



Chapter One

Thank God her crappy day was almost over.

Sydney Granger walked into her office, wanting nothing more than to kick off her high heels. Her aching feet were killing her. She sighed. But she still had work to do before she could head back to her condo and relax with a glass of wine.

She sank down in the black-leather office chair behind her sleek, glossy desk. The meeting with the board had...not gone well. She touched her aching temple. It had been two months since she'd taken over as CEO of Granger Industries, and the board members were still nervous. All they saw was a wealthy heiress who was inexperienced in business, real estate, and construction.

Sydney shrugged to herself. She was used to people underestimating her.

She swiveled in her chair and, for a second, stared out at the glowing lights of Washington, D.C. She had an excellent view of the grand dome of the Capitol Building. She knew D.C.—had been born and raised here—but she was still finding her feet in the new job. And behind closed doors, she secretly wondered if she'd ever get there.

Glancing back at her desk, she saw the files stacked neatly on the corner by her executive assistant. Then she looked at her laptop. Sydney knew if she opened it, she'd have a ton of emails to deal with. That glass of wine had never seemed further away.

What the hell...there was no one left in the office at this time of night, so she released the clip in her hair. No one to see the new CEO kicking back. The pale-gold strands fell down to brush her shoulders.

Her gaze fell on the framed photo resting on the corner of her desk. It was a picture of her with her father and brother. It had been taken a few years ago, and they were all grinning for the camera. *Why the hell did you leave me the company, Dad?* Still reeling from her father's sudden death, she'd been stunned when he'd left the lion's share of the company to her. Her brother,

Drew, had inherited stock in the company as well. Drew had a sky-high IQ, and probably knew way more about the business and the company. But she knew that for all his brilliance, her socially awkward brother wasn't a businessman.

For some reason, her father had wanted *her* to be CEO of Granger.

God, she missed him. Since her mother had died when Sydney was ten, it had just been the three of them. Grief and guilt were a gnawing hollow ache inside her. But Sydney didn't let it show. She'd been raised in Washington society, and she was damn good at hiding her feelings. At the glittering gatherings, so many people were just waiting for the slightest show of emotion to pounce and spread the gossip. She remembered the insincere faces and condescending pats after her mother had died.

Sydney leaned back in her chair. The CIA should just send their agents to train at society parties and gallery openings. Then they'd have the best poker faces around. She touched the frame. Had it really been two months since her father had died in that explosion? Terrorists had been targeting a foreign diplomat who'd been staying at the same hotel, and her father had been caught in the blast.

"I'm so sorry, Dad."

Now, Sydney was here, buried in her work at Granger Industries. Drew, unable to cope, had run off to South America. His latest interest was in history and archeology. The guy had a collection of degrees—she sighed—but he never stuck with one thing. Last month, he'd been talking about launching an online tech company. Next month, who knew? He'd probably take up race car driving.

Sydney rubbed her temple again. She had reports to read, forms to sign, tomorrow's meetings to prepare for. She was trying, but right now, she just felt like she was drowning. Most days she was barely managing to keep her head above water.

It had to get better, but there was a little voice in the back of her head whispering with a whole lot of glee that she'd fail. Again. It loved to remind her that she'd screwed up her last job...and that others had paid the price. She glanced over at the photo of her father again, and her throat tightened.

The ringing of the phone on her desk startled her. She frowned. It was late. Who'd be calling at this time?

She snatched up the receiver. “Sydney Granger.”

“Ms. Granger, listen and do not talk.”

The electronically-altered voice made her stiffen. “Who is this—?”

“Quiet. Your brother’s life depends on it.”

Sydney’s hand clenched on the phone. “This is about Drew?”

“We have your brother in Peru. If you want him back alive, you come to Lima and be prepared to transfer five million dollars to us to secure his freedom. We will contact you again then.”

What? Her heart started to pound. *Stay calm, Sydney. Keep them talking. Get as much information as you can.* “How do I know this isn’t a hoax?” She looked blindly out the window, the lights of the city now just a blur. “I want to talk with him—”

“I make the demands, not you. My only proof...I am Silk Road.”

The line went dead.

Sydney set the phone back down with a shaky hand. Silk Road? Who the hell was Silk Road?

She’d spoken to Drew a few days ago. He’d been fine. Excited. He was on the trail of an ancient pre-Incan culture. He’d been visiting museums, meeting with local archeologists, and talking about heading into the Andes. He’d been yammering on about the ruins he planned to visit, and talking about all the research he’d been doing.

But for all his amazing intelligence, her brother was a bit oblivious to regular life. It would be so easy to snatch him.

God. If these people hurt him... Drew was all Sydney had left.

She forced herself to breathe. *Think, Sydney.* Did this have something to do with her previous employment? Her former role had been highly classified. None of her friends or family had known about the work she’d done. To the world, she’d been a Washington socialite who cared mostly about designer clothes, fancy parties, and museum openings.

She quickly opened her laptop and logged on. She typed in a search on Silk Road.

A few minutes later, she sat back in her chair, dread settling in her belly. There wasn’t much, but what she’d learned wasn’t good. Silk Road appeared to be a dangerous, black-market antiquities syndicate. Not much was known about them, except that they were well-funded, well-connected, and ruthless.

Something else caught her attention. Over the last few months, the group had tangled with a private security firm that specialized in security for archeological digs, expeditions, and museum exhibits. Treasure Hunter Security. She tilted her head at the fun name. It appeared that this firm had beaten Silk Road—twice.

She typed in another search, and pulled up the website for Treasure Hunter Security.

They were based in Denver but worked all across the world. She scrolled through the pages and stopped at an image showing three men—all of them wearing khaki clothes and holsters—standing shoulder-to-shoulder. Declan and Callum Ward were the owners of the company. Former Navy SEALs, and from the look of them, tough and capable. Her gaze fell on the third man standing with them. He was slightly taller and a little broader than the Ward brothers. Big, with shaggy, long, brown hair and a rugged face. He looked like a man you didn't want to mess with.

Her gaze drifted back to the photograph on her desk and locked onto her brother's smiling face. Her stomach turned over.

She had to rescue Drew. And she needed Treasure Hunter Security to help her do it.

Logan O'Connor stretched out, put his boots up on the arm of the couch and pulled his ball cap over his eyes.

Damn, he was tired.

After he'd returned from a job in the Cambodian jungle a month back—having rescued Callum's ass—he'd plunged straight into another job in the Gobi Desert. It'd been grueling, and hot, and sandy. He hated sand.

"Hey, boots off the couch!" A hand slapped at his boots.

Logan just growled.

His hat was whipped away. Darcy Ward stood there, glaring at him. As usual, she was all glossy and put-together. Not a single strand of her chin-length black hair was out of place and her blue-gray eyes were narrowed on him.

She tried to shift his boots again, but he kept them where they were.

"We have a client coming in, Logan," she said with a huff.

Logan grunted.

She pushed and shoved again, and finally his feet slid off to the polished concrete floor.

He sat up. "I'm damn glad I never had a sister."

She pulled a face at him.

"Go bother your *actual* brothers," he growled.

"They aren't here." Her nose screwed up. "Declan and Layne are upstairs. They should be down soon."

Dec—Logan's best friend—lived in the apartment above the Treasure Hunter Security offices.

Logan snorted. "I bet I know what the hell they're doing." Since his best friend had tumbled head-over-his-ass in love with Dr. Layne Rush, the man couldn't seem to stay away from his fiancée. "Those two are like fucking rabbits."

"No swearing in the office," Darcy snapped.

"Why?"

"We have a client coming in," she said with exaggerated patience. "She's flying in from D.C. She's the CEO of Granger Industries. This is going to be a good-paying job, Logan. Don't screw anything up."

Granger Industries? Logan had a vague recollection of real estate, or construction, or something. Just to piss Darcy off, Logan put his boots up on the coffee table. "Where's Cal?"

"On a trip with Dani. She's photographing the ruined city of Great Zimbabwe and Cal went with her."

Another man who couldn't stay away from his woman. Logan still couldn't believe his friends had gone and fallen in love. Dec and Cal—two of the toughest guys he'd ever known.

He heard footsteps, and since he hadn't heard the front door, he knew it was Dec. Actually, after years together on the SEAL teams, and now working together at THS, Logan could pick out Dec's footsteps anywhere.

"Darce. Logan." Declan crossed the large, open space of the converted warehouse.

Logan glanced at his friend. Dec was tall, muscled, with piercing gray eyes. He still looked the same as he always had, but these days, he seemed different. More relaxed, more at ease.

"Who's our new client?" Dec asked.

“Sydney Granger of Granger Industries.” Darcy looked at her watch. “Her plane should’ve landed about an hour ago. She should be here soon.”

Dec nodded and headed toward the small kitchenette in the corner of the space. He opened the fridge and pulled out a soda.

“Diet Coke?” Logan raised a brow.

“Layne is addicted to the stuff.” Dec shrugged. “I’ve developed a taste for it.”

Logan shook his head. “Next thing you’ll tell me is that you want to do lunch, or go out for a damned manicure.”

Dec’s gray gaze narrowed. “No, but I’m thinking about kicking your ass.”

Logan snorted. “You can try.”

“Shush,” Darcy said. “She’s here. Try to look professional.” She knocked Logan’s boots off the coffee table.

Logan followed Darcy’s gaze to the wall of flat screens at the end of the warehouse. That was Darcy’s domain. She might look like she’d stepped out of a magazine, but the woman was a genius with computers. On the far screen, he saw security footage from the outside of the office. He saw what looked like a rental car parked near his truck, and caught a glimpse of blonde hair as a woman walked toward the front door of the warehouse.

The next thing he heard was the click of heels on concrete. Logan turned his head. And then he straightened.

The woman was tall, slender, and wearing a navy blue skirt that slicked over her gentle curves and a crisp white shirt. Blonde hair the color of champagne was caught back in some sort of complicated twist at the back of her head, accenting a face that was downright beautiful. She had a slim nose, perfectly formed lips, and high cheekbones. Pale-blue eyes skated over the room.

The woman had money and class written all over her.

Logan shifted on the couch. She was *so* not his type.

“Hi, Ms. Granger.” Darcy stepped forward and held out her hand. “I’m Darcy Ward. This is my brother Declan.”

“Thank you for seeing me. And please, call me Sydney.” She shook hands with Darcy and then with Declan.

“Nice to meet you,” Dec said.

“And this is one of our top security specialists, Logan O’Connor.” Darcy gestured at Logan. Logan didn’t bother standing, just lifted his chin.

Sydney Granger gave him a cool stare before her gaze moved back to Declan and Darcy. Yeah, he’d been dismissed by the Ice Queen. He was surprised he didn’t have freezer burn.

“I need your help,” Sydney said. “My brother needs your help.”

Darcy gestured to the conference table off to the side. “Why don’t you sit down? You wouldn’t give us any details over the phone—”

Sydney Granger nodded. “I wasn’t sure if it was safe.” She sank into a chair. “My brother left for Peru several weeks ago. He has a history degree, and he wanted to explore an ancient culture down there—”

“Inca?” Dec asked.

“No. Have you ever heard of the Warriors of the Clouds? They’re also called the Chachapoyas.”

Logan frowned, and watched Darcy and Dec shake their heads. Darcy reached over to tap on one of her keyboards, clearly planning to do a search.

“I hadn’t either,” Sydney answered. “But I did some research on the flight out here.”

“They’re from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*,” Logan said.

Pretty blue eyes blinked at him. “Yes.”

Yeah, I’m not just a big, dumb idiot. Logan was used to people taking one look at him and deciding he was big and dangerous but not very smart.

“The gold idol that Indy’s after in the beginning of the movie—” he looked at the others “—you know, when he’s escaping from the big, rolling boulder. That belonged to these warriors.”

“That’s right,” Sydney Granger said in her cool, cultured voice. “But the movie isn’t factual. The Chachapoyas weren’t metalworkers, so they didn’t have any golden idols. But they built cities and fortresses high in the cloud forests of the Andes. My brother estimated that only a small portion of their sites have been found so far. The Cloud Warriors fought off the Inca for years, and even helped the Spanish fight against the Inca. They were famed for being beautiful, and many of them were fair-skinned with pale-colored hair and eyes. Several of their mummies have been discovered, and some do have pale hair, and several descendants of the Chachapoyas today still have blonde hair, and blue or green eyes.”

“Were they not native to the region?” Darcy asked. “Perhaps they came from somewhere else?”

Sydney tilted her head. “There are lots of theories. That they had come from Europe prior to the Spanish, that they were descended from the white, bearded god, Viracocha. Recent DNA testing shows they are from the Andes, indistinguishable from the others living in the area. They are from the cloud forests.”

“What happened to the Cloud Warriors?” Logan asked.

“They held out, but eventually the Inca conquered them. They were forced to leave their cities, and then disease brought by the Spanish wiped them out.”

“Okay, so what do these Warriors of the Clouds have to do with your brother?” Dec asked.

Logan watched the woman as she lifted her chin. Staring at her face, all he saw was icy perfection. No emotion, no distress, nothing. Yeah, she was a real cool one.

“I got a call at my office last night. A group says it has my brother and they want five million dollars in ransom. They said I have to go to Lima, Peru to carry out the transaction.”

Logan shook his head to himself. Forget cool, she was ice all the way. Man, the woman didn’t even look like her pulse jumped when she talked about her brother being held hostage. Ice water in those veins.

Dec was frowning. “We don’t do a lot of ransom demands. We have interceded when some archeologists have been snatched off digs—”

Interestingly, Logan saw Sydney press her hands together on the table. Her fingers flexed, then relaxed. “I came to you because the group who have Drew...they call themselves Silk Road.”

Now, Logan pushed to his feet. *Aw, hell.*