

I

Zander checked his reflection. The custom-made suit made him feel taller and slimmer. He squared his shoulders and brushed the jacket flat over his stomach before smoothing his hair down with both hands. The glass inside his thick-rimmed spectacles was clear. He didn't wear them to aid his vision.

'You look good.'

Lexi's voice sounded distant; he was consumed with what he was about to do: if he was up to it; if he could get away with it.

'I need to go alone,' he said.

She didn't reply, but he knew she understood. They had learned to respect each other's need for space over the years. The walk to the lift was short and the trip to the 36th floor swift, with just enough time to put on his gloves. He stepped out and checked his watch: 4 p.m. Philip had said he liked to sit in the bar in the early evenings on weekends because it was always empty then.

Zander moved to the entrance. The door glass was smoked but the window next to it had a small border of clear glazing. He angled his head so he could see the black-and-white room within; there was no sign of anyone there.

Perhaps Philip was late today.

Before he could type in the six-digit code that Philip had used a few days earlier, a figure opened the door from within. Zander quickly stepped away and moved towards the lift. He couldn't risk being seen.

The suit felt heavy and hot on his body and the shirt underneath was sticking to his skin. He risked a glance back and saw a barman walking in the opposite direction. He hadn't anticipated that the bar would be staffed. That was stupid. The risks were too high. He had Lexi and AJ to think about. He reached out to the lift call button.

Then again, the barman leaving might be a sign.

He turned to watch the young man reach the end of the corridor and disappear around the corner. He felt it in every muscle and sinew: he wasn't the prey racing for cover. He was the panther.

Zander checked his watch; then he strode back to the door and typed in the code. If the bar was empty, he would return to his room and rethink. But if Philip was here, alone, then game on.

The door felt heavy as he pushed it wide and stepped inside the room. The interior smelled of freshly cut lilies and espresso. There were plush black and white chairs in pairs around glass tables, each set positioned far enough away from the others to afford residents the privacy they expected. Floor-to-ceiling glass ran the length of the right-hand wall, looking out over the Thames to the city beyond: a city still drenched in afternoon sun.

Zander placed both gloved hands into the pockets of

his trousers. At a table tucked into the corner, out of sight of the door, a lone figure sat sipping whisky.

Zander was unlikely to afford his target any mercy, and all hope was lost when Philip Berringer looked his way. His eyes widened in surprise and then narrowed as he said, ‘You came back.’

‘I moved in.’

‘Congratulations.’ The words were contradicted by the man’s body language. Philip was evidently irritated that someone like Zander would live in the same building as someone like him: someone so important and sickeningly rich.

Zander’s eyes scanned the room, taking in every last detail. He was hyper-alert, his breath steady. He felt calm, in control, powerful. The room was empty other than the two of them but the barman could come back at any moment.

‘Have you seen what’s going on down there?’ Zander walked to the glass door and slid it open. The breeze felt cool on his face. He stepped out on to the balcony and looked back at Philip. ‘Come see.’

Zander rested his arms on the balustrade, taking care to cover his gloved hands with his elbows. He glanced down at the grass, thirty-six floors below.

For a moment, it seemed that Philip might not move. Zander had spent hours – days even – fantasizing about ways to show the smug bastard that he wasn’t someone to cast aside. And, in his mind, this scenario had run without a hitch.

Make it happen, said the voice in his head.

‘You’ll never believe it,’ Zander said.

Philip remained in his seat.

Hold your nerve.

‘Seriously, man. You will not believe your eyes.’

Finally, he heard the tinkling of glass as Philip lowered his drink to the table and slid back in his chair.

Zander smiled. No one could resist a mystery.

‘I don’t see anything.’ Philip sounded bored as he reached the balcony.

‘No,’ Zander said. ‘Down there.’ He leaned forward as far as he could so that his torso was folded over the glass and his head hung low.

As anticipated, Philip copied him. ‘I still—’

Zander stepped back, bent low and – with both hands – lifted the man so that his feet came up from the floor. Philip’s body pivoted forwards. He grabbed at the glass. He tried to push backwards, but Zander kept lifting his legs higher and higher. Philip kicked and wriggled and banged but didn’t scream or cry out.

Well, not until he fell.

Afterwards Zander walked back into the bar and collected one of the white chairs. He carried it on to the balcony and placed it where Philip had been standing. This had been Lexi’s idea, as had the latex gloves.

‘If you insist on doing it, do it right,’ she had said.

Then he removed the matchbox from his pocket. He’d bought it on a whim in the market. Bulls Eye Matches. It felt fitting. He took a single match, struck it,

and watched it burn. The whole thing had taken less than four minutes. He looked towards the balcony and listened to the distant sound of a woman screaming.

Smiling, he placed the matchbox on the table opposite his victim's drink and then carefully laid the extinguished match on top.

'One down,' he said to the empty room.

Bloom arrived at the custody suite five minutes earlier than she had been requested. The call had come from an officer working for Detective Chief Inspector Nadia Mirza. Bloom had been surprised. She had first met Mirza a few months earlier. The DCI had been holding the then Foreign Secretary Gerald Porter in custody while investigating claims that he had sold British secrets to an unknown foreign power. Porter had told Mirza he would only cooperate if Bloom handled a personal matter for him first. He wanted his estranged niece Scarlett found and reunited with the family. But his motives were not pure. He had used Bloom to unwittingly pass coded details of his location to his associates, who had then liberated him, much to Mirza's fury.

Bloom had called Mirza to apologize for her part in the whole mess and reassure the DCI that she had not been complicit in Porter's escape. They had ended the call on good terms, but Bloom knew her card had been marked, so she was surprised to be asked to provide a consultation today.

The custody sergeant checked her identification and then made a call to say she had arrived. A few moments later DCI Mirza entered the room with a fair-haired young man in a shirt and tie. The fact that Mirza was

working out of a police station meant she had been removed from her post heading up a specialist police unit within the Ministry of Defence.

‘Dr Bloom, thank you for coming in.’ Mirza did not meet Bloom’s eye. She was either embarrassed by her change of professional fortunes or still seething over Bloom’s part in it. ‘This is Tyler Rowe, our behavioural investigative advisor.’

‘Nice to finally meet you, Dr Bloom. I’ve read a lot of the case notes from your time with the police,’ said Rowe.

Behavioural investigative advisors were the National Crime Agency’s new term for offender profilers. Bloom had spent the first decade of her career as a police psychologist, producing suspect profiles and assisting with interview techniques. In those days the field had been new and most officers were highly sceptical of it, but she had been employed by a forward-thinking assistant chief constable who had put together a small team of specialist advisors to assist major crime inquiries. It had been a fascinating time and she had earned a great deal of respect from officers, becoming one of the most well-known and consulted of her profession. But there was never sufficient access to either witnesses or perpetrators. She was always questioning them via others, a reality that she found increasingly untenable. She needed to be in the room to really find out what made a person tick, and so she’d taken up the challenge set by a sparky, ex-secret service agent she’d met at a conference where she had been speaking on the Psychology of Crime. The

man in question was now her professional partner, Marcus Jameson, and the challenge he'd set was to prove no one is better placed to solve a mystery than a psychologist and a spy. Nearly six years later they had a strong track record investigating cases that were too tenuous for the justice system to take on, such as locating some of the UK's hundreds of thousands of missing people.

'Please call me Augusta,' Bloom said to Rowe, wondering if she'd ever looked so young when she'd been starting out in a similar role. 'I'm not sure why you need me when they have you on staff.'

'We've brought someone in for questioning and would like you to observe the interview,' Mirza said.

Bloom followed DCI Mirza and Rowe into a small office. She wouldn't be allowed in the interview room – that was reserved for investigating officers and legal advisors – but she would be able to watch it all live on a TV screen in an adjacent room.

DCI Mirza took a seat in front of the screen. 'A body was found decomposing in the passenger seat of a Lamborghini outside the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel on Thursday last week. The gentleman in question, Sheikh Nawaf al Saud, had checked in the previous Friday and checked out again on the Monday but his car was left covered on their forecourt.'

'I take it he didn't die from natural causes if the car was covered?'

'That's the crazy part,' said Rowe. 'The pathologist found the body's organs had begun to accumulate gas, which suggests he had been dead going on for a week.'

‘Which is impossible if he checked out on Monday,’ said Mirza, finally looking Bloom in the eye. ‘We believe from his previous movements on Friday that the deceased hired the car himself and drove it to the hotel where he was seen checking in with a Caucasian female. Then at some point over the next twelve hours he was murdered and left under the cover of the car outside. After which point the murderer stayed on for the rest of the weekend living his victim’s life before checking out on Monday.’

‘That’s fairly brazen. Did CCTV not see who covered the car?’

‘Whoever did this is smart. There are very few blind spots in the CCTV coverage, but the Lamborghini was parked in one.’

‘So, how—?’ Bloom was about to ask how she could help when she saw on screen the person they were about to interview.

Seraphine Walker was immaculately dressed as always with her long blonde hair fastened at the nape of her neck; her legs were crossed and her hands rested casually on her lap. She looked as if she were sitting in a waiting room, rather than one designed for interrogation. Her gaze momentarily moved to the camera and for a beat or two Bloom looked into her eyes.

Despite looking like a woman of wealth and respectability, 29-year-old Seraphine Walker was a high-functioning psychopath. Twelve months earlier Bloom had revealed her to be the mastermind of an elaborate game designed to tempt other psychopaths to compete

for a position in her organization: an organization set up to manipulate and control global events from the shadows. Bloom and Jameson had managed to expose the game, but Seraphine had walked free thanks to her network of allies within the justice system. But this was only part of the story. Bloom and Seraphine's history ran much deeper. Their mothers had been best friends at school. Bloom was twelve years older, so they'd had little contact as children, but when fourteen-year-old Seraphine had stabbed her school caretaker with a pencil, Bloom had offered to help. She had been a freshly qualified psychologist keen to practise her new skills and it hadn't taken her long to realize Seraphine was different. Suspecting the young girl was showing early signs of psychopathy, she had tried her best to help and guide her. But it had all gone horribly wrong.

'Does she know I'm here?' Bloom sat heavily in the chair with her coat still buttoned. She and Seraphine could not be more different in their appearance. Where Seraphine opted for glamour, using her outfits as a weapon of distraction, Bloom believed clothes were for comfort and, on occasion, blending in. Hence the plain grey coat and comfortable shoes.

'No.'

'You think Seraphine is involved in this murder? How?' Bloom said.

'I would prefer not to say at this stage, but I would like your professional eye on how she handles herself. After all, you were key to uncovering her activities over recent years. I've studied the case files for her Psychopath

Game and I know she is a tricky interviewee. The consensus from police and prosecutors alike is that she is highly intelligent, seemingly helpful but ultimately slippery.’

It was a fair description of a high-functioning psychopath’s character. They often conducted themselves with a veneer of superficial charm but underneath were, almost without exception, focused on personal gain.

‘I doubt she’ll tell you anything useful.’

‘We’ll see.’

The door to the right of the screen opened and two plain-clothed officers entered. Seraphine remained perfectly still as the male officer explained that a voluntary interview is used to question a person about their possible involvement in an offence. He then asked if she was happy to proceed on that basis.

‘That all depends on the offence you’re referring to.’ Seraphine’s expression was serious for a moment and then she smiled widely. ‘I’m messing with you, Detective Peters. Please carry on.’

The male officer twitched at the mention of his name. He and his colleague had yet to introduce themselves. Bloom suspected he was surprised their interviewee knew who he was, which showed just how out of their depth these people were. Seraphine Walker didn’t go anywhere without fully researching whom she was meeting.

The officers continued with their formalities, explaining that Seraphine was free to leave at any point and also free to have a lawyer in attendance. Seraphine nodded and smiled and confirmed she was happy to carry on.

‘Could you confirm your whereabouts on the evening of the twentieth of last month? That’s Friday, the twentieth of April?’

‘Where do you think I was?’ She looked curious and just a touch amused, as if she were indulging youngsters who were playing pretend.

‘Please answer the question,’ said the female officer, who had introduced herself as DC Morgan.

‘What offence are you questioning me in relation to?’

‘There was an incident at the St Pancras Hotel where we have reason to believe you were attending a charity fundraiser for UNICEF.’

‘What sort of incident?’

‘At this stage we’d simply like to confirm what time you arrived and left the event, please?’ DC Morgan spoke a little too quietly. It made her seem anxious: a factor that Seraphine would use to her advantage, given half a chance.

‘Well, you’ve piqued my interest. I do like a good mystery. What was the incident?’

‘Can you confirm that you were at the St Pancras Hotel on that evening?’

‘If I had been, don’t you think I’d already know about the incident of which you speak? I expect it was hotel gossip.’

‘Are you saying you were not there?’ said DS Peters. He had a no-nonsense confidence about him.

Seraphine smiled. ‘What was the incident?’

‘A gentleman died.’

‘Oh dear. How sad.’

‘Were you attending the fundraiser for work or pleasure? I understand you are a psychiatrist?’ asked DS Peters.

‘I’m no longer practising. You might say I’m in between careers, considering my options. Maybe I should consider police work.’

‘You can’t be an officer if you have any convictions,’ said DC Morgan.

‘It’s fortunate I don’t then, isn’t it?’ Seraphine held the young woman’s gaze for a long moment.

The young detective constable dropped her eyes.

Next to Bloom, Mirza sat forward to look at the screen a little closer. ‘Any thoughts so far?’

‘Only that I hope your officers are good at their jobs,’ said Bloom.

‘I only hire the best.’

‘Good,’ said Bloom, ‘because something tells me they are as much under interrogation as she is.’

DS Peters was asking Seraphine to tell him her movements before the event on Friday evening.

‘Were you in the vicinity of the St Pancras Hotel between four p.m. and five p.m. on the twentieth?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘Were you there?’

‘This is a voluntary interview where I volunteer information. I will answer what I believe is relevant. So, to help me decide, tell me why you are asking.’

‘We have reports that the deceased man arrived with a tall white woman with long blonde hair.’

Seraphine’s eyebrows rose and she glanced up at the camera.

Bloom looked at DCI Mirza. ‘You are kidding me. That’s why you’re questioning her?’

On the screen DS Peters said, ‘Could this have been you?’

‘Why would you think it was me?’

Peters took a photograph from the file in front of him and laid it on the table. ‘Do you know this man?’

Seraphine sat up a little. ‘Your deceased man is a member of the Saudi royal family?’

Bloom noticed Mirza straighten in her chair. ‘So you do know him?’

‘Is this your dead guy? If so, I can see why you’re flapping around trying to find out what happened. How funny.’

‘You think murder is funny?’ said DC Morgan.

Bloom heard DCI Mirza sigh.

‘Murder. Wow.’ Seraphine spoke in a whispered voice.

Morgan rolled her shoulders a little. Peters didn’t miss a beat.

‘How do you know this man?’

‘I don’t.’

‘So how do you know he’s a member of the Saudi royal family?’

‘I didn’t, but I do now.’ She winked at Peters.

DS Peters hesitated for a brief moment and then composed himself. ‘Did you see this man at the fundraising event?’

‘I wasn’t aware I’d confirmed my attendance.’

Peters took another photograph from his file and presented it to Seraphine. ‘I believe this is you arriving at the event.’

‘Gosh, I do look fabulous, don’t I?’ Seraphine held eye contact with DS Peters. ‘I knew that dress was a good choice. I look great in red.’ This stare was entirely different to the one she had used on Morgan, but to his credit Peters didn’t waver.

‘Were you aware that someone had offered up the chance to drive a top-of-the-range Lamborghini as part of the charity auction?’

‘Why do you ask?’

‘Were you aware?’

‘I can’t say I paid much attention to the auction. People rarely offer up anything of interest.’

‘Do you know who won that bid?’

Seraphine’s smile was a touch impatient. ‘Like I said, I didn’t pay attention. Was the winner your victim or your killer?’

‘So you can confirm that you attended the event. Did you have any contact with this man during the evening?’ DS Peters pointed to the picture of Sheikh Nawaf.

‘Not as I recall.’

‘Have you or anyone you know had any previous dealings with this man?’

‘Anyone I know?’ A flash of something crossed Seraphine’s face.

‘I am trying to establish whether you have any connection to the deceased. Please answer the question. Do you know him or anyone who might have reason to harm him?’

‘I have never met this man.’

‘Never met,’ repeated DCI Mirza under her breath.

‘You say you’ve never met him but have you had any dealings of any nature with him?’

Seraphine began to drum her red-painted fingernails slowly on the table, making a clickety-clacking sound. After four rotations she stopped and relaxed back in her chair before looking up at the camera. ‘To whichever genius is watching up there I am not playing games with people’s lives. I have not done so in the past and I will not be doing so in the future.’ She stood and held a hand out to Peters. ‘You have an impressive interview technique, DS Peters.’ She looked at Morgan. ‘Pay attention, Fleur, you could learn a lot from this guy.’

In the room down the hall Bloom let out a long breath. ‘You’d better fill me in on what you’re thinking. You don’t show a woman like her your hand unless you’re happy stirring up trouble.’

Six months earlier

The cold November air penetrated Keith Runnesguard's polo shirt and raised the hairs on his chest as he stepped outside. He should have worn his overcoat, but it was packed in the suit carrier he held in his left hand. In his right hand he carried his sports bag and squash rackets. It was only a short walk back to his car. A familiar route he took every Tuesday and Thursday. He could see the Range Rover parked in its usual spot at the far edge of the car park, away from any other cars that might clip it. He picked up the pace, blowing warm air out of his mouth and up towards his nose to give some comfort against the wind. Only as he neared the vehicle did he see that a dark figure crouched by his front passenger wheel.

'Can I help you?'

'You've got a flat, Keith.'

Relieved that this person wasn't vandalizing his car, Keith felt irritated at the idea of calling out the breakdown service. As CEO of a global pharmaceuticals giant, he wasn't the kind of man who changed his own tyres. And he had a 9 p.m. call with the US he needed to be home for.

‘Do I know you?’ Keith said as the figure stood up. Keith didn’t recognize the man’s face. He wore a black woollen hat pulled low over his ears and leather gloves. Was he another club member? Staff maybe? Without answering the man took two quick steps towards Keith and struck him hard in the chest.

The sensation of warm liquid soaking his shirt made Keith look down. Even in the dimly lit car park he could make out an expanding circle of red against the white material. Still holding his suit carrier in one hand and his sports bag in the other, Keith dropped to his knees as the world swam in front of his eyes. He would have toppled forward into the dark figure had the man not started to hit him over and over in the neck and face, causing Keith to rock backwards. His head hit the tarmac with a loud thud.

In his last moments Keith felt his attacker prise his left hand open and take the car keys he had been holding alongside his suit carrier. He heard his door unlock and had time to think, *Did he attack me to steal my car?* before he heard a sound he could not place until it was joined by a familiar smell.

He lit a match.

Oh God, he lit a match. What was he going to set alight?

4

By the time they had moved to a more spacious room to debrief Seraphine's interview, Bloom had been able to reflect on what she had heard and generate a theory for what DCI Mirza might be suspecting.

'You said the killer had lived the victim's life for the weekend – in what way?' said Bloom, pulling a chair up at the table.

'Room service and champagne were ordered each night as well as tickets to the opera on Saturday, and according to the concierge he entertained at least one young lady on Sunday evening,' said Rowe.

'So if Nawaf died within twelve hours of checking in on Friday, whoever went to the opera and entertained the lady is your killer, am I right?'

'That's the thinking,' said Mirza.

'So you don't suspect Seraphine Walker killed Nawaf herself?'

'Not personally. The deceased is a Saudi national who we can see from CCTV footage arrived in traditional dress on Friday. On Monday, CCTV sees him checking out dressed the same but this time he takes care to never show his face to the cameras. We suspect this was his killer but we can't ignore the fact that Walker was on-site

that Friday and possibly even arrived with the sheikh. Somehow, she is involved. I know she is. I can feel it.'

'Let me see if I have this right.' Bloom was careful to watch her tone. She was already on shaky ground with the DCI and it would do no good to show any exasperation at their thought processes. 'You suspect Seraphine Walker might be complicit in this crime because the deceased arrived at the hotel with a woman who vaguely matches her description and because she is confirmed to have attended a charity fundraiser there that night.'

'For UNICEF. As if a psychopath cares about troubled kids,' said Rowe with an awkward laugh.

The DCI shot him a look. 'It is my understanding from reviewing the Psychopath Game files that Seraphine Walker challenged her players to a series of tests to detect whether they were indeed psychopaths. Is this correct?' she said.

'It is. But murder wasn't one of the tests.' Seraphine had sent mysterious cards to people she identified as possessing psychopathic traits that read 'Dare to Play?' If they followed the weblink included – which all of them did – they were taken to the dark web and set tasks designed to enable Seraphine to select the best of the best.

'And yet one of the participants, Faye Graham, murdered her husband.'

'A fact that caused Seraphine to reject her from the selection process.'

'Selection for what?'

'Membership of her secret society.'

‘And what happened to those who didn’t make the grade?’

‘They disappeared.’

‘Disappeared or *were* disappeared?’

‘That’s unknown.’ It was true that the likes of Faye Graham and Lana Reid, a friend of Jameson’s sister, had never been seen again after failing Seraphine’s game.

‘Didn’t you yourself accuse Walker of conducting a cull on those of her kind that she found wanting?’ Clearly DCI Mirza had listened to the recordings made of Bloom’s showdown with Seraphine as her game was exposed.

‘It was a hypothesis.’

The DCI smiled a little as she looked up at the ceiling. ‘And what is the purpose of this secret society of psychopaths?’

‘Well, that’s the million-dollar question.’

‘You failed to determine why this woman was collecting fellow psychopaths?’

‘We did. We only managed to halt the selection activities.’

‘And how can you be sure you did that?’

Bloom acknowledged the point with a brief smile. ‘We cannot.’

‘Especially now she has been cleared of any wrongdoing.’

Bloom said nothing. It was pointless arguing the point. She, herself, suspected that Seraphine would be back to her old ways soon enough.

‘And if you don’t know what she was really doing or

why, how can you be sure that murder was not always part of the plan?’

‘Because Seraphine ranks those psychopaths who kill lower than she does the rest of us.’

‘So she says.’ DCI Mirza opened her notebook and flicked through the pages. ‘Sheikh Nawaf’s killer brazenly lived in the man’s hotel room, wore his clothes, and spent his money while his victim’s body lay metres away. If those aren’t the actions of a psychopathic person, I don’t know what are.’

‘Maybe. There are lots of motives behind why people do what they do. It’s not always down to a dysfunctional personality. Do you have any other theories on who the killer might be? How about the person who won the auction bid? They would have had the opportunity to get the victim alone in the car where he was killed.’

‘The guy who won the bid took the chance to drive the car that evening and was seen by multiple witnesses thanking Nawaf and returning to the event.’ Mirza’s tone was impatient.

‘How about prints or DNA evidence, if the killer stayed on site?’

‘The hotel received a call from someone claiming to be the sheikh on Monday afternoon, saying he had bed bug bites following his stay. As per hotel policy the room was professionally treated and disinfected,’ said Mirza. ‘All we have is one print of the deceased left on a bedside light and a partial print of a person unknown. Like I said, the person who did this is smart.’

Rowe said, ‘Sheikh Nawaf was something of a

playboy, by all accounts. He often spent a month in London enjoying the freedoms not accessible to a young man in Saudi Arabia. We considered someone might have been offended at how a member of the Saudi royal family was bringing shame on his Muslim faith but that doesn't fit with the killer remaining in Nawaf's room and living the high life.'

'I don't think Dr Bloom needs to hear all our rejected theories,' said Mirza.

Rowe shrank a little in his chair as he went on, 'It has to be someone capable of passing themselves off as the sheikh, so we're thinking someone of a similar height, build and hair colour.'

'Not necessarily,' said Bloom, keeping her tone light so as not to add to Rowe's discomfort. 'Any good con artist will tell you if you act the part people see what you want them to.'

'Isn't that one of the things Seraphine Walker was testing: a person's ability to manipulate and defraud?' said Mirza.

'It was, yes. You've clearly done your homework. But I suspect you asked me here because you're not completely convinced by this theory. You want me to confirm it could be her work but I'm not sure her being at the same venue is enough. In fact, if I know Seraphine, it is a stronger indication that she *wasn't* involved.'

'You don't think she was keeping an eye on her player?' said Rowe.

'She's never felt the need to do that before. In fact, I'd say she's been meticulous in ensuring she is nowhere near

any incriminating scenes or events. This woman is highly intelligent and well connected. Even if she wanted to check up on someone, I doubt very much she'd do it herself.' Bloom looked from DCI Mirza to Rowe. 'Look, I get that whoever killed the sheikh was something of an expert con man, someone capable of becoming another character. He didn't simply hide in the room and enjoy the spoils of wealth; he went out in the world pretending to be his victim. But maybe he's a confident killer who knows he can get away with it because he's done it before? Have you considered that he might be a hired professional?'

'Why would a hitman stay in Nawaf's room for the weekend?' said Rowe.

Bloom shrugged. 'Maybe for some reason it was necessary to keep up the illusion that the sheikh was alive.'

DCI Mirza sat back in her chair, thinking. After a moment or two she looked at Bloom. 'In the Psychopath Game were there ever any struck matches used to indicate something?' she said.

'Not that I know of. Why?'

'We found a box of matches on the driver's seat of the Lamborghini. Eight of the thirty matches had been struck and left in a neat stack on top of the box. Have you ever seen anything like that before?'

'I can't say that I have.'

'We have,' said Rowe. 'Six months ago the director of a pharmaceuticals company was murdered outside of his country club and two struck matches were found with his body.'

'That is confidential information,' Mirza said to Rowe.

After an uncomfortable moment of silence she turned to Bloom. ‘But now you know, Dr Bloom, I may as well tell you we thought nothing of those two matches until we found the eight in the Lamborghini. It just so happens DS Peters worked both cases and now we’re wondering if this is some kind of scoring method.’

Seraphine’s attendance at the crime scene was one thing but the suggestion that people’s murders were being given scores was an altogether different thing. That implied a competition was afoot – or, in other words: a game. She could see how DCI Mirza had joined the dots to Seraphine Walker.

‘This is not her style,’ said Bloom. ‘She’s not interested in killers. She wants power, not death and destruction.’

Detective Chief Inspector Mirza moved in her chair to face Bloom more squarely. ‘Can you be sure these men were not targeted by Seraphine Walker’s game for some reason? These were powerful men with powerful contacts. Right up your psychopath’s street, wouldn’t you say?’

The pub was quieter than Marcus Jameson had hoped for a Friday night. He wanted some hustle and bustle to surround them and release the pressure. He couldn't remember if it was normal to feel this nervous. It had been a long time since he'd dated. His past life with MI6 had taken him around the world and as a young man he had enjoyed the freedom and variety that afforded on a romantic level. But he was out of practice. With any luck the nerves would go when she arrived, but again, he couldn't recall if that's how it usually went.

Truth be told, he had only ever connected with two women on a romantic level and one of them had turned out to be a crazy psychopath. The other, Jodie, might have been the real deal. She had been his closest friend and ally in MI6. They'd worked on many operations together, from Afghanistan to Eastern Europe and Russia, until she had stepped in for him on an assignment one night and never made it back. At the time of her death he hadn't been sure how he felt about her romantically. They had spent one night together, which they both agreed had been a mistake. But in hindsight, there was no doubt he had loved her.

He checked his watch; she was ten minutes late. Hopefully it was an innocent delay. He had no appetite for

games. He wanted a beer but knew it was more gentlemanly to wait. Perhaps she would like to share a bottle of wine?

‘How did I know I’d find you here.’ Augusta Bloom removed her coat and hung it over the back of the opposite chair. ‘Are you not having a drink?’ She nodded to the empty table.

‘I’m waiting for someone, a date. She’s late.’

Bloom narrowed her eyes. ‘Not . . .?’

‘God no. Give me some credit. It’s a woman I met online.’ He couldn’t blame Bloom for thinking he was meeting Seraphine. They had dated briefly before Jameson knew who or what she really was. Then he had stupidly turned to her when Bloom needed help on a recent case and Seraphine’s condition for stepping in had been the promise of a date with him. A date he had no intention of keeping because the woman was a manipulative witch.

Bloom sat. ‘I won’t keep you long then. I’ve just had a worrying experience with DCI Mirza. They were interviewing Seraphine about her possible involvement in the murder of a man at the St Pancras Hotel.’

‘The body in the supercar? I read about that in the news. How is Seraphine involved?’

‘I’ll get you a drink and fill you in on Mirza’s theory, but you’re not going to like it.’ Bloom left to go to the bar.

Jameson checked his phone. He’d had nothing from the woman he was supposed to be meeting. She was now twenty minutes late. He’d never been stood up before. He wasn’t a fan.

Bloom placed a pint in front of him and her usual

soda and lime by her chair. “The DCI suspects Seraphine is challenging psychopaths again and this is one of her latest tests. They think this murder is linked to another and that both were given a score in the form of struck matches left at the scene. They think she’s encouraging people to kill in some kind of sick competition.”

‘Oh Lord.’ Jameson took a long drink.

‘She wanted my input, given I know Seraphine better than most.’

‘I hope you told her we charge handsomely for our services and that she can’t afford us.’

‘She wasn’t asking, Marcus.’

‘She has no power to make you do her bidding.’

‘Of course she does. I let her down on the Gerald Porter case. She can destroy my reputation within the police and I’ve worked too long and too hard to let that happen.’

Jameson sighed. This was bad. ‘Do *you* think Seraphine’s behind this?’

‘No.’

‘Because?’

Bloom shuffled forward in her chair and rested her forearms on the table as she lowered her voice. ‘I know Seraphine has killed before but that was a political powerplay. She’s not interested in people who kill out of hate and anger. She completely dismissed Faye Graham when she killed her husband, remember?’

‘You’re saying this can’t be Seraphine testing psychos because killers are not the kind of psycho she’s after. You know how crazy that sounds, don’t you?’

‘She was there at the hotel on the night of the murder, attending some charity fundraiser.’

Jameson raised his eyebrows and then let out a long sigh. ‘She wouldn’t go anywhere near the crime scene. She’s too smart.’

‘That’s what I told Mirza but she’s got a bee in her bonnet. I think she sees this as a chance to redeem herself. You know Steve Barker is now an assistant chief at the Met and so effectively Mirza’s new boss.’ ACC Barker was an old contact of Bloom’s who had been pivotal in investigating Seraphine’s Psychopath Game.

‘Mirza thinks she can impress him by catching the woman he failed to convict?’

‘Maybe.’

‘OK, but before we discount the theory completely, do we think Seraphine’s capable of inciting others to murder?’

‘We know she is, but that’s not the point. She would never put herself so close to the crime. She didn’t need to be there. So why was she? I have a feeling it was just a coincidence.’

Jameson couldn’t help the smile. ‘Is this a gut feeling?’ She always chastised him for relying too heavily on such things. She insisted on the need for objectivity and evidence rather than instinct.

‘Marcus, I have never said a gut feeling is bad, just that it needs interrogation. We don’t get such feelings out of nowhere. They’re born of experience. Your training in MI6 plus your years in the field mean the fast-thinking part of your mind, the part dedicated to