

Arizona Heat

Chapter 1

The familiar notification buzz of the communication device brought Emily out of her dreams and back into reality. She mumbled a curse under her breath as she stretched out an arm and, sleepily, fumbled on the bedroom floor, among her discarded clothes, for the source of the disturbance.

Having located it, she rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and, holding the device in one hand, tried to focus on the message, her face lit by the soft, blue light that made the words visible to her tired eyes.

‘CODE RED. CONFERENCE ROOM. 09:00.’

Emily cursed again as her gaze shifted towards the alarm clock on the bedside table; it was already 07:30. Fighting her overwhelming desire to roll back over and believe that the message was just a part of the dream she had been enjoying, Emily rolled out of bed and headed for the bathroom. The rush of warm water from the shower head had an instant effect on her and she felt her senses returning and the stiffness in her body was abating.

Her mind focused on the situation. She was Emily Sanders, 29 years old, well respected agent in her organisation - a high flyer even; the youngest agent ever to reach such a high rank. Code Red meant that this was the most serious of situations and she had been chosen to solve the problem, whatever it was. Sleep could wait; she was needed.

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On entering The Clubhouse, Mayfair, Emily made her way to the private conference room where Giles Markerson, Head of Operations and his working party were waiting for her. Giles, a former Mi6 agent, was founder of The Elite Agency; a prestigious, private organisation supporting the work of the British Government around the world.

‘Emily; good to see you again. It’s been a while. I think you know everyone here. So, to business!’

Emily sat down and poured herself a coffee. She had never been entirely sure how genuine Giles was. She was one of the best agents in the organisation yet work had been scarce for her despite the fact that the agency’s business had been brisk.

The lights in the room were dimmed and the screen at the far end of the room was lit up by the image of a face that Emily recognised immediately.

‘Martin?’

She had not intended to blurt out the name quite so loudly and she became aware of heads turning in her direction at this. Control of one’s emotions is a key trait in remaining discreet and, indeed, safe in her line of business. There on the screen was the face of Martin. They had worked successfully together years before and had become quite close. But she had not

had contact with him for months. He was dead, wasn't he? That is what she, along with everyone else, had been lead to believe.

'Yes,' Giles began, 'Martin Turnbull. A former agency partner of yours. Presumed dead but, seemingly, alive and in a spot of bother. This is where you come in.'

Having been taken aback, Emily composed herself as Giles continued with the briefing.

'It seems that Martin is being held by foreign nationals in a secret location somewhere in the Mojave Desert. We received a coded message, believed to be from Martin, and we were able to track it to that region, but not accurately. It is imperative that you can find him and rescue him. He will either be in possession or know the whereabouts of important documents relating to the production and sale of weapons of mass destruction which could threaten the safety of millions. If they are not in his possession, you must work together to retrieve them.'

Emily remained silent as Giles continued to elaborate more on the mission, trying to take in everything. She was desperate to get started. She was a professional with professional pride and, after all, it was Martin; she loved working with him and she had missed that so much. Was it mere coincidence that Giles had used her sparingly, despite her proven track record of success, since Martin had been sent away and disappeared?

Giles outlined the roles of all the members of the team, both those in the room and the U.S.A. contacts that Emily would need.

As the team dispersed to begin their work, Giles took Emily to one side for a private chat.

'Emily, I am sure you understand the importance of this mission. We must secure those documents.'

'And bring Martin back safely,' added Emily.

'All agents understand that their safety is not guaranteed, Emily. Martin knows, as do you, that the success of your mission will be judged on the documents reaching the British Government so that an international crisis can be averted.'

While Emily knew these words to be true, she couldn't help but reflect for an instant on the human aspect;- a man's life was at stake; a friend, a colleague. But so, potentially, were the lives of millions.

'Giles, I understand,' she replied, firmly. 'Why me now though? Despite my successful mission record, you don't seem to have used me much recently. Why now?'

'That's not a question to discuss at this moment, Emily. I just know that this is the mission for you. You know Martin and you trust each other. That will be vital for success. We can discuss the recent past on your return.'

Not convinced by Giles's response, but desperate to prove herself again, Emily left to begin the preparations. Time was of the essence. Martin was in danger. The world was in danger. Securing the documents quickly had to be her priority!

In the days that followed, there were briefings, presentations and vital, cutting edge equipment distributed. Less than a week after the initial message had come through, Emily found herself on her way; a mixture of emotions flowing through her mind. She was a driven woman with professional pride in every pore and a determination to succeed in this mission. However, a personal and emotional link to Martin existed and she had a lingering suspicion that, just maybe, all was not quite as it seemed. Extreme caution and alertness would be needed.

Elements to include later in the story;-

Is the whole thing a 'set up'? Is Martin really still alive? How would he have sent a coded message?

Contact and cover in Las Vegas???

Nationality of foreign nationals???

Is USA best place??? Which other countries involved?

Where else will the mission take her/them?

Is Giles a double agent? (Most likely!)

Has Emily been suspected of being a double agent?

Is Martin the double agent? Use Emily to get documents?

Martin – Emily; more than just working partners?

Who are the foreign nationals?

Obstacles to success of the mission – excitement?

Mission – success or failure?

Plot –middle chapters

-Emily goes to Phoenix + meets contact

-Goes undercover in Las Vegas casino where foreign nationals are regulars

-Finds location of where Martin is being held and rescues him

-Working together they plan to take the documents from a vault below a power installation

Final Chapter

The lone guard outside the vault in the depths of the cave became distracted by the movements of a small furry rodent scurrying along the floor in and out of the evenly spaced, but dim, light.

Emily sensed her moment; the element of surprise was in her favour and she slipped forward. One silent, invisible emission was enough to stun him and send the guard slumping to the ground.

She indicated to Martin that the way was clear. He sprang forward and placed the electronic device on the vault's lock. Almost immediately, the heavy metal gate sprang forward and Martin was able to pull it wide open for them to enter.

"We don't have much time," whispered Martin. "We both know what we are looking for. You search that side of the vault and I will cover this side."

Emily nodded and set to work, both of them efficiently rifling through files looking for the documents they had come for, risked their lives for.

Within minutes a smile spread across Emily's face and she turned, triumphantly waving a handful of papers. Martin moved over to her and took them from her, glancing quickly through to substantiate her success.

"Quick. Let's get out of here," confirmed Martin. "We don't have much time. They will be aware of our presence by now."

Moving stealthily, the pair made their way towards ground level and the escape exit. A sudden soft noise and shadow movement on the wall alerted Martin in time and he turned in time to parry the intended blow of a rifle butt from a heavily armed guard. Emily reacted quickly and stunned the opponent with her stun gun.

"Thanks," smiled Martin.

Both knew that the most difficult part of the escape route was still to come.

Having made their way to the ground floor without further incident, Martin took a piece of large metal from his bag and started to prise open a door in a side corridor, rather than risk the reception area of the building. One sharp yank and the metal split the lock, sending splinters of wood and metal flying everywhere. The sound of boots coming along the corridor and the high pitched sound of the alarm stirred the two agents into rapid action.

Sprinting through the door to the outside, they found themselves in the car park, but not alone. Guards were heading towards them from the main entrance, weapons raised and preparing to fire. Emily and Martin sprinted, as fast as possibly but ducking down between cars as bullets began to fly over their heads. There was the sound of bullets hitting metal and bullets shattering glass as the two of them dived into a jeep waiting nearby.

Pushing the occupant roughly through the door and onto the tarmac, Martin grabbed the wheel and the engine sprang into life as bullets still whistled close by. His senses told him the way to chose and the jeep raced off. Two pursuers were dashing between the parked cars and, as they emerged in his path, he accelerated still further and sent them spinning and dropping, lifeless, onto the tarmac. The same fate befell the unarmed sentry at the exit barrier.

Martin could not slacken his pace as he became aware of pursuers now in vehicles. The hot, arid desert road passed beneath the fast-spinning wheels of the jeep.

“How far behind are they,” shouted Martin above the incessant noise of the straining engine of the jeep.

“About 200 yards!” bellowed Emily. “I think they may be gaining on us though.”

Martin rammed his foot down still further, straining every sinew in his leg. The needle on the speedometer moved still higher, the noise intensified still further and the dust surrounded the vehicle, making vision more difficult.

“I’ve lost sight of them now!” Emily struggled to make herself heard.

The outskirts of Phoenix burst into view and provided Martin with the opportunity to lose his that he had been waiting for. Luckily, the main streets were far from throbbing with traffic and he weaved in and out easily, making pursuit difficult. Rounding the corner, he sensed an opportunity and tightened his grip on the steering wheel. A sharp left turn taken into an underground car park and bringing the jeep to a sudden halt behind a pillar that obscured it from the road. It was a risk and neither of them dared even breathe as, equally, they could not see if the pursuers had seen them and followed them in or passed by.

Minutes passed. Nothing.

Emily and Martin looked at each other in silence, apart from the continued heavy breathing brought on by the chase. Finally, they got out of the jeep and made their way on foot and public transport back to their hotel, all the while remaining vigilant.

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Emily took a delicate sip from her fruit-filled cocktail as she and Martin sat on the hotel terrace watching the sun set behind the horizon.

“What are your plans after we return back to London and deliver the documents?” she began.

“We are not returning to London.”

Emily sat bolt upright. That was not the reply she had been expecting.

“I am sorry to have involved you in this, Emily. I have clients who are prepared to pay very good money for those documents and I intend to deliver,” continued Martin, calmly.

“Why?” Emily began. “Why are you doing this? Why did you have to involve me? We were partners; close friends. Why the hell did you need me to do your dirty work!”

Her voiced became raised as she knew what would come next.

“What happens to me now!”

“I needed the best person to get me away from my captors and that was you. I needed someone I could trust and that was you. I needed someone to help me retrieve the documents and that was you,” replied Martin.

“You know the score,” he continued. “There is no room for sentiment in this business, either personal or sentiment towards your country. As for what happens next, that’s sort of up to you. You can take a cut and walk away from your country or ..”

Emily knew the second option without Martin having to finish his sentence.

“That’s not a choice at all, Martin,” Emily said, slowly.

“Well it’s a choice you have to make,” said Martin, “and now.”

Emily had failed to notice that Martin’s right hand had been in his jacket pocket throughout the conversation. She knew what else was inside that pocket and she felt a shiver run through her.

“Martin. You know that I cannot join in with your treachery. Surely all that we have been through together means something to you? Come with me and let’s complete our mission. Pretend this conversation never happened.”

“You know I can’t do that now, Emily. It’s gone too far. You know too much.”

After a second’s silence, Martin continued, “So, you leave me with no option.”

Emily closed her eyes momentarily, waiting for the pain to course through her body, but none came. Had her death been painless?

She dared to open her eyes and, immediately, saw the figure of Martin, slumped in his chair, head tilted onto one shoulder. Standing by the side of the chair was Giles Markerson.

“It seems I came in at just the right moment,” said Giles, a knowing smile spread across his face.

“How did you know? How did you know where we were? How?” Emily said, confused.

“We are not amateurs, you know,” began Giles. “We had our suspicions about Martin after his ‘disappearance’. Just a simple tracking and listening device in your equipment. We couldn’t tell you. It would have changed the dynamic. We were fully aware of your history together and we needed you to help confirm our suspicions.”

Emily glanced at Martin’s unmoving body on the chair opposite.

“What you mean, Giles, is you used me. Used me like an object. An object you could sacrifice, if necessary!”

“You know there’s no room for sentiment in this business,” retorted Giles in his officious tone.

Emily hauled herself upright and stood facing Giles.

“Those are exactly the words Martin used,” Emily said forcefully.

There was no more to be said. She gave one last glance at Martin’s body, one final stare into the unemotional face of Giles Markerson and turned, walking briskly through the doors, into the hotel and away forever from The Elite Agency.