

Chapter One

She hated wearing heels.

Morgan Kincaid scowled down at the offending shoes. She was also wearing a tight, little cocktail dress in a brilliant aquamarine. Eye-catching and bold. Exactly as she'd planned. In addition, she wore far more makeup than usual—which she also hated—but she'd accented her eyes with smoky black and painted her lips red.

She didn't mind the dress that much, except that there was nowhere to store her SIG Sauer. She wrinkled her nose. She hated leaving her handgun behind.

As her heels clicked on the path leading up to the museum entrance, she was glad that she'd at least been able to strap the smallest knife from her collection to her thigh. Not that she should need a weapon for this job.

Morgan looked up and studied the western façade of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. She liked the eye-catching wall of glass. The modern feel contrasted with the amazing exhibitions on display inside. The museum contained everything from history exhibits, to dinosaur fossils, and even a planetarium.

She paused and turned back to see the view. The museum was perched on the edge of City Park, with a view of the city skyline, and the even more impressive outline of the Rocky Mountains beyond. The entire scene was backlit by the setting sun.

“Morgan, I'm entering the party.”

The deep male voice of Declan Ward echoed through the tiny earpiece in her left ear. Dec was her boss at Treasure Hunter Security. After a career in the Navy, Morgan had left when they'd refused to let her join the SEAL teams. After a few months adrift, uncertain what to do with her life, she'd answered a knock on her door to find Dec on her doorstep.

The former Navy SEAL and his brother, Callum, had offered her a job she couldn't refuse. Along with their tech-savvy sister Darcy, the Ward siblings had created a security business to

provide protection to archeological digs, expeditions, and high-profile or valuable museum exhibits across the globe.

Morgan liked living in Denver, and she loved working at THS.

She discreetly touched her ear, fiddling with her sparkly, dangling earring. “I’m not far behind you.”

“Remember, we’ve been hired to test the exhibit security of the Mughal Emerald Pendant. Get close to the emerald and check the security. You know what to do.”

She certainly did. “You got it.”

“And keep an eye out for Coop,” Dec added. “He’s on the inside.”

Morgan fought back a snort. You only saw Ronin Cooper if he wanted you to see him. Also a former SEAL and a former CIA agent, the man was an expert at hiding—in the shadows or plain sight.

She smoothed a hand over her short, black hair. She kept it cut short so it stayed out of her way on missions. She continued on toward the doorway, and the short line of people waiting to enter. As she reached the guard at the doorway, she smiled, upping the charm. She watched interest flicker in the man’s eyes, and his gaze dropped down, lingering on her legs. *Men*. They were so predictable.

Out of her small clutch, she pulled her glossy invite for the evening’s special exhibit. He checked it, eyed her legs again, and then waved her through.

Morgan stepped into the heart of the party. The western side of the museum had several levels that could be hired for private functions. This level was filled with people dressed to impress, wandering through multiple displays that had been set up. Each one showcased the museum’s latest acquisitions.

A collection of priceless jewels of the Mughal Rulers of India.

She checked her coat and then wandered through the crowd. The sounds of quiet conversation, low laughter, and clinking champagne flutes mingled in her ears. Outside, the sun had finally set, and the city spread out below them in a twinkle of lights.

Morgan circled the room, noting all the exits, the stairs leading up to the next level, and the doorways into the kitchen and to the main part of the museum. It was second nature to her. She’d worked in Naval Intelligence prior to passing all the physical tests to join the SEAL teams. She’d wanted to join special forces so much, and follow in her father’s footsteps.

The thought of her dad was like a sharp slash of a knife. God, a day never went past where she didn't miss the old guy. Because she had the wrong equipment between her legs, her dreams of special forces had been crushed. Mack Kincaid would have protested loud and proud for his daughter.

Morgan fought back the old bitterness and kept her shoulders relaxed. She was doing good work now, and she loved it. She hoped her dad would be proud.

She did another circle of the party, this time paying attention to the artifacts on display. The jewels were incredible. There was a huge sapphire inlaid with gold and other small gemstones. A small box made entirely of carved emeralds. A large, heart-shaped, diamond pendant.

God, Declan's fiancée Layne would go nuts for this stuff. The archeologist was passionate about her work. Morgan liked history as well, and truly believed it deserved to be protected. But at the end of the day, some of the stuff THS helped uncover and safeguard was just old and ugly.

She turned her head and caught sight of Dec. She was careful not to let her gaze linger on him. Although, dressed in a sharp suit, the man deserved a second look. She was used to seeing him in cargo pants and T-shirts. In a suit, the man looked mighty fine. Layne would go nuts for that, too. The two of them couldn't keep their hands off each other.

Morgan sighed. She'd seen Declan wet, muddy, sweaty, and—once or twice—naked. While she could appreciate his rugged looks, she wasn't attracted to him. He was like a brother to her. All of her colleagues were: from Dec's flirty brother Cal, to big, tough Logan.

It was just her luck that she worked with some prime specimens of the male species, and didn't feel a spark with any of them. She frowned. Most days she wondered if she'd ever find the right guy. She was the queen of the first date. She'd been on a long string of them, and rarely had a second one. She just couldn't find a guy who made her melt, and who could keep up with her at the same time. Most guys glimpsed her guns or knives and ran in the opposite direction.

She paused and spotted a guy checking her out. He was staring at her legs. She mentally rolled her eyes. Who needed a guy, anyway? They were all so boring and predictable.

"A drink, Miss?" A waiter paused beside her, holding out a glass of champagne.

Morgan was about to refuse, when she glanced at the waiter again. It took her a second to realize it was Coop. She accepted the glass with a smile, knowing it wouldn't actually be champagne. She tried to work out what he'd done to make himself look different. Padding in his cheeks, maybe? Shaping on his chin?

“Thank you.” She took a sip. Sparkling water.

Coop pulled out a cloth and started to wipe a nearby table. He leaned close to her. “Keep flashing that smile and those legs. Every man in the room is watching you.”

“They always do,” came Dec’s dry voice through the earpiece.

Morgan sniffed. She didn’t dress up very often, but when she did, she knew she cleaned up pretty well. “Tell me more about this emerald pendant?”

“The Mughal Rulers of India were renowned for their gemstone collections. Especially their carved emeralds. The emerald pendant is hexagonal-cut, just shy of one hundred and fifty carats, and intricately carved with lotus and poppy flowers.”

Morgan took another sip of her drink, her gaze falling on the largest pedestal at the front of the room. The emerald pendant was the star of the show.

“We were hired by Dr. Zachariah James,” Dec continued. “He’s a well-known archeologist and has made a name for himself finding very rare artifacts that were considered lost forever.”

Morgan lifted her glass to cover her lips. “A regular Indiana Jones.”

“My father speaks very highly of him,” Dec said.

Instantly, she imagined Zachariah James to be an older, professor-like man with graying hair. Dec’s dad might be a silver fox—fit and gorgeous—but Morgan was well aware that most historians and archeologists looked nothing like Dr. Oliver Ward.

“The emerald is on display just ahead of you,” Dec continued. “It’s on an open stand. No covers.”

Risky. She headed in that direction, instantly spotting the sparkle of green under the lights. She passed two younger men who were gawking at her, their mouths open. She flashed them a flirtatious smile.

Then she reached the emerald.

“Wow.” As she circled the pedestal she didn’t need to fake her amazement. The jewel was damn impressive. The large emerald was carved with exquisite flowers and circled by small diamonds. It would fit perfectly in the palm of her hand.

She leaned forward, no longer looking at the emerald. Now she was searching for any sign of the security system—alarm or pressure sensors. Nothing was visible.

“One hundred and forty-two carats. Intricate design of flowers that matches designs you’ll find in the Taj Mahal. She’s a beauty.”

The deep voice, edged with a hint of playfulness, made her look up.

Across the emerald's stand, her gaze collided with a man's. Something inside Morgan went very still.

She sized him up in a second. A few inches over six feet, broad shoulders that filled out his white dress shirt, fit and lean, with tanned skin that suggested he liked the outdoors, and the sharp, handsome face of a fallen angel. He had tawny hair, filled with brown and gold strands, that looked like it was well beyond needing a cut, and green eyes the same shade as the emerald in front of them, which watched her with blatant interest.

Morgan finally found her voice. "It's gorgeous." *A little bit like you.*

He smiled. "I have a weakness for beautiful things."

She fought back the urge to blink. Damn, the man's smile was a weapon. He had straight, white teeth, beautiful lips, and dimples. Morgan was a sucker for dimples.

Pull yourself together, Morgan. She raised a brow and smiled. "Does that line usually work for you?"

He lifted a shoulder. "I've had more luck with it than you'd expect." He extended a hand to encompass the room. "I work here. I helped create this exhibit."

Morgan forced herself to focus on the job and not this man's charm and good looks. "Oh? Well, congratulations. It's a great party. I almost didn't come."

He circled the stand. "Why?"

She shrugged. "My ex got the tickets, and, well..." She waved a hand, falling easily into her character. "There was a messy breakup. I'm sure you don't want to hear all the gory details." She smiled. "I got the tickets for this exhibition, though."

Another sexy smile. "Your ex must be an idiot."

"Now, there is something we can both agree on." She lifted her glass and took a sip. Her gaze fell back on the emerald. "Tell me more about this fabulous gem."

"It was commissioned by the Mughal Court, possibly sometime during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan. That puts it somewhere in the mid-1600s. Sometime after that, it made its way into the hands of an official of the British East India Company."

Morgan tilted her head. "British East India Company. I've heard of that."

The man nodded. "The English company, along with its fleet of East Indiaman ships and large, private armies, eventually controlled large areas of India and much of the trade of cotton,

silk, salt, tea, and opium. The company officials established sprawling estates and helped themselves to much of India's treasures. They laid the groundwork for the British Crown to later step in and assume rule in India."

He lit up as he told her the history. "Fascinating. So how did this emerald end up here?"

"It was transported as part of cargo headed back to England on a ship called the *Verelst*. The ship sank off the coast of Mauritius." That smile again. "My team and I dived the wreck last year, and one of the artifacts we recovered was this incredible gem."

"You dive shipwrecks?"

He nodded. "Underwater archeology is one of my areas of interest." Suddenly, his gaze moved over her shoulder, and he stiffened. "Hold that thought, and please excuse me for just a moment."

"Sure."

Morgan pretended to fiddle with her hair, and glanced in the direction her private tour guide was looking. He was deep in quiet conversation with a security guard, but his gaze was on a man leaning against the wall.

He'd spotted Declan.

Hmm. So whoever this guy was, he knew that THS had been hired to test the security.

After the guard had moved off in Dec's direction, the man looked back at her and smiled. "Sorry about that."

God, the megawatt smile was panty-melting. The man had it down to a fine art. "No problem. I realize you're working, as well." She turned back to the emerald. "So, is it safe? I can't believe you have an amazing emerald just sitting out here like this."

His face turned a little serious. "We have state-of-the-art security."

"Oh?" Morgan made a big show of looking at the sides of the pedestal.

He laughed and of course, he had a sexy laugh, too. "You can't see anything. There's a special sensor system that picks up body heat that's in close range to the emerald for too long, and triggers an alarm. And a backup."

She arched her head to look at him. "A backup?"

"If someone gets past the first system, then it is also calibrated to the emerald's exact weight. If it's moved off the pedestal, then an alarm is triggered."

"That's impressive."

“Thank you. Do you need a refill?” He gestured at her empty glass.

She shot him a smile and watched his gaze drop to her lips. “I’d love one.” She handed her empty glass to him, and their fingers brushed. His gaze flicked back up to hers, locked there. Morgan felt a faint trickle of electricity through her hand, and she blinked.

“What’s your name?” he suddenly demanded.

“We’re having so much fun, I don’t want to tell you and break the spell,” she said, only half kidding.

The smile was back. “Okay, Ms. Mysterious. Stay right here, and I’ll convince you to tell me when I get back.”

Then he was gone, walking through the crowd with a loose-hipped stride that made more than one woman look his way.

Focus, Morgan. She pulled off one of her earrings and peeled off the tiny sensor attached to it. She stepped closer to the pedestal and gently pressed the tiny, transparent dot to the stand.

“Dec?”

“Got it. I’m patching you through to Darcy.”

“I’m here,” came Darcy’s melodious voice. Dec’s younger sister was sitting several miles away, in the converted warehouse that housed the Treasure Hunter Security offices. Morgan could picture her sitting in front of her wall of screens.

“I’m tapping into the security system now,” Darcy said.

“I need to know how much this emerald weighs,” Morgan murmured.

“Searching now,” Darcy said.

Morgan scanned around the crowd for that tawny head of hair. She spotted him over by the bar. He was a head taller than most of the other people in the room. The bartender was handing him two full glasses. “Hurry it up.”

“Fifty-five grams. And the heat sensor will be disabled in three, two, one...”

Coop walked past Morgan, handing her a napkin topped with a few hors d’oeuvres. “Fifty-five grams,” he murmured quietly.

Okay, now for the switch. Morgan moved closer to the emerald, looking like she was studying the tiny carvings on the gem. Her heart was beating hard and fast, but she breathed steadily.

She held her left hand up over the emerald and lifted the hors d’oeuvres close with her other.

It was all a matter of timing. And Morgan had excellent timing.

With a quick slide, she skimmed the emerald off as she set the napkin in its place.

Adrenaline flooded her system, but she'd had years of practice controlling it. She took a step back, her fingers closing over the emerald. It felt cool in her hand.

No alarm sounded, and no one converged on her with shouts or screams. She quickly turned, wrapping the emerald in a small cloth she'd brought, and slipping the priceless gem down her neckline, nestling it in her cleavage.

She wandered over to the window, looking at the reflection of the party in the glass.

"Slick." Dec's amused voice.

Morgan hid a smile.

"There you are." Mr. Handsome had returned. He handed her another champagne flute. "Now, I just have to know your name."

Job done, Morgan decided she deserved a drink. She took a large gulp, the champagne fizzing on her tongue. Ugh, she'd much prefer a beer. "You first."

"Dr. Zachariah James."

Morgan choked on the champagne.

Dr. James moved closer, patting a hand to her back. His warm palm hit the bare skin between her shoulder blades. "Hey, take it easy. Did it go down the wrong way?"

She was instantly distracted by the feel of his hand. Skin to skin. Again, she felt that disconcerting tingle where they touched. "I'm fine, Dr. James."

"Please, call me Zach." Up close, she saw golden streaks through the green of his eyes. "Dr. James is so stuffy, and Zachariah is a mouthful."

He straightened, his gaze moving over her shoulder. Then his flirtatious manner disappeared in a blink, his body stiffening. It happened so fast she couldn't quite believe it, and his hard face became nearly unrecognizable.

She turned, following his gaze. He was staring at the pedestal...and the napkin of hors d'oeuvres resting on top of it.

Dr. James' hands turned to fists at the sides of his rigid body. "Goddammit!"

Chapter Two

Zach James knew most people thought he was a pretty easygoing man, quick to smile and share a laugh.

But that was only because he showed people what he wanted them to see. He'd learned very young to keep his true feelings hidden, or they got used against you. So right now, he let very little of the anger and frustration storming through him show.

He saw the gorgeous woman watching him. She'd caught his eye instantly, with her long, shapely legs and intriguing face with an equally intriguing scar on one cheek. Her short, pixie-cut hair was as dark as ink, her skin bronze, and her eyes the most fascinating aqua blue, just like her tiny dress. He expected to see confusion on her face, but her gaze was impassive, watching him steadily.

Declan Ward sauntered up to them, his hands in the pockets of his trousers. "Evening."

"We were watching you," Zach bit out.

He'd wanted the new security system to work out. He'd helped design it. He hated that visitors to the museum had to view things through inches-thick glass. Zach believed people should be immersed in history and culture, be able to interact and marvel at it. Not that artifacts should be locked away.

But as an archeologist and historian, Zach's first priority was always to safeguard the artifacts.

"I'm not here alone," Declan said.

A waiter appeared just behind Declan. The man gave a single nod, his face grave.

"This is one of my team, Ronin Cooper."

Now that Zach looked at Cooper, he wondered how the hell the guy had ever passed for a waiter. He had broad shoulders, a powerful body, and a look in his dark eyes that was more than a little frightening.

Zach shook his head. “Well, you guys are good.” He held his hand out. “I want the emerald back.” He’d hired Treasure Hunter Security, but every second the jewel was out of his sight left him twitchy.

Declan shrugged. “I don’t have it.” He nodded behind Zach. “She does.”

Zach turned and his gut tightened. *No way*. The insanely attractive woman he’d been drawn to had a faint smile on her face.

The wide-eyed wonder was gone. She winked, reached down the front of her tight dress, and pulled out the Mughal emerald.

“You were watching me, too,” she said. “But you only saw what you wanted to see.”

Right. He’d only seen legs up to her ears, and pouty red lips that had made him think dirty, dirty thoughts. He’d seen a sexy woman who shivered each time he’d touched her.

Now, he saw a dangerous glint in her eyes. There was a lot more to this woman than her good looks. But a part of Zach was angry that her reaction to him might have just been an act.

She handed over the emerald.

Zach took it, ensuring his fingers brushed against her palm. He watched her carefully.

She pulled her hand back quickly, something flashing in her eyes.

He smiled. At least something about her had been the truth. The emerald was warm, and he realized the warmth came from her skin. Hell, from her breasts.

Shit. The last thing he needed now was an erection. “Treasure Hunter Security came highly recommended, but I wanted to be sure.” He looked at Declan. “I wanted to see for myself.”

Declan raised a brow. “A test?”

“You can call it that,” Zach answered. He waved over one of the museum security guards. He passed off the emerald. “Get it back on the display, and set someone to watch it.”

“You need our help with museum security?” Declan asked.

“No.” He looked at the woman again. “I wouldn’t have pegged you for security, Ms...?”

“Then I was doing my job right. And it’s Morgan. Morgan Kincaid.”

Morgan. It was a strong name, unbending. And looking at her now, he thought it suited her. But off the job, did she bend for a man? Did she melt under someone’s strong hands? “Well, you intrigued me the first moment I saw you. Now I’m even more intrigued.”

Morgan raised a brow. “Well, you’d best get un-intrigued, Dr. James.”

Oh, no. He didn’t plan to do that.

She leaned in closer, lowering her voice. “And you should always remember to expect the unexpected.”

Declan cleared his throat, looking amused. “Dr. James, you aren’t the first guy to fall for Morgan’s charms. That’s why we always send her in for these kinds of jobs. Now, if you don’t want our help with security for your exhibit, what do you want?”

“I have a job for you,” Zach said.

Declan looked at the others, and then back at Zach. “I’m listening.”

Zach glanced around the crowded room. “Not here. Let’s go to my office.”

He led them past a guard and down a long corridor. They crossed the main level of the museum, a giant open room with the skeleton of a giant plesiosaur hanging from the ceiling, and then he turned down another corridor, where the staff offices were located.

His office was a little messy, but that was normal. He knew where everything was, and that was all that mattered. His favorite photo of himself and his expedition team—all in their dive gear and holding up artifacts from the wreck of the *Verelst*—was on the wall. He was holding the Mughal emerald in his hand.

Zach sat in his battered office chair, while Declan took one of the guest chairs on the other side of the desk. Ronin Cooper leaned against the wall, and Morgan prowled over to his only window. There was only nighttime darkness outside.

God, those legs. It was impossible not to look at them. He saw the strength in them now. Sleek muscles he hadn’t noticed before. How he’d mistaken her for a regular woman on a night out, he didn’t know. They all watched him expectantly.

Down to business. “Several weeks ago, the museum was given a collection of letters and personal effects of people who were missionaries for the American Lutheran Church. The group worked in Madagascar, and had their headquarters in a former French settlement on the south of the island called Fort Dauphin, nowadays called Tolagnaro.” Zach sat back in his chair. “Some of the letters were written by local Malagasy people who’d worked closely with the missionaries, and their ancestors. One letter belonged to a former Malagasy servant, Jean, who had worked for the French Governor of Fort Dauphin in the late 1600s before the French abandoned the settlement.” He shot them a thin smile. “Or were forced out by the locals, depending which side you were on.”

“So, who is this Jean?” Declan asked.

“Well, we already knew that a Malagasy called Jean had told an interesting story to a rescued French sailor, who then went on to replay the story to the Governor of the French East India Company.”

“I take it the French East India Company was in competition with the British East India Company?” Morgan asked.

“You’d be right. Many of the European countries had trading companies and fleets, trying to snag their share of wealth from the East Indies. The Dutch were ahead of the game, with the largest share of the trade, followed by the English. The French East India Company was founded to compete and give the French a slice of the pie.”

“And did they get a slice?” Morgan asked.

“A little. But they never reached the levels the Dutch and British did. They did start negotiations with Siam.”

“Thailand,” Ronin said.

Zach nodded. “It was all thanks to a charismatic Greek adventurer by the name of Constantine Phaulkon helping to broker the deal between France and Siam. He was a fascinating man. A former clerk for the British East India Company, he arrived in Siam as a merchant. In a matter of a few years, he became fluent in Thai, worked in the royal court, and became the number one counselor to King Narai. There were plenty in the king’s court who resented the foreigner’s fast rise to power, and thought he wielded far too much control.” Zach blinked. “Sorry, I’m getting off track.” He saw Morgan smirking at him. “I just find Phaulkon so interesting. Anyway, King Narai, hoping to impress the French King—Louis XIV, also known as the Sun King—wanted to send some ambassadors to France, along with some gifts to sweeten the deal. A ship called the *Soleil d’Orient* set sail, and do you want to guess the next part of the story?”

“It never made it to France,” Morgan said.

“Correct. Considered lost at sea, or perhaps the Siamese ambassadors set it alight with their incessant smoking.”

“So what did this Jean see?” Declan asked.

“He saw the *Soleil d’Orient* limp into Fort Dauphin, leaking badly. The crew befriended the locals as their ship was repaired. When they headed back out, they were caught in a storm, and the ship sank just off the Madagascan coast, north-east of Tolagnaro.”

“And no one’s ever found it?” Ronin asked.

“No. A few people have tried, but they’ve never found the wreckage.”

Morgan moved closer. “But you have.”

Excitement trickled through Zach’s veins, the same way it did every time he was on the trail of an historic find. “Yes. Jean didn’t share everything with the French. In his papers, we found he’d marked the exact location of where the *Soleil d’Orient* went down. We’ve kept that information under wraps.”

Declan nodded. “No one wants word of an important shipwreck leaking to the wrong people.”

“No. The last thing I need is every would-be treasure hunter descending on Madagascar. Treasure Hunter Security is highly recommended, but I need a team with expert underwater recovery skills as well.”

Declan smiled. “Most of my team are former Navy SEALs, Dr. James. Except for Morgan. Although she may as well have been.”

Zach eyed Morgan, wondering what her background was.

“Navy,” she said, answering his unasked question. “And I passed the SEAL training.”

Zach’s eyes widened. He knew the failure rate was high for BUD/S training. He was impressed. As far as he knew, no woman had officially ever passed it before. He forced his gaze back to Declan. “Can you get a ship suitable for the recovery operation?”

Declan nodded. “Yes. But it’s top of the line, and it’ll cost you.”

Zach’s heart began to pound. This was it. He was going to find the *Soleil d’Orient* and her cargo. There was so much history awaiting in the hold of that ship, and possibly any number of secrets kept hidden for years by the waves. He looked at Morgan as she leaned a hip against his desk. He had to admit that having the oh-so-attractive Morgan Kincaid on this expedition would make it even more interesting.

Dr. Zachariah James and team, discoverers of the wreck of the *Soleil d’Orient*. It was a long way from the trailer park he’d grown up in.

He cleared his throat, reality crashing back in for a moment. “My funding won’t cover a top-of-the-line ship.”

Declan arched a brow. “We don’t do charity work, Dr. James.”

“I’ve already got signed salvage deals with the Madagascan government. I’m also willing to pay you a percentage of what we salvage.”

Declan crossed his arms over his chest. “It doesn’t do my company much good if we find a bunch of rusted cannonballs.”

Morgan leaned closer. “What exactly was on that ship, Dr. James?”

Zach vowed to himself that before this expedition was over, he’d get Morgan Kincaid to call him by his first name.

“Treasure, Morgan.” He looked at Declan. “A lot of it.”

Declan straightened. “Spell it out for me.”

“Valuable antiquities, including a golden dinner service the King of Siam had received from the Emperor of Japan, and priceless Chinese porcelain. In addition to that, gold, silver, coins, and chests of diamonds.”

Morgan just stared and Ronin gave a low whistle.

Declan’s face was impassive for a long moment. Then, he stood. “You’ve got yourself a security team.”

Chapter Three

The winter morning was fresh, and the sky was blue. Snow crunched under Morgan's boots as she strode up the steps to the Treasure Hunter Security warehouse.

There was a spring in her step. She was eager for the hunt. Apart from last night's job at the museum, she hadn't been out in the field for the last few weeks, and she was starting to feel itchy.

She pushed through the glass doors and into the warehouse. Dec had bought the old flour mill and had converted it. He and Layne lived in the spacious upstairs apartment, and the huge, open space below was for the office.

Morgan honestly admitted she loved the space, with its polished concrete floors, exposed brick walls, and large windows offering a good view of the city. The far end housed Darcy's domain. The youngest Ward sibling was something of a computer geek, although she hardly looked like one, and the opposite brick wall was covered in computer screens. Off to one side sat their long conference table, and on the other side, worn couches faced some games tables that they played during their downtime—pool, air hockey, and their latest addition, a foosball table. Morgan played a mean game of table soccer.

Two men were currently locked in a vicious air-hockey battle. Ronin raised a hand, while his opponent shot Morgan a quick smile. Hale Carter was another former SEAL. He was their resident fix-it man in the field. Hale hadn't met an engine or gadget—or woman—he couldn't fix or finesse. With glossy dark skin, a handsome face, and a gorgeous smile, he loved the ladies, and they loved him.

As Morgan headed for the small kitchenette tucked in the back, she heard the click of heels on the floor. She slipped off her leather jacket, slung it over the back of one of the couches, and turned. "Morning."

"Good morning. This new job sounds amazing," Darcy Ward said.

That was Darcy. Straight to the point. Of medium height with a slim build, Darcy always looked like she'd just stepped out of the pages of some fancy fashion magazine. Today, she was wearing dark jeans tucked into knee-high boots, and an emerald-green shirt that contrasted nicely with the dark bob of her hair. She had wide, blue-gray eyes, which were a combination of Dec's gray and Callum's blue.

"It does sound good," Morgan said. "But we have to find it, first. Shipwrecks are notorious for hiding their secrets." Morgan strode over to the small kitchenette, grabbed a mug, and poured herself some coffee from the pot.

"But you have the location of where the ship sank."

Morgan turned, leaning back against the countertop. "Sure. But the final resting place of wrecks are often found miles from where they actually sank. It depends on the currents, the sea floor, other conditions—"

Darcy waved a hand. "Well, Zachariah is very good at what he does."

Morgan stilled and stared at her coffee. "You know him?"

Darcy nodded. "I've met him once or twice." Darcy got a far-off look in her eye, smiling. "He has that whole adventurer-vibe going on. Did you see his smile?"

Morgan sighed. "I sure did. And his dimples."

"Dimples..." Darcy shook her head, like she was clearing it. "He lectures at the University of Denver with Dad. Students fight to get to study with him." Darcy waggled her perfectly shaped brows. "Especially the female students."

Why wasn't Morgan surprised? She sipped her coffee, and noticed a body sprawled on one of the couches. She strode over, sat down, and bumped the sleeping man's hip with her own.

"Sleeping on the job, O'Connor?"

The big former SEAL grunted, lifted his boots onto the coffee table, and folded his muscled arms across his chest. "Had a late night."

"Oh? Do anything exciting?"

Logan opened one gold eye and gave her a slow smile. No one would ever call Logan handsome. With his mountainous body and his rugged face, he had too many jagged edges. But when he smiled, like he did now, it eased all the rough lines. "Pretty certain you don't want me to tell you what Sydney and I were doing last night."

Morgan took a hurried sip of her coffee. “Please don’t.” That was all Morgan needed—X-rated images of Logan with his oh-so-feminine and stylish fiancée.

Suddenly Logan’s face lit up. “Speak of the devil.”

Morgan turned her head and saw Sydney Granger striding toward them, holding a stack of files. Tall, slender, and elegant, Sydney wore neat slacks and a shirt in pale pink that had some sort of tie that wrapped around her neck. Her pale-blonde hair was caught up in some effortless-looking twist that Morgan would never be able to do.

Sydney might work for Treasure Hunter Security now, and be engaged to the wild, rugged man beside Morgan, but she still looked like the society woman and former CEO she’d been.

“Hi, Morgan.”

“Sydney.” Morgan’s gaze dropped to the stack of files and she suppressed a shudder. Morgan hated paperwork while Sydney reveled in her job taking care of the business side of THS.

“Morning.” Declan strode in, and with a ripple of muscles, pulled a gray sweater over his T-shirt. “I call our planning meeting to order.”

Morgan moved toward the conference table, snorting. “Layne’s almost got you housetrained.”

Dec gave her a hard stare. “Don’t be nasty.”

“Where is Layne?”

“Here.” The pretty brunette bounced down the stairs leading from the upper level. She was holding a stack of papers and was dressed in slacks and a nice shirt. She was also frowning.

“You look stressed,” Morgan said.

“I’m giving a guest lecture with Oliver at DU today.” She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “Nothing like working with your future father-in-law to give you a case of the nerves.”

Dec wrapped an arm around her. “He loves you.”

“And he’s hot,” Morgan added. “In a sexy silver fox way.”

Dec pretended to kick her, and they moved to the conference table. Everyone made themselves comfortable, cradling coffee mugs. Logan had snagged what looked like a day-old donut from somewhere. Darcy stepped up beside Dec, holding a slim tablet.

“I’ve been running searches on the *Soleil d’Orient* all night.” Darcy grinned. “I’ve confirmed that she’s a very big catch. I managed to find a copy of her cargo manifest.” Some of the screens on the wall filled with information. Morgan could see some photocopies of old documents—

manifests, and what looked like old newspaper clippings. Most were in French. Morgan could speak some French, but her reading wasn't great.

"Let me run this through my translation program." Darcy touched something on her tablet. New text appeared beside each document, in English.

Morgan scanned the list of treasure: antiquities, gold, silver, diamonds.

Logan let out a whistle. "Diamonds as big as a baby's fist. Nice."

His fiancée arched her pale brow. "You've never even been near a baby, and since when do you like diamonds?"

"Since I started watching you wear them." His voice lowered. "Naked in our bed."

Color filled Sydney's cheeks. "Quiet."

"Zachariah requested a ship," Darcy continued on, shooting Logan a narrow-eyed glance. "Dec contacted Diego. He's agreed to join the expedition. He'll meet up with you, with the *Storm Nymph*."

Morgan sat back in her chair. She liked Diego Torres. He was another former SEAL, but one who could never give up his love of the water. He owned a research and salvage vessel, the *Storm Nymph*, which he hired out for underwater archeology and oceanographic expeditions.

"I hate narrow ship bunks," Logan grumbled. "Never fit in them."

Morgan rolled her eyes. Logan always found something to be grumpy about.

Dec turned to face their teammate. "Well, Logan, you'll be happy to hear that the team for this mission will be myself, Morgan, Coop, and Hale."

"I've organized commercial flights for you all," Darcy said. "You'll fly into Mozambique and meet Diego and the *Storm Nymph* at the Port of Maputo. You'll sail across to Madagascar, and meet Zachariah and his team in Tolagnaro."

There were nods and mumbled acknowledgements.

Sydney cleared her throat, setting her clasped hands on the table. "We need to talk about our *other* project."

Dec scowled. "Go on."

Tension filled the room. Morgan knew exactly what project Sydney was talking about. Silk Road.

The black-market antiquities ring operated in the shadows. They were well-funded, and targeted valuable artifacts and treasures. They were ruthless, and thought nothing of killing to get what they wanted.

Treasure Hunter Security had collided with them a few times. But after they'd kidnapped Sydney's younger brother in South America while on the trail of an ancient treasure, Sydney had made it her mission to bring the group down.

It wasn't an easy task.

"I've had very little luck getting people to talk about Silk Road." Sydney huffed out a breath. "I've had better luck chasing the money. Darcy's been helping me. By narrowing down countries and locations where we know they've been operating, I've been able to trace some payments they've made. Of course, it all leads back to a tangle of offshore companies and accounts." Frustration rose in her voice. "I'm still working on it, but I'm continuing to pull the threads. I'm getting closer."

Darcy stepped forward. "I've also been running searches for any references to Silk Road, their operations, or their known associates. We're marking those on maps to see if we can find any pattern."

Sydney nodded. "A few things have lined up. I think there may be three main people running things behind the scenes."

"Why?" Morgan asked.

"The money seems to always come in from three different sources. I don't know what or where those sources are, but there are three." A deep sigh. "It's mostly just speculation at this point."

"My searches are still running," Darcy said. "I have a list of their known associates, people they hire. One thing I have noticed is this—"

A screen lit up, showing a map of a city. A familiar city spotted with red dots.

"London's a hotspot," Dec said, his gaze narrowed.

"It appears to be," Darcy confirmed. "But that could just be because of the concentration of museums and private collections to steal from. I'm still working on it."

The screen zoomed out, showing a map of the globe covered in red dots and connecting lines.

Dec nodded. "Good work, both of you. Make sure you don't do anything to tip them off that you're looking at them."

Darcy sniffed. "Please."

"Silk Road has caused too much trouble and too many deaths." Dec's tone darkened. "We'll do whatever we have to do to bring them down." He looked at his sister. "Keep working on it. And whatever you uncover, I need you to coordinate with Agent Burke at the FBI. You know he's investigating these guys as well, and he'll have extra information that could help."

Darcy wrinkled her nose. "I'm only talking to that man if I have to."

Dec made a grumbling sound. "He's the FBI, Darce. You don't get a choice."

Darcy muttered some possibly choice words under her breath.

"What are the odds of Silk Road coming sniffing around our shipwreck?" Morgan asked.

"There's the potential for a lot of treasure, for sure," Dec said. "Thus far, Dr. James has done a good job keeping it under wraps."

"Won't take long for word to get out once we're on site," Coop said.

Darcy cleared her throat. "Something our searches are showing is that Silk Road likes to target expeditions with particularly important artifacts. Anything attached to an interesting myth or legend."

"Adds to their value," Hale said.

"And when Silk Road attacked our jobs, we were dealing with a famous lost oasis, a legendary stone, and the hidden treasure of a lost people," Darcy added.

"So is a gift from one king to another from a few hundred years back interesting enough for them?" Dec asked.

"Dr. James mentioned some Japanese plates and Chinese porcelain," Morgan said.

"But not legendary artifacts," Dec said. "I can't see anything here that would interest them."

"We can't rule it out, though." This time it was Layne who spoke. "You guys need to be careful over there." Her eyes lingered on her fiancé.

"Let's keep our fingers crossed," Morgan said.

"And our eyes peeled," Hale added.

"No one actually says 'eyes peeled', Hale." Morgan shook her head. "Especially badass, former Navy SEALs."

Hale just shot her a wide smile.

Darcy ignored them. "I'll keep monitoring. If we spot any Silk Road members entering Madagascar, I'll let you know."

More images appeared on the screen, and Morgan was instantly drawn to a headshot of Dr. Zachariah James. It captured his handsome face and carefree grin perfectly.

“Wow,” Sydney said. “*That’s* Dr. James?”

From across the table, Logan growled.

“I met him at a conference once,” Layne said with a wistful sigh. “He is *very* easy on the eyes. And he has this charm...”

“He appeared to be rather taken with Morgan,” Dec said.

A rare smile crossed Coop’s face. “And her legs.”

Morgan scowled at them both across the table. Zachariah James struck her as a roguish adventurer. She was certain he only stuck around until the excitement had passed.

“Well, he is only mortal,” Darcy said. “I curse Morgan on a daily basis for having legs like she does.”

“Morgan does have amazing legs,” Logan conceded.

Sydney reached over and smacked him in the back of the head good-naturedly.

“How about we leave my legs out of it and find some treasure?” Morgan stood, shoving her chair back. “Or I’ll be forced to draw my weapon...or maybe kick someone with my amazing legs.”

Darcy slapped a folder on the table. “Your trip is all booked. Have fun.”