

## CHAPTER ONE

### Lima, Peru—the Gran Hotel Bolívar

1992

Until the general called, I'd been pacing around my suite on the fifth floor, wondering what was keeping Marisa. In the past she'd always been waiting in the room—towels on the bed, dressed in a bathrobe—as eager to catch up as I was. So when the phone rang, I expected to hear her voice, telling me she was stuck in traffic. Or the fog.

“Professor Thorsen?” said a man with a raspy voice.

"Yes, who is this?"

“My name is Real," he said in Quechua, "General Clemente Real, commander of army forces in Ayacucho. Would you mind if I come up to your room? It's urgent.”

The uneasiness I'd felt before turned to near panic. A general? Had something terrible happened to Marisa? “What is this about, General?"

“It's about the war, Maestro. It's about secrets. It's about you.”

"You must have me confused with someone else."

"No, caballero. No mistake. No confusion."

I sank onto the sofa. What the hell was he talking about? And why was he speaking Quechua? I answered in Spanish. “Listen, General, could you be a little more specific?”

“We’ll discuss it when I get there. I’m downstairs. It’ll take me only a few—”

The lights faded and went out. The room darkened. From somewhere came a shouted curse, and when I spoke back into the phone, I realized we’d been cut off. Or he’d hung up.

I replaced the receiver and tried to make sense of the call. An urgent matter, he had said—and in Quechua. Now why would a Peruvian general be interested in me? And how would he know I spoke the language of the Andes? Surely it had nothing to do with Marisa.

Or did it?

I took out her e-mail and read it for at least the hundredth time.

*My dearest Mark:*

*I’ve left him. It’s over. If you still want what we’ve been talking about, I’m ready. No more excuses. I can either fly to Tampa next week or you can come to our place and we can leave together, maybe spend a few days in Acapulco on the way home. You can always use the economics conference in San Marcos as your pretext.*

*I can hardly wait to see you again.*

*All my love, Marisa.*

*PS: Please be careful. Peru is falling apart.*

Our place was this place, where we’d first made love more than ten years ago. Before my world collapsed. Before we’d gone separate ways. But now...now we were putting the world right. Let Peru fall apart. Let the Shining Path take over. All that mattered was that she’d soon be in my arms again and we’d be flying home.

But why was a Peruvian general coming up to my room?

The minutes ticked by and still no word from Marisa. No general either. Nothing but fog outside the window, a noisy protest rally in the plaza, and a nasty feeling in my stomach.

I swept back the drapes and stared over Plaza San Martín, five stories below. The fog—thick here, lighter there—swallowed whole buildings, most of the demonstrators, and even the bronze horse of General San Martín. A man with a Lenin cap and red armband was pumping up the crowd with a bullhorn, shouting about the brutality of President Fujimori's *Mano Dura* policies, his voice competing with the roar of traffic and the blare of radios. The crowd cheered, placards waved, and their chant rolled over the plaza like a tidal wave.

“Strike! Strike! Strike!”

Just like the last time I was here with Marisa. I closed my eyes and pictured her in this very room: Marisa with the long dark hair and sparkling blue eyes, propped up in bed beside me, saying she'd made a terrible mistake, that she wanted to leave her husband and move back to the States. With me. Had she changed her mind? Had her husband found out?

"Strike! Strike! Strike!"

The phone rang again.

*Please, dear God, let it be her.*

I scooped it up and groaned when I heard the voice of my dean in Tampa, yelling in his New York accent. "What the hell's going on, Mark? Your assistant told me you'd gone to Peru. Don't you read the papers? There's a war going on."

"It's a personal matter, Dean, and you don't have to shout. I can hear you fine."

"Well, I can't hear you worth a damn. Does this have anything to do with a woman?"

"Who told you that?"

"I'm just repeating what Jenny told me. Said you went out and bought some cool new

sunglasses. Ray-Ban. Also that you've been growing a mustache. Damn, Mark, a mustache?"

"Look, Dean, I'm here to attend a conference. Okay?"

"Fine by me, but why didn't you fill out a travel form? And what am I supposed to tell the president? She's been hounding me ever since your nomination to dean—wanting to know your qualifications, your administrative experience, when you can meet with her."

"Just tell her I'll be back in a few days, Monday at the latest."

"This better be good. She's not the type to be kept waiting."

The knot in my stomach twisted tighter. "Listen, Dean, I—"

"Monday," he shouted. "Nine sharp. In my office."

The line clicked as if he'd slammed down the phone. The noise in the plaza grew louder. And the receiver was still in my hand when someone knocked on the door.

Not a Marisa knock, but the pounding knock of arrogance, as if the police were outside and ready to kick in the door.