

Untraceable

‘What is the truth?’ he asked. It was a simple question. Spoken softly, seemingly without menace. The others gathered in that place knew from experience that things were going to get crazy any minute now. No one wanted to be around Patrick when he was crazy. Even when he was calm, he had an aura around him that crackled with barely contained violence. Patrick brought his hand up to his face and silently took a long pull on the cigarette, causing the ash glow to red hot. All eyes watched the grey ash at the tip gradually get bigger and start to droop. It perched perilously, clinging on desperately and defying gravity. Still Patrick sucked, his chest expanding further, making it huge. His cool grey eyes remained fixed and unblinking on what looked like a bundle of dirty rags on the floor in front of him.

The bundle of rags spoke in a barely audible whisper, ‘Piss off.’

The rain that had been dancing passively on the tin roof of the abandoned barn appeared to respond to this act of defiance with outrage by suddenly unleashing a torrent of water which sounded like a hail of bullets greedily tearing their way through the thin metal and rip the flesh from who any who dared to be there on that dark night. They were all accustomed to the sound of high velocity rapid gunfire and no one took any notice.

The impotent length of ash finally gave up the struggle against gravity, detached itself from the cigarette and headed downwards. Curiously mesmeric, like watching a parachutist in freefall, the four men standing followed its descent, grateful for anything that delayed what might come next. They were all battle hardened, accustomed to extreme violence in hostile countries. And they had all killed. Although none of them thought of themselves as killers. Before was different, that was self-defence. Kill or be killed. As professionals, they had been paid well to do it. This was different. This was murder.

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While the ash has been centre of attention for most inside, outside something else entirely was developing. The staccato like raindrops falling on scattered leaves masked any slight sound from the footsteps of the two approaching figures. Both were clad in black making them all but invisible in the darkness of the surrounding woodland. Their practised

movements were economical and precise, allowing them to advance quickly. The night vision goggles illuminated the scene before them in a way that resembled a computer game, hotspots glowing a brighter, almost luminescent green, than the surroundings made it almost as good as daylight. In some cases, it was better than daylight, as heat left a trace, which meant there was a history. This effectively gave them the ability to see back in time. Using this now, they could see the footprints, represented by fading green marks, leading from the parked vehicles leading towards the big double doors of the barn. Five distinct sets of prints and what looks like a rough line – like something had been dragged along. They paused to carry out one final check of their weapons, both Heckler and Koch MP5K; this version, with the shorted barrel and minus the stock and with 15 rounds of 9mm ammunition, made it ideal for close quarters work. Strapped to their legs as a backup were Glock 17 pistols, which in the hands of even a moderate marksman could place multiple rounds in a 5cm diameter grouping from 25m. This accuracy, even under rapid fire, explained why it was the weapon of choice for counter terrorism forces across the globe. These two were in the elite of marksmen and accustomed to placing deadly accurate shots to chest and head in seconds at even greater distances. Tonight, if the Glocks were deployed, the distances would be less than 5m.

They advanced rapidly, like wraiths as almost floated across the last 10m and flattened themselves against the barn wall. The first figure withdrew an object from the kit strapped onto the chest body armour and attached it to an extendable pole. The mirror at the end of the pole would allow the holder to see inside a building from an obscure angle without the risk of revealing their presence. It didn't take long to assess the scene and after a rapid series of well-practised hand gestures designed to wordlessly communicate a plan, the two moved to the execution phase without a word being spoken. The only sounds was the very slight click of the safety catches being slid to the automatic position. Two flashbang grenades crashed through the window and detonated instantly. The flash caused blindness for up to 5 seconds and an after image which distorted visions while the 170dB bang results in temporary deafness and the disruption to the fluid in the ear causes a loss of balance. Before the flash had even fully subsided, they were through the door, weapons raised. Patrick was the first to react, years of training producing a muscle memory chain of actions that saw him reaching for his own Glock. Before it was even out of the holster, four shots rang out adding to the confusion. Patrick flew backward and lay in a tangle of legs and arms.

He was dead, even before the blood oozing out of the two precisely placed holes in his chest started to show red. The two 9mm holes in his forehead had sealed his fate before his feet even left the ground.

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Days later, what had been a bundle of rags wiped at the steam on the mirror to reveal her naked reflection. The distorted image could not mask the bruises that were starting to fade a little. The various cuts would eventually become visible scars. None of this bothered her. It was the scars inside that would never heal that would stop her sleeping at night. She had trusted Patrick, but he had betrayed her on many levels. Now, she was determined to find out who had given him the orders. Only then, could she begin her revenge. She turned and put out the light as she walked out of the bathroom. The area of the mirror where she has wiped, gradually steamed up again, soon showing no trace. Just like she was now. Untraceable.

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