that we’re involved, and hopefully he’d be discreet.*

*Richard Morris will be totally discreet now,* Marina lamented.

Sonja carried the rifle through the hallway and placed it near, but out of reach, of the assassin. “Stupid bastard. He’s not wearing gloves. His fingerprints will be all over the rifle. The police will compare the slugs in the bodies with the barrel rifling, and he’ll be convicted of all six murders.”

“No! I don’t think so!” Marina was trying unsuccessfully to find a pulse in the assassin’s throat.

“He’s dead! That blow on the head must have killed him.” Marina lifted the ski mask. “He’s definitely Asian,” Marina observed. “He’s about five-foot-seven, extremely wiry and muscular, black hair, brown eyes, about 160 or 170 very-solid pounds.” She searched his pockets. “He has no identification at all.”

“That figures,” Sonja acknowledged. “This place could be crawling with the bad guys at any minute; I think we should get the hell out of here and call the police. We can’t leave these cases here because the bad guys could arrive *before* the police and grab them. I’ll take the small case and keep us covered. You grab the two money briefcases—but keep your gun handy.”

Marina and Sonja exited the back door of the warehouse under a helpful cloak of darkness. The moon was at about half-phase, but the back door of the warehouse faced north and the building cast a moon-shadow on the duo. Sonja’s car was about two blocks from the warehouse. As the two approached the car, Sonja removed her jacket. She handed her magna-key to Marina and said, “You drive.” When they reached the car, Sonja used her jacket to cover the back license plate and scrambled into the back seat—as Marina slowly moved the vehicle forward. Marina negotiated the vehicle cautiously down a dark street, for about two blocks, before turning on the headlights—the half-moon provided just enough light to navigate.

Marina took a circuitous route back to the office, to assure that no one was following. Sonja extinguished the video and caller-ID functions on her vidphone and called the police using a complex, multi-sequence routing procedure that precluded any possible trace of the satellite-cellular call. Sonja reported the six homicides, and she advised the desk sergeant that the murderer was apprehended and was secured with handcuffs near the front door of the warehouse. She also informed the desk sergeant that the assailant had tripped on a stool, may have a concussion or worse and may require medical

attention—better send an ambulance. Sonja wanted the police to understand that the assailant's death was an accident—that he had not been beaten over the head and murdered.

“Six murders! Killer apprehended! Lady! I *gotta* have your name!”

“Fat chance, Sergeant!” Sonja hung up. “Damn it! That sounded like Sergeant Boswell. I hope he didn't recognize my voice. Shit! I should have let you make the call, Marina.”