



Chapter One

He edged his hand into a narrow crack in the rock face and readjusted his grip.

Callum Ward shifted his weight and then pulled himself up. Sweat dripped down his face and he pulled in a steady breath, enjoying the pleasant burning sensation in his muscles. Climbing—free of ropes and equipment—was a challenge he enjoyed, along with the adrenaline pumping through his body.

He looked up, his body pressed flat against the warm rock. The Rocky Mountains in spring was one of his favorite places to be.

A world away from the dangers and pressures of the SEAL teams.

Not a SEAL anymore, Ward.

Cal stayed there for a moment, breathing deeply. He glanced down at the ground, several hundred feet below him. Then he looked up. The top wasn't far away. With intense concentration, he picked out his path.

Then he climbed.

He loved the speed and freedom of free soloing. He was alive. He couldn't ever let himself forget that.

Or the fact that so many of his SEAL buddies were not.

A few feet from the top, a harsh ringing sound made him start. One of his hands slipped, and for a

second, he felt his body swing away from the rock.

Quickly, he moved back, jamming his hand into a narrow handhold, scraping his knuckles in the process.

With a curse, his heartbeat hammering in his ears, he slipped his hand into his pocket and yanked out his cell phone. He wedged the device between his ear and shoulder.

“What?”

“Cal, where are you?” His sister’s voice came through loud and clear. “Lazing the day away at your cabin?” Darcy’s voice soured. “I hope you don’t have company, right now. There’s no time for all those blondes tripping over themselves to get to you.”

Cal rolled his eyes and glanced at the magnificent view of the valley below—a sweep of trees and the breathtaking mountains. In the distance, he heard the throb of helicopter rotors. Some rich somebody getting a quick transfer to Vale or a rescue helicopter.

“No blonde. I’m climbing, D. Kind of at a critical moment here.”

“We have a job.”

His senses sharpened. “Okay. Well, I need to finish the climb, get back to my truck, then lock up the cabin. I can be back in Denver this evening.”

“Too long. I sent Declan to get you.”

Cal snorted. “You managed to pry him away from his new fiancée?”

“It took a little convincing.” Darcy’s voice softened.

Yeah, Cal's big bro had certainly fallen hard for his sexy little archeologist. It was a little too sickly-sweet to see. Cal couldn't imagine foregoing the variety of lovely ladies out there for just one—no matter how beautiful, smart, or sexy she was.

Live life to the fullest. That was Cal's motto.

"Look, it'll still take me some time to meet up with Dec—"

"Actually, he's coming to you. He should almost be there."

At that instant, the sound of the helicopter turned to a roar. The helo crested the mountain top above, sending a fine spray of rocks and twigs raining down on Cal. In the clear bubble of the helicopter cockpit, Cal spotted his brother's rugged face.

Cal sighed. Looked like his climb was done. "Yeah. He found me."

"Good. See you soon."

An hour later, hair damp from a quick shower, Cal entered the offices of Treasure Hunter Security.

The offices were housed in an old flour mill that Dec and Cal had bought and converted. Dec had outfitted the upper level into his living quarters. Downstairs was all open-plan, with lots of concrete and brick, housing the heart of their business. At one end of the large space, computer screens lined the wall, and high-tech computers sat on sleek desks. That was their sister's domain. Darcy loved anything that involved a keyboard. The other corner

was dominated by a pool table and an air hockey table. The furious *thwack* of the pucks told him there was a high-stakes game going on.

“Ward,” a deep voice called out. “Come and take over for Morgan. Woman is a fiend at this.”

Cal grunted at Logan O’Connor and made his way over to the air hockey table. Logan was big, and with a checked shirt, worn jeans, and shaggy hair, he gave off a wild, mountain-man vibe. His opponent, Morgan Kincaid, was about as opposite to that as you could get. She leaned her long body into the table and shot Logan the finger. The tall, sleek, dark-haired woman wasn’t just a fiend at air hockey, she was damned good in the field and in a fight.

She looked Cal’s way, her dark hair feathered around her strong face. “Cal.”

“Morgan.” Cal looked around. “Hale and Ronin?”

“In the field.” Morgan strode over to the small fridge in the kitchenette tucked in one corner of the space. She grabbed a soda and popped the top. “Both of them are in DC. Guarding some fancy jewel exhibit for the Smithsonian.”

Cal took her end of the hockey table and shot the puck at Logan. “You know I’ll beat you too.”

“No way, Ward. You’re dreaming.” Logan slammed it back. “You’ve never beat me yet.”

“That’s because you cheat,” Cal said.

“Cheat? How the hell can you cheat at air hockey?”

Cal lined up his shot and hit the puck. “I don’t know, but you do.”

Logan slammed the puck back again with a

growl. He shook his head, his shaggy hair brushing his shoulders. "Where the hell is Dec?"

"Well, he dropped me off at my place and then came straight here to meet Layne," Cal answered. "My guess is that he's wrapped around his fiancée."

"He's happy."

Cal lifted his head and studied Logan. Logan was his brother's best friend. The two of them had been together on the same SEAL team, and had saved each other's lives more times than they could count.

"Yeah, he is." Cal was damned happy for his brother. Before Dec had met Layne, he'd carried dark shadows from his time in the Navy. Cal knew what those shadows could do to a man. He'd seen too many friends die, people killed, and bad guys get away. Memories stirred, and he shoved them aside. The shadows could kill you, if you let them.

Dec had gotten out, and Cal had followed not long after. It had taken a bullet for Dec to leave, but for Cal, it had just taken losing his best friend.

"He's in love," Logan added. He made it sound like Dec had caught a disease.

On a security job a few months back, Dec had met Dr. Layne Rush. What was supposed to be a simple archeological dig in the Egyptian desert had turned into a wild and dangerous adventure. Layne and Dec had ended up discovering a lost oasis and falling in love. Now Dec smiled all the time, and snuck his fiancée off to their apartment whenever he could.

Love. Cal had never experienced the emotion, and he was fine with that. "Don't worry, O'Connor, I don't think it's infectious."

Logan grunted.

“The love thing isn’t for me.” Cal leaned his hip against the air hockey table. “There are too many lovely ladies out there to limit myself to just one.”

Logan grunted again. “Like that redhead who was wrapped around you at the bar the other night?”

Cal grinned. “She was...enthusiastic.”

“What was her name?”

“She didn’t tell me. But we had a great time.” They’d gone back to her place, and Cal had left before the sun had come up.

Logan raised a brow. “My prediction...someone is going to make you slow down one day, Ward.”

“Nah.” Cal liked his life just the way it was. He’d had it serious before. Being a SEAL had meant that every situation was a life or death decision. And every decision could be your last. Treasure Hunter Security suited him just fine. He still got to use his skill set, and he was much less likely to end up dead.

He’d made a vow to a dying friend to live enough for both of them.

“You’ll take the fall one day.” Logan glanced up, his gold-brown eyes intense in his rugged face. “Like your brother, you’ll be a goner.”

Cal shot the man the finger. “Screw you, O’Connor. If you want the whole ‘love at first sight’ thing so badly, you do it.”

Something flickered over the man’s face, but before Cal could make sense of it, he heard voices behind them, and footsteps echoing on the polished concrete floor.

Dec, Layne and Darcy had arrived. Dec had one

arm slung across the shoulders of his fiancée. Cal guessed he was right in his assessment of what the two had been up to. Layne's attractive face was a little flushed, and his brother looked awfully relaxed and satisfied.

Darcy looked her usual polished self, her high heels clicking on the floor. She was wearing dark slacks and a white shirt that tied up around her neck. Her dark hair swung, shiny and sleek, by her jaw. Darcy might be a hacker extraordinaire, but she always liked to look good doing it.

"We have a job." Darcy's blue-gray eyes leveled on Cal. "Cal, you're going to Cambodia."

Cal groaned. "Why are my jobs never in the Caribbean? Or the Seychelles? Cambodia has jungles, which means mosquitoes."

"So pack some repellent," Dec said, amusement in his deep voice.

Darcy ignored them both. She made her way over to her computers. "We've been hired by the Angkor Archeology Project." She picked up her favorite laser pointer/remote and aimed it at the screen.

An aerial picture of Angkor Wat appeared. The sprawling temple complex was impressive, the central structure rising up from a sea of trees and vegetation. The complex was surrounded by a large moat.

Cal had visited Angkor Wat once before. Not on a job, but while on R and R from his SEAL team. It was a fantastic, interesting place to visit. He wouldn't mind another look at it.

"The AAP is a mixed team of archeologists from

around the world, and they are focused on studying the ancient Khmer Empire that flourished from the ninth to thirteenth centuries. The team was responsible for lidar scans that were taken of the area a few years back.”

“Lidar?” Logan said.

“Light Detection and Ranging,” Darcy answered. “It’s a sophisticated scanning technology. The lidar device is mounted on a helicopter that flies over an area, shooting the laser. From it, you get high-resolution maps. The AAP started scanning Angkor Wat, and the scans uncovered amazing detail. Completely undocumented features beneath the forest floor.”

The images on the screens changed, showing scans crisscrossed with roads, canals, and earthworks.

“Amazing.” Layne stepped forward. “I remember this now. It really helped to expand the knowledge on Khmer construction.” She tilted her head. “There was a lot of hype about a ‘lost city’ they discovered.”

Darcy nodded. “Mahendraparvata. The city was never really lost. Everyone knew where it was, buried under the jungle on Phnom Kulen or Mount Kulen. It’s a mountain range not too far away from Angkor.” Another image flicked up on the screen. It showed a long silhouette of a mountain. “Phnom Kulen is a sacred mountain, and a few temples have been discovered here and there, but what had been found was mainly just rubble in the jungle. No one really knew the true extent of the city. The scans helped reveal the scale of it, connected the dots, and

showed the outlines of things buried beneath the surface.”

Cal wandered closer. “So what’s so special about this city?”

“Mahendraparvata is the place where King Jayavarman II was crowned as the god king back in the ninth century. It is considered the sacred birthplace of the ancient Khmer Empire.”

“So, what do the AAP need from us?” Cal asked.

“The team’s recent scans of Phnom Kulen have uncovered some interesting structures.” Darcy smiled. “They want security for a jungle expedition to a lost temple.”

Cal grinned. “Oh, good. Let me just pack my fedora and bullwhip.”

Darcy rolled her eyes at him. “They wouldn’t give me details related to these new scans. I’m sure they don’t want every amateur treasure hunter or history buff invading. They said they’ll provide you with everything you need when you get there. They must have good funding because they’re paying well.”

“Who are the players?” Dec asked.

“The AAP team is currently staying at a hotel in Siem Reap. That’s the main city in the area, and the tourist gateway to the Angkor temples. The team is being led by an English archeologist by the name of Dr. Benjamin Oakley.” An unflattering shot of a tall man with a head of gray hair appeared. “He’s working with a local archeologist named Dr. Sakada Seng.” Another photo appeared showing a young Cambodian man. “Oakley has two more archeologists on the team. An Australian, Dr.

Gemma Blake, and a Frenchman Dr. Jean-Luc Laurent.” Two more photos appeared beside Dr. Oakley’s.

Cal whistled.

Darcy rolled her eyes again.

Dr. Blake was a small, curvy blonde with a wide smile. Laurent looked like he was in his forties, with a long, narrow face and sandy hair.

“The final member of the team is their tech guy. He runs the scanning technology. He’s an American by the name of Sam Nath.” The picture of a younger man with dark hair, copper skin, and a wide, beaming smile appeared.

“Okay.” Cal nodded his head. “So I take this group into the jungle to find a lost temple. I’ve had worse jobs.”

“Oh, there’s one extra joining the team as well,” Darcy added. “Daniela Navarro.”

Layne gasped. “Really? I *love* her work.”

Cal frowned. “Another archeologist?”

“You don’t know who she is?” Layne shook her head and looked at her fiancé. “You’ve heard of her, right?”

“Photographer,” Dec said.

“That’s right.” Darcy leaned back against the desk. “She’s a world-renowned photographer of ancient sites. She travels the globe, taking pictures of ancient temples, pyramids, and statues. Her photos can go for tens of thousands of dollars.”

A picture flashed up. It wasn’t of a person; it was of the Abu Simbel temples in Southern Egypt. The photographer had taken the shot early in the

morning, the sun just touching the giant statues of Ramses the Great. There was a sense of magic in the shot, a hushed stillness.

It made Cal's chest tighten. Made him think of dreams and possibilities.

"I couldn't find a shot of Navarro." Darcy shrugged. "For a photographer, she doesn't seem to take pictures of herself. But I have to say, her work is fabulous."

Cal knew this would be a straightforward job. Get in, get it done, visit Angkor while he was there, and be back to do some more rock climbing before he knew it. "Well, at least I know our friends at Silk Road won't be interested in the rubble of a temple."

Declan scowled. He and Layne had tangled with the dangerous black market antiquities ring in Egypt. The shadowy organization let nothing get in their way in their rush to steal priceless antiquities.

Darcy nodded. "I don't think those mercenary thieves will bother you. This is a solo job, but if you need more help on the ground, let me know. I'll have Logan on standby."

Logan crossed his arms over his chest. "I hate mosquitos more than Cal."

Everyone ignored him. Dec looked at Cal. "You see any sign of Silk Road, you call us."

Cal nodded and looked back at Darcy. "So when do I leave?"

"Now." His sister handed him a stack of documents. "Enjoy your trip."

Click.

Dani moved her camera, lining up the girl's smiling face in the middle of the shot, and pressed the button. *Click.* Then she zoomed out, taking in the landmark behind the girl as well.

Dani loved Angkor Wat. The City of Temples was full of amazing wonders. She lowered the camera for a second. Here, at the base of one of the towers of the main temple, the harmonious feel of the place really stood out.

The unique temple rose up into the sky, and its beauty wasn't diminished by the tourists swarming around it. She knew it was a representation of Mount Meru—the sacred mountain that was home of the gods.

What she loved was that every nook and cranny of the place offered something different—amazing bas-reliefs, or nature insinuating itself back into the ruins, trees growing through the temples. She didn't even mind the tourists. Watching them taking it all in, the range of emotions skittering over their faces, it all made her smile.

That's what Dani liked capturing the most. Not just the old temples and the sense of history, but the feelings they elicited. That's what made her photographs come alive—all the things people were thinking and feeling written on their faces and caught in their movements.

Damn, she loved her job. She smiled. She was grateful every day that she made a very good living from her photography.

She zoomed in on a couple posing for their camera that they'd perched on a rock. Young lovers, she decided, by the way they touched each other. She snapped them as they pulled exaggerated poses. Then the man pulled the woman in for a kiss. Dani took the shot, capturing that most elusive of things—love. That fleeting, mysterious emotion.

She lowered the camera. She gave them six months. Then one of them would be itching to get out. She shoved the cynical thought away. *For now, she'd focus on the love.*

Dani set off down the steps and worked her way through the crowd of people walking slowly through the temple. She wandered to a quieter part of the site, where the crowds thinned, and she could hear the echo of her footsteps on the ancient stones. Here, she could get some good shots. She turned in a circle. Hmm, *here*, the light was just right. She raised her well-used Canon.

But there were plenty of pretty shots of Angkor Wat out there. What she was looking forward to the most was her chance to photograph the ruins of Mahendraparvata. Of finding lost temples amongst the jungle.

She stopped again. This time, she spotted a woman only a few years younger than herself. She was gorgeous. Blonde hair spilled over tanned shoulders. She wasn't model thin, instead she had curves that Dani suspected would bring a man to his knees. She felt a flash of envy. When you were tall, with slim hips and a flat chest, curves were always a distant dream. The woman was smiling as she took

in the temple's carvings.

As Dani snapped a few more shots, a handsome man wandered closer and struck up a conversation with the woman. They talked for a bit. Small talk, Dani imagined. The woman laughed.

Dani frowned, even as she continued clicking. The man had player written all over him. He had the look of a man who knew what he looked like, and knew how to use it. Her brother and father had the same look—same handsome face, same insincere smile.

With an annoyed sigh, Dani moved on.

She kept snapping shots. She zoomed in, and this time spotted a middle-aged woman dressed in a short skirt and a low-cut top. This time, Dani was reminded of her mother. Julia Navarro Simmons Hall was on marriage number four, and had always judged her worth by her looks. And the bank account of her current husband.

Dani turned away, looking for a more interesting subject. She avoided her family as much as she could. She refused to let them intrude on the life she'd made for herself.

She zoomed in on a man walking up the main path toward the temple.

Wow. She took a bunch of shots. Handsome, rugged, and sexy. The man had a face made for the camera with enough angles to cast some interesting shadows. Dark hair that was just long enough to fall over his forehead, day-old scruff on his cheeks, and a well-shaped jaw.

Next, she took in the body. He walked with a

loose-hipped stride, a man comfortable with himself. He was somewhere over six feet with a muscular physique. A pale-khaki shirt stretched over wide shoulders, and his long legs were tucked into dark-green cargo pants. He didn't look like a man who spent much time in fancy suits or stuffy offices. No, he was well suited to the ruined temple beside him.

She took a few more shots. Suddenly, he glanced her way, a frown on his face.

Dani decided it was time to move on. She focused on a small group walking up the steps of the temple, and decided to head inside.

Inside the enclosure, bright-green grass contrasted with the old stones. The group she'd followed had disappeared, and instead, Dani focused on getting a few up-close shots of the engravings on the wall. Devatas—dancing women in all different poses, elaborate headdresses on their heads. The entire site was a group of enclosures, galleries, and cloisters leading in to the main temple.

She wandered up some steps and into a paved gallery. She paused, taking a deep breath. Here, she could easily imagine the ancient Cambodians walking through on their way to celebrate their gods.

“Hey, stop!”

The young woman's scared voice made Dani frown. She hurried around the corner.

Down a set of steps, she spotted a man playing tug-of-war with a woman's backpack.

The man kept yanking, but the woman held on with grim tenacity.

Suddenly, the man shifted his weight and shoved hard against the woman. She stumbled backward but kept her bag clutched in her hands.

“Hey!” Dani let her camera drop around her neck and hurried down the steps. “Leave her alone.”

The man’s dark eyes widened. Ignoring Dani, he reached down and gripped the woman’s bag again. She cried out and fell onto her hands and knees.

“I said, leave her alone.” Dani rushed forward, and slammed a hard kick into the man’s side.

He stumbled back with a grunt. He was a couple of inches shorter than Dani’s five foot eight, but she didn’t dismiss his wiry strength.

When he raised a fist, Dani got mad. She kicked him again and slammed her fist into his belly.

“Stop!”

The deep, masculine voice echoed off the temple walls. Behind her, Dani heard the sound of running feet. The thief’s gaze went over her shoulder, and his eyes widened.

He turned and bolted.

Chest heaving, Dani turned. And went still.

Mr. Handsome, rugged, and sexy was sprinting toward her.