

Chapter 1

The alarm clock shrieked a nasty little electronic beep.

It finally annoyed Jack Devlin out of his hazy, hung-over sleep. He kept his eyes shut hoping to suspend his awareness that it was someone else's alarm clock, that he was sick with a hangover, and that he had buried his father yesterday.

But it all came pounding back—the funeral, the reception at his brother George's house, the drunken night out.

The woman next to him finally reached over and turned off the alarm, but Devlin didn't open his eyes. He remembered the frenzied drunken sex, the kind only two strangers can have, but he didn't want to open his eyes and see her. He just wanted to stumble out of there while she slept and leave it behind. The alarm killed that chance. She was awake now. She gently attached herself to him. A long naked thigh nestled into his crotch. An arm wrapped around his chest.

Devlin had to leave, but she wasn't letting go. He had to go back to the apartment where he was staying and find his brother George waiting for him there.

He kept his eyes shut, cleared his throat, and asked, "Did you tell me your name was Helen?" knowing full well it wasn't.

"What?" She lifted her head. "What did you say?"

"Hold on a second. Where's your bathroom?"

"Down the hall."

Devlin gently extricated himself, swept the sheet off, and swung his legs to the floor. The room was air-conditioned down to a chilling cold. He clenched his teeth, stood up, and squinted at the piercing pain in his head. It had been a long time since he'd drunk so much. With one eye half-open, he left the bedroom and walked into a

short hallway that led to the bathroom. The hallway felt hot and stuffy after the air-conditioned bedroom. He ducked into the bathroom and closed the door behind him.

Devlin opened both eyes. The bathroom was cleaner than he expected. Very neat actually. Three string-bikini panties hanging on the shower rod were bright white.

He reached into the shower and turned on the hot water. The tub was sparkling clean.

He opened the medicine cabinet looking for something to ease his pain. She had a bottle of Excedrin. He swallowed four with a handful of water, hoping to get the pulsing spike out of his right temple.

He checked the contents of the medicine cabinet while he waited for the shower to warm up. There was a typical assortment of products, plus two vials of prescription medicine. One was a half-full bottle of Penicillin VK. The other was Valium, 5 mg. Both were for Daryl Austen from a Dr. Vincent Colonia. The address on each was 166 E. 63rd Street.

The shower water was steaming. Devlin adjusted it with cold water and stepped in. The soothing water washed over his head and face and ran down his muscled belly. He filled his mouth with water, swirled it around, and spit it out.

He lathered all over twice, shampooed his hair and shaved with a Lady Bic razor he found in the shower. He dried himself off with a clean, blue towel and walked back to the bedroom. The bare wood floor felt clean under his bare feet.

Daryl was sitting up in bed with her arms crossed under her breasts. In the dim light that leaked around the window shades, she looked a lot better than Devlin expected. A hell of a lot better. He sat in a chair next to the bed and looked right straight at her. Her breasts were nearly perfect. There wasn't an ounce of fat on a stomach just

on the verge of showing some muscle. One long leg, uncovered by the sheet, was casually crossed over the other. The white sheet just about bisected her at the crotch.

She had a friendly, quizzical look on her face. A long, slim nose, full lips, and streaked blond hair that was permed into the crinkly style that made some women look sexy and others just look messy. On Daryl, it worked.

Maybe that's what you call a wry look, thought Devlin. He tried to see the color of her eyes in the dim light and decided they were probably blue.

Devlin liked the way she didn't seem at all bashful about being naked with a stranger.

"Did you ask me if my name was Helen?"

"Yes."

"You don't remember my name?"

"It's Daryl. Daryl Austen."

"Why'd you ask me, then?"

"I don't know."

"Were you thinking of someone else?"

"No. You get up this early every day?"

"Yes. Who was drunker last night, you or me?"

"I figure me."

"Did you tell me your name?"

"You don't remember my name?"

"No, are you insulted?"

"Yeah."

"Really?"

Devlin stood and began gathering his clothes. “No.”

She asked, “How old are you?”

“You don’t remember my age either?”

“You didn’t tell me.”

“How would you know?”

“Come on,” she asked. “How old are you?”

“Thirty-eight, how old are you?”

“Twenty-eight.”

“I’m too old for you,” Devlin told her.

“The hell you are, with that face and body. So what is your name?” He leaned over the bed and shook Daryl’s hand. “Jack Devlin. She shook his hand and looked at his swaying cock. “Not too shy, are you, Jack Devlin?”

“No.”

“Guess you don’t have to be, Jack.”

“Guess you don’t either, Daryl.”

“Thanks. See, if we keep repeating each other’s names, we’ll remember them.”

“I’ll remember yours. Daryl.”

“Is it too personal to ask where you got those interesting scars?”

“Yes.” Devlin found his underwear on the floor and stepped into it.

“I see. Well, Jack, how about that tan? How did you get such a dark tan so early in the season? You look like you’ve got a white bathing suit on from behind.”

“I was in the islands for a while.”

“Doing what?”

“Vacation.”

“Uh-huh.” She waited for more from Devlin, but it wasn’t coming. “Well, I see you’ve showered and all. A couple more minutes you’ll be dressed, and you can get the hell out of here without any more morning-after chitchat.”

Devlin looked to see if there was any anger in her, but she still had that crooked smile.

“I’m sorry, but I do have to leave.”

“Well, don’t leave before I tell you that I don’t usually go to bed with strange men I meet in bars.”

“I don’t see why you’d have to.”

“I don’t.”

“Why did you?”

“Because my fucking bastard of a boyfriend broke up with me, and I was angry and depressed, and I figured it would do me good to get laid.”

“Did it?”

“Yes, but I don’t like this hangover. And I don’t like the feeling that you want to leave as fast as you can.”

He told her, “It’s not because of you.”

“Why, then? You have to get to work?”

Devlin’s face twitched. He picked up his pants from the floor and stepped into them.

Daryl watched and waited for an answer.

Devlin said, “No, I’m not going to work. I kind of ran out on my brother back at that bar. I want to catch up with him.”

“That big guy you were with was your brother?”

“Yeah.”

“And you said you two were out drinking because . . .” She stopped herself and put her hand on her mouth. Then she asked, “Were you telling me the truth about your father?”

“Yes.”

“You really were?”

“Yes.”

“Oh shit. I’m sorry.”

Devlin was dressed except for buttoning his shirt. Daryl got out of the bed and walked quickly to her closet. She pulled out a robe and slipped it on with her back turned to him.

“Do you want any coffee or anything?”

“No. Thank you.”

“Come on. It’ll take another five minutes.”

“Okay.”

She left the bedroom, suddenly seeming remote and far away from him. As he put on his socks and shoes, he kept thinking about Daryl Austin’s smooth, sleek belly that curved so nicely down to the dark patch between her legs and her interesting quizzical smile that had disappeared so quickly when she remembered why Jack Devlin had been drinking so fiercely.

They didn’t talk much while they drank the coffee, but Devlin was glad he’d stayed. Daryl didn’t ask him any more questions or push at him. She was quiet and respectful of his loss. She said she was sorry about his father and even told Devlin he’d better hurry and see about his brother.

By the time Daryl walked him to the door, Devlin felt off balance. It had been a long time since someone had been so understanding. He started to say something, but Daryl told him, “Don’t say anything. My number is in the book if you want to see me again.”

He nodded once and turned to find the elevator. He didn’t look back when he heard Daryl’s door shut.

When he walked out onto the street it was 8:25 A.M. Traffic was already building on Third Avenue, along with the New York summer heat and humidity. It was the middle of July. A patch of hot, humid air had descended on the city that wouldn’t leave. It just sat there getting foul with carbon monoxide and the hot breath of eight million sweating people.

Devlin slipped on a pair of sunglasses he’d worn during the funeral to fend off the glaring daylight while he hailed a taxi.

He sat in the cab and smelled stale cigarette smoke and sweat on his clothes. At least the hangover was subsiding under the coffee and Excedrin.

He hoped George had remembered to leave his keys under the doormat. At the pub on Second Avenue, somewhere uptown in the Seventies or Eighties, Devlin had tried to explain the convoluted instructions for opening the doors in the loft building, unlocking the elevator, and hiding the keys.

They had been fiercely drunk. Black drunk, like men can get when someone they love dies. The drinking had started right after the funeral Mass in the church up in Larchmont. They drank with the family and friends throughout the afternoon, then into the evening. So many in the family hadn’t seen Jack in so many years that his presence became almost as much an event as his father’s death.

When everyone finally left, the brothers dropped their polite faces and sat together in George's backyard, still drinking but more slowly— without the urgency of sadness, or anger, or the pressure of guests and family standing around them.

They sat side by side on two mildewed chaise lounges in George's backyard and talked to each other with a bottle of Jameson Irish whiskey sitting on the grass between them. As the warm summer daylight seeped away, George's kids came down one by one in their pajamas. They each got a drunken kiss and a rough hug from their daddy.

George was so big, the kids seemed to disappear for a moment when he hugged them. Jack sat quietly and watched the nightly ritual.

Jeanine was six. Brian was eight. Mary Margaret was ten. Mary Margaret was old enough to know her father had been drinking. It made the child worry. She didn't like it, but she respected her daddy too much to say anything.

By the time the last kid was in bed, there was no more daylight in the July summer sky. George's wife, Marilyn, had come out twice offering them food. George waved it off. Jack gently refused it.

Jack admired Marilyn. She was one of the few people who had his respect. In his boozy reverie, he started to idolize her. It took a good, confident woman to let them keep drinking and not try to force or cajole them out of their misery. She let them wallow comfortably in their recollections. She let them share their alcohol-tinged memories of their father and their temporary brotherly camaraderie.

"Did you think much about Dad dying some day?" asked Jack.

George pulled himself up and answered, "Sure. Guy gets to be eighty you think about it."

"You felt close to him?"

“I guess. I saw him at least once a month. Half the time the old bastard insisted on driving himself over here from Jersey.

“Dad really loved you, George.”

“He loved you, too, Jack.”

“He thought I was okay, but he really loved you, George. You were such a damn good kid. Everybody loved you.”

“Aw, come on. Dad was proud as hell about you.

“I know. He was one of the good guys, George.”

“Sure was.”

He was tough, but I liked him. I respected him. He was a gentleman. Worked hard all his life. Stuck with Mom. Sat next to her bed and took care of her for the whole year it took her to die.”

George nodded. “He sure did.”

He died well. Fast and neat. He hated worrying about needing someone to take care of him.”

George asked, “You talk to him much?”

“Yeah, as a matter of fact.” Jack reached over and clutched his brother’s meaty shoulder. “I’m sorry I haven’t kept in better touch with you.”

“Ah shit, Jack, you don’t have anything to be sorry about.”

“No. It’s not good.”

“Why? You’re running around working for that outfit of yours. I’m here with the family. How we gonna see each other?”

“I could call. When was the last time I called you?”

“I could call, too. I know you’re out there if I need you. All I have to do is call that

number for you, and your company finds you. Where were you?"

"Grand Cayman."

"When I called about Dad, they got you in less than an hour. I could call more.

What the hell were you doing in Grand Cayman?"

"Sort of a working vacation."

Doing what? What does that company do?"

"Pacific Rim?"

"Yeah. What do they do?"

Jack waved his hand, "They use to call them detective agencies. Now they're 'security companies.' Pacific Rim has lots of clients based in the Pacific. Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese. Big electronics and manufacturing outfits. Lot of American clients, too."

George asked. "What do *you* do for 'em?"

Devlin shrugged, suddenly tired of all the whiskey in him. "Information. Protection. Security."

"You like working for foreign clients?"

"I don't work for the clients, really. I work for the guy who runs it. He's smart, and he's honest, and he has guts."

"Who's that?"

His name is William Chow. I met him when I was in Vietnam. He ran a supply service for the CIA. Had his own planes, trucks, the works. He never existed, but he knew everybody and everything."

"Hooked in with the spooks."

"Yeah, but not anymore. Not that I know of. He's got his own organization. At a

certain point, you got to have an organization behind you.”

“How come you left the Secret Service?”

“Had enough of the rules and regulations. Same with the military. They have tremendous power, George. Incredible resources. You wouldn’t believe what they can do. And then a bureaucrat somewhere makes a policy decision, and it all goes to shit.

“That ain’t the only place that happens.”

“In your job?”

“Sure.”

“What is it, Bristol-Myers?”

“Bristol-Myers Squibb now.”

“They merged?”

“Yeah, like everybody else.”

“So what do you do for ’em, George?”

“Information. Protection. Security.”

Devlin laughed gently. He rubbed his face to push away some of the drunken haze. “Ah, George, we have to get together more often. We don’t even know how each other earns a living.”

“You’d be bored if I told you, and everything you do is a secret.”

“Hmm.” Devlin looked at the first stars appearing in the east, then turned again to his brother. “Mom’s gone. Dad. It’s just us now, George.”

“I guess so.” George took a thoughtful sip out of the Jameson bottle. “You going back to L.A.?”

“Soon.”

“You staying in Manhattan?”

“Yeah. A couple more days I guess. Got the company apartment.”

George looked at his brother. “What are you so fucking serious about?” He reached over and put his big hand on Jack’s arm and said, “I know you’re there. You know I’m here. You’ve got your life. I’ve got mine. It’s fine.”

“I know it’s fine. I know. You have a lovely life, George. You should be proud.”

George settled his head back on the chaise. “Yeah, why not.”

“You have those beautiful kids. They love you like a hero. Marilyn. She’s great.”

“It’s just like a billion other families, Jack.”

Devlin swept up the bottle from the lawn and thought about how soft his brother’s voice had become. “I guess so, George.” He took a burning swig and looked at his brother. “Last of the Mohicans, George.”

George looked back at him.

Suddenly Devlin stood up. “Come on, George, let’s get the hell out of here. I’m taking you to dinner.”

“Shit. I can hardly stand up.”

“Bullshit. Let’s get the hell out of this backyard and just do something away from this goddamn funeral.”

“The funeral’s over, Jack.”

“Not until I’m away from here it’s not. I’m not letting you shake my hand, pat me on the back, stick me in a cab, and make some promise to stay in touch. We’re going to spend at least one damn night together away from all this.”

George blinked once and said, “Okay.”

Devlin called a car service. He swore to Marilyn they wouldn’t drive, and twenty minutes later they stumbled out the door and into the black limo waiting at the bottom

of George's driveway.

Devlin took his brother to Palio on 53rd Street. They had a drink in front of the great Sandro Chia murals in the downstairs bar while they waited for a table. Their Italian dinner sobered them enough to prompt a new round of drinking that took them up the East Side through more comfortable bars.

They were two big men talking about a dead father they both loved and missed deeply. Two brothers bumping along down the street not caring very much about who didn't like it. Two sincere drunken men telling each other private things and making promises that both might later acknowledge but never actually keep.

And then, at the third bar, Devlin saw the blonde, and he was drunk enough not to ignore the sudden overwhelming urge for sex. He wanted to get close to her and take her home and strip and go as deep into her as he could. Go as deep as it took to turn aside the loss and stave off the emptiness.

There was so much power and energy in his good looks and boozy sincerity that when he asked, the girl just said, "Why not?"

He ambled over to George, who was playing darts with three other men. When Jack told him he was leaving, George at first looked confused and disappointed. But as soon as Jack pointed to the blonde, George smiled and slapped him on the back wishing him luck. George listened carefully while Jack gave him his keys and described how to get into the loft apartment.

In the hot light of the morning-after, the memory of George's big drunken smiling face haunted Jack. He willed the cab to hurry down Second Avenue.

The street door to the loft building where he was staying was open during the day because of the commercial lofts on the first two floors. Security started in the elevator.

Each floor had a lock. Jack had told George to leave the seventh floor unlocked. That way the elevator would take him to his floor, and George could hide the keys under the mat outside the apartment.

The taxi driver dropped him off, the lobby door was open, and Devlin stepped into the elevator. He punched seven at the same moment he saw the floor was locked.

“Damn!”

He stepped off the elevator and looked up at the lobby ceiling as if he could see through it and up to the loft on the seventh floor. He pictured George dead asleep in his bed.

He walked out of the small lobby and turned left on West Broadway. His watch said ten minutes to nine. The hell with it, he thought, I’ll just have to wake him up.

Five rings and the answering machine came on. After the beep, Devlin yelled into the phone, “George, it’s me, Jack. Wake up!”

Nothing.

“Come on, George, wake up. I’m locked out. You have to let me in, George. Come on!”

Nothing.

He thought about it. The answering machine is in the living room. He’s in the bedroom. Maybe the door is closed.

“Shit.”

Devlin yelled louder, “Come on, George, wake up!”

People across the street stopped and looked at him. He stuck his head farther into the half-phone booth. “George!”

Nothing.

He could see his seventh-floor window halfway down the block. It seemed very far away. Nobody is in there, thought Devlin. Now what the hell do I do?

