

# Chapter 1

“Okay, so what have we got?” Lily’s dad paced the kitchen in his shirt and tie, running his fingers through his fading blond hair.

Lily put her chin in her hand and stared at her laptop. “I told you, Dad. Not enough. The guy who sold her the papers is a visa-passport-whatever faker. Facial recognition on the CCTV has had him in the City a few times recently, but he doesn’t stay anywhere long enough to get caught. And without him, we’re not going to get any further.”

Her father rubbed his face, then folded his arms. “What’s he doing in the City?”

She shrugged. “Pubs, mainly. Probably meeting clients. Although there are a couple of places he goes that I can’t figure out. Most likely dead drops, just leaving the papers for people to come and collect. One derelict alley in Bow Lane in particular.”

Her father picked up his briefcase, a long black court gown, and the box containing his barrister’s wig. “We’ve only got a few more days on this one. Till next week at the latest. If we can’t find him, they’ll deport her.”

“I know. But he’s left no online trail, and officially he doesn’t exist. He accesses his e-mail from random coffee shops. I’ll keep trying, but . . .” She shrugged and took a sip of tea from a large white mug.

He rubbed her curly head as he passed. “Good girl. Wish me luck.”

She grinned. “You don’t need luck. You’ll ace it.”

“Thanks to my star researcher.” He winked.

“For a big corporation with so much to hide, they were sloppy. That firewall wouldn’t have kept out the cold, let alone anyone who actually wanted to get into their system.” She smiled. “Besides, it was you who taught me how to find fraudulent transactions.”

Her father paused suddenly, looking at her.

“What?” she said.

He hesitated before replying. “Nothing.” He blinked. “You looked so like your mother then, I . . . it just caught me up short, that’s all.”

Lily glanced toward the photographs on the table against the sitting-room wall. The most recent had been taken in Temple Gardens on her sixteenth birthday, the vivid autumn leaves behind her picked up by the colors in her hair. She was a smaller, sharper version of the mother she had never met, but they shared the same soft ringlets in a shiny mixture of gold and bronze. They also shared pale skin and large green eyes framed by dark lashes and eyebrows.

Lily’s father turned for the door. “There’s money on the table if you need anything. Why don’t you go and meet your friends?”

“Thanks. I think Sam’s busy. Her cousins are over from Canada or something.”

“Right. Well, make sure you eat, please.” He straightened his tie in the hall mirror.

“Yes, Dad. Go, or you’ll be late.”

He reached for the door handle.

“And good luck!” she called after him. The latch clicked and she turned back to her computer. Through the window the gulls wheeled against a leaden midday sky.

Lily and her father lived quietly, in a routine formed around his work, her school, and shared mealtimes. Their flat was cramped and old, and Lily knew he didn’t earn that much, as lawyering went. They lived in Middle Temple on the edge of the City of London, a sort of ancient village full of lawyers, with a dining hall and library, right on the river. Lily’s bedroom had white bedding, a desk, and the MacBook her dad had given her for Christmas. She adored it. Next to it was her brick of a laptop, scuffed and scratched from too many accidents. It was full of tag ends of code, script written on long, quiet afternoons.

Coding was something Lily had discovered she was good at by accident, after her school had run a short course in computer programming. But creating programs that compared consumer interest in products through Facebook “likes” had soon morphed into hacking Facebook, then the school system, then the systems of corporations her father was up against in court. It had become like an addiction, one Lily and her father tried to put to good use. What Lily did was illegal, even if it was for the right reasons, but in the last year they had worked on cases as diverse as stopping a major corporation from poisoning its workers and breaking part of a human-trafficking chain.

Recently, though, it seemed to Lily that someone out there seemed to be aware of her—making contact online and then vanishing again, always just as she was about to launch some

complicated new piece of code. Lily didn't know who it was, how they knew, or why they never tried to stop her—they always disappeared too quickly for her to find out anything more than a username: apache85. She had not told her father. Not yet. He worried about her too much as it was.

Lily got down from the stool and made herself some toast, which she ate standing at the counter. Her father was always after her to eat, and he'd been even worse than usual this week, as they had pulled two all-nighters trying to track down the passport faker. She yawned and stretched, feeling jaded.

On the fridge, a handwritten note saying *BLOOD* was held beneath a magnet on top of a form from the doctor's office. Frequent blood-giving had been part of Lily's routine all her life, owing to her rare blood type. She had come to hate doctors, and needles, but she didn't complain. Her father was worried, though, that the blood-banking service would cease now that the National Health Service was being dismantled by corrupt politicians, and that made him even more protective. Lily had found him poring over expensive private health care literature recently. Health care they couldn't afford.

She finished her toast and washed up, then sat back down in front of her computer. The dead drops the forger had made didn't seem to make any sense. One in particular, the Bow Lane one, confused her. It had taken too long. She logged into the Corporation of London's CCTV system. They had recently upgraded their security, but it hadn't taken Lily long to find her way back in. She scrolled through the hundreds of camera locations before clicking on the Bow Lane one.

Along with the security upgrade, new cameras had been installed throughout the City. This one was a sophisticated gimbal setup that could revolve within a wheel in any direction. Lily used the trackpad of her computer to spin it, showing her the whole alley. A building that looked like a closed stationery shop came into view, together with a small, dark coffee shop.

She squinted and looked closer. At the end of the alley, where there had appeared to be a dead end, was instead a gate. Lily attempted to zoom the camera. As she did so, the gate opened, and a tall figure in a long, pale coat walked through it. A wide hood was drawn up over his head, concealing his face. The coat hung open, and beneath it he wore a Henley T-shirt, jeans, and boots.

As Lily watched, he reached back and pulled the gate closed behind him. He halted, turning very slightly toward the camera. She tried to zoom in closer, to see his face, and blinked as he disappeared from view. A moment later, the camera screen shuddered and went dark, cracked.

“What the—?” She tried to reestablish the connection, but the camera was out of action. “Okay . . .”

Going to her bedroom, she added a knitted top to her uniform of worn layered T-shirts, skinny jeans, and sneakers. She pulled on her black jacket, grabbed her canvas satchel, the money, and her keys, and left.

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Temple was one of the safest, most traditional places in London. There were porters everywhere, and everyone seemed to

know everyone else. Barristers in gowns and wigs strode across the frozen paved walks. It was the hardest winter since records began, and the City had been below freezing since before Christmas.

Putting in her earphones, Lily stood out of the way to let one of the clerks rush past before taking the east gate and heading out toward Ludgate Circus and the City beyond. She launched her music app as she walked, thinking about the figure in the alley. She passed the vast bulk of St. Paul's Cathedral with her usual sense of contentment to be in the City of London alone, with its narrow alleys and their strange names. It was easy to spend hours walking around, watching people as they took a break from work. Or the homeless man at the number fifteen bus stop, with his can of super-strength lager and a bag of bread for the birds. And the tall, thin West Indian street sweeper with his waist-length dreadlocks and the mirrored wraparound sunglasses he wore even in the gray light.

But today, Lily headed straight for busy Bow Lane. In the surprisingly empty passage she found the old-fashioned stationery shop. She looked closer. Dust coated the display; the shop had clearly not been open for a very long time. The sky was a narrow pewter lid overhead, dulling the sounds of the city outside. At the end of the passage an iron gate stood half-open, almost obscured by greenery.

*That was where he came from.*

Lily walked through. The alley was barely wide enough for her to pass, and was lined and roofed with splitting whitewashed planks. At the other end, she emerged into a dead-end courtyard. On one wall a large archway, which had once led out

toward the main road of Cheapside, was closed up with massive doors, nailed shut with rough pieces of wood. Above the door, on the grimy old plaster, was painted a sprawling black bird, wingtips like fingers. A crow, or maybe a rook.

She stared up at the building all around her. It was an ancient coaching inn, four stories high and sloping inward, with elaborate balconies running around it on each level. The nailed-up arch would have been for horses and carriages to come and go; Lily had read about them in a book on London's lost buildings. It was dark and quiet and looked empty. *Must be worth a fortune to a developer.*

Then, behind her, she heard a low growl.

She turned. Four yellow eyes blinked at her, glowing blankly at chest height in the wooden alley. Lily swallowed. Low, rumbling snarls reached her ears.

*Okay, there is no such thing as a dog with two heads loose in the City of London . . .*

The creature paced, weaving back and forth at the inner gateway, never taking its eyes from her. Lily stepped back. It was massive and barrel-chested, and it definitely had two heads. From one of the mouths, a long, pink tongue lolled over the razor-sharp teeth. The other mouth wrinkled as it bared its long fangs, snarling. It was the sound of fury. Madness.

The dog's weaving increased, and slaver ran from its jaws. Lily's knees weakened. She looked around the huge derelict courtyard. It reeked of abandonment. She tugged out her earphones and edged toward the nearest door, which stood slightly open. If she could get inside . . .

The dog saw her move and the snarling escalated. Then, like a greyhound from a trap, it bounded through the gate and burst into the courtyard. Lily scrambled for the doorway, but a second later everything erupted into pain and blood.

The dog pinned her to the ground, her head cracking against the cold paving. Its jaws fastened on her neck, compressing her collarbone, and shook her violently. Claws like broken razors slashed at her jacket, tearing her flesh from ribs to hip bone. She screamed.

There came a pounding on wooden boards. Running. A shadow fell across her eyelids. Boots thudded onto stone. Snarls and yelps echoed around the high walls. She opened her eyes, saw nothing but blurred shapes, and scrambled backward, against the crumbling planks of the building. She curled her legs beneath her just as the body of the enormous animal slammed into the wood by her damaged left side, knocking her to the ground again and showering her with dust. A great head fell into her lap, tongue lolling from the side of its mouth, gums red and slack against yellowing fangs. Lily's heart clattered, her lungs refusing to fill.

A tall, dark-haired boy in worn jeans and a faded red Henley appeared in front of her. She recognized him from the camera. No coat this time. He was eerily beautiful, with crow-black hair and pale skin. He crouched on his heels and pushed up his sleeves, looking at her, head tilted. Lily could feel the blood pumping from her wounds, dripping over her chest, down her ribs, soaking into the waistband of her jeans.

“Please, you need to get help,” she managed, her hand

scrabbling for the engraved silver medical alert disk at her neck. It was gone, lost in the fray. “My blood, I need . . .” She couldn’t finish.

He took the collar of her jacket between two fingertips, moving it aside. “I think it’s too late for that.”

Everything went black.