





2

Eight Five Five



Farlowe unscrewed his silencer, holstered his pistol, and turned to Phillips, who scanned the scene around him.

“Eight hundred heavy, times two,” Phillips said into his Bluetooth headset.

Farlowe studied his handiwork. A clean entry wound on Jarvis’ forehead only hinted at the horrors that were once the back of his skull.

“Heavy hangs the head that wears the crown,” he muttered under his breath as he listened in on Phillips. Farlowe could see Devra’s body laying on its side, partially obscured by shadows.

Phillips turned to him. “Cleaners are en route. Two minutes.”

“Shoulda been center-mass. We wouldn’t need so many sponges,” Farlowe said.

“That’s the way it came in,” Phillips replied as he moved



toward Devra's corpse.

Farlowe surveyed his surroundings. He didn't see anybody, but he did hear a voice. Female, Swiss-German accent. Frantic.

Phillips grunted and stepped over to Devra. Blood had sprayed onto the statue behind her. Two head-shots, just like the mission request. But something was wrong.

"She's calling the police," Farlowe said.

"What?" Phillips was distracted, which is precisely what he shouldn't have been at this moment.

Farlowe moved closer to Phillips. "I can understand what she's saying. She's calling the police."

"It's not her." Phillips rolled the body at his feet onto its back.

Phillips looked at Farlowe as a dark panel van pulled up next to them. Three cleaners, all in their late twenties, two men and one woman, quickly jumped out of the van and moved to the bodies.

"It's not Bogdanovich... What the hell?"

If Farlowe was surprised by this news, his years of training and fieldwork had taught him how to hide it.

Farlowe reached for his weapon and started to screw back on the silencer.

"I'll take care of the witness."

"No. We assumed somebody would see this. We're in a very public place."

"So now what?" Farlowe asked Phillips.

"Now we clean up this mess and get the hell out of here. Now Bogdanovich is on the run. So now you find her. I want no open communications. You talk to nobody but me. I'll give you your next move when I know what it is. Now you go."





Suddenly, they both were bathed in green light. Like a plasma. Farlowe looked for a source. There wasn't one. Still, he kept looking. It was coming from Jarvis' corpse. Enveloping them.

"What the..."

Phillips grabbed hold of Farlowe's arm and pulled him backwards as the cleaning crew covered their eyes.

"Everyone get back! It's XM!" Phillips yelled, but to Farlowe, it was like listening to someone from below the surface of water. Distorted. Muffled.

Farlowe had a sense of falling backwards as his eyes locked onto the glowing plasma floating near him. It was assembling itself, like a mist with intelligence. Farlowe heard a deafening hiss. It sounded like something he had heard many times before. The final exhale. A death rattle. Then, the mist drifted towards the base of the Escher statue and was sucked into the earth.

"Farlowe! Farlowe!"

He would never know what happened for the next few seconds. Farlowe tried to force his thoughts into focus, and when he did, everybody was gone. He was alone in front of the statue. His pistol and silencer were missing.

"Farlowe!"

The agent looked down at his hands. The woman cleaner was swabbing his hands with disinfectant, removing gunshot residue. The cleaner next to her was dropping his pistol and silencer into a large plastic bag.

"You with us? Or are you with someone else?" Phillips asked Farlowe.

"Completely with you, sir," Farlowe lied. He realized that he was momentarily out. He didn't remember them taking his

