

Friends In Spy Places

Book 14 of the NEVER SAY SPY series

By Diane Henders

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The town of Silverside and all secret technologies are products of my imagination. If I'm abducted by grim-faced men wearing dark glasses, or if I die in an unexplained fiery car crash, you'll know I accidentally came a little too close to the truth.

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are products of my imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

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CHAPTER 1

As I slid into a chair at the meeting table, Clyde 'Spider' Webb hid a cavernous yawn behind his hand.

"Are we keeping you up, Webb?" Greg Holt inquired sarcastically. "We wouldn't want you to sacrifice your beauty sleep over trivial little things like international espionage and murder."

A blush stained Spider's cheeks, making him look more like a guilty teenager than the brilliant twenty-seven-year-old analyst he was. "Sorry," he mumbled. "I was up really late last night. I wasn't expecting a Sunday morning meeting."

The contagious yawn overtook me, too, in spite of my best attempt to smother it.

Holt shot me a look, his steel-blue eyes glinting with contempt. "Christ, I'm more alert than you and Webb put together; and I was interrogating Grandin all night."

Yeah, yeah. Holt The Magnificent.

I was biting my tongue so I wouldn't say that aloud when Spider sprang to my defence. "You didn't get attacked and drugged yesterday like Aydan did!" His pale cheeks flushed with indignation. "She was

barely out of the hospital when she flew down to Calgary last night! And then she had to drive back to Silverside this morning for this meeting; and I bet the roads were still awful after that blizzard, weren't they, Aydan?"

"Yeah, they reopened an hour before I left Calgary this morning," I agreed, trying not to sound as exhausted as I felt. "It took me nearly three hours instead of the usual two." I gave Spider a little 'thank-you' smile and turned back to Holt. "So did you get anything from Grandin?"

Holt scowled. "He'll crack soon."

"So that's a 'no'." I tried not to sound snotty, but Holt's scowl deepened anyway.

Director Charles Stemp strode in, quelling our exchange of unpleasantries. As he took his seat at the head of the table, he said, "Agent Kelly, your mother wishes to speak with you."

"Tough," I snapped. "She can rot in hell."

"Allow me to clarify," Stemp said in his usual dispassionate tone, but something in his voice made the small hairs rise on the back of my neck. "Your next mission is to visit your mother."

It seemed like a bad idea to voice the retort that quivered on the tip of my tongue, so I stared at Stemp in silence.

After a chilly moment, he went on, "When we released her last night she begged me to arrange a meeting with you, to allow her a chance to fully explain herself. I agreed. She is staying at the Silverside Hotel in Room 106, and she is expecting you this afternoon."

I pressed my lips together to hold in an explosion of profanity. Meddling bastard. Just because he'd finally reconciled with his parents, now he thought there should be a happy ending for everybody?

Bullshit. *His* mother hadn't faked her death and run off with some sleazy criminal only to turn up thirty years later pretending to be dear old Mom.

Spider gave me a sympathetic look across the table. Holt just smirked. Asshole.

"I realize this is an uncomfortable situation for you," Stemp went on. "But we need to know whether your mother was involved in Sam Kraus's espionage and treason, and this is our only chance to investigate her before she returns to the United Kingdom to resume her work with MI5. Although it is not optimum for you to return to active duty so soon, your personal connection makes you the only logical choice for this mission."

I forced myself to see past his impassive façade to the understanding in his eyes. He wouldn't do this to me unless it was necessary.

And Nora was only here for two weeks. Surely I could tolerate her for that long. Make nice, and find out for sure whether she truly was the conniving bitch I thought she was.

Who knew? Maybe I'd gotten it all wrong. Maybe she loved me as much as she claimed, and she had been protecting me the only way she knew how by leaving all those years ago. My heartstrings quivered with painful hope.

I squashed it. The woman was a liar, an adulteress, and probably a criminal. Not worth getting my hopes up.

"I'll do my best." My voice came out flat.

"Good. Dr. Rawling is available to do your psych clearance interview today. Do you foresee any difficulty obtaining it?"

Suppressing a groan, I muttered, “No.” I didn’t bother to add, ‘...as long as I lie to him as usual’.

“Why can’t we just question Nora under the lie detector again?” Spider asked. “If she’s innocent, she wouldn’t mind doing that, would she?”

“She has refused to answer any more questions,” Stemp replied. “And as long as the UK continues to grant her diplomatic immunity, Canada has no authority to hold her or question her.”

“If she’s innocent, you’d think she’d want to help out her daughter,” Holt growled. “Sounds guilty to me.”

“Perhaps. Or she may simply be observing standard MI5 security protocols.” Stemp turned back to me. “We are exploiting a grey area, since your mother has completed all activities directly covered by her diplomatic immunity. We have a bug in her hotel room, taps on the hotel phone and her cell phone, and analysts are monitoring her email and internet usage. They have also prepared a dossier including her financial records and other pertinent documents. Those records have been forwarded to you.”

Holt snorted. “That’s a hell of a so-called grey area, since the Vienna Convention flat-out says ‘the premises of the mission shall be inviolable’.”

“My point exactly,” Stemp replied. “Nora Taylor’s hotel room in Silverside is not ‘the premises of the mission’. Her mission is complete, and its premises were her hotel room in Calgary. She is officially on vacation.”

Holt smirked, clearly enjoying the opportunity to show off his knowledge. "Except that Article 30 says the diplomat's private residence and papers and correspondence are also inviolable."

"Which is why this is a clandestine op," Stemp said coolly. "The potential for a catastrophic worldwide security breach is of larger concern to the chain of command than the possibility of a slap on the wrist for a technical violation of the Vienna Convention."

I read between the lines: 'Don't get caught.'

Stemp went on, "Of equal priority to the investigation of Nora Taylor is the investigation into who paid former CIA agent Grandin to abduct Agent Kelly. Holt, did you make any progress with your interrogation last night?"

"No," Holt mumbled. "But he'll crack soon. I'm sure of it."

Stemp turned to Spider. "Webb, do you have any new intel?"

Spider rubbed bloodshot eyes and sat up straighter, squaring his bony shoulders. "As soon as Holt arrested Grandin yesterday afternoon I got the team to comb the internet for any connections between Grandin and Aydan, but they didn't find anything. I also got them to infiltrate the CIA's network and check Grandin's personnel file, along with anything else they could find, but it looks as though the CIA has already given us everything they have on him." He sent a questioning glance toward Stemp. "I didn't tell Brock and Tammy to work on it today. Should I?"

"No," Stemp replied. "You were right to make the attempt, but there is no need to expend further resources. An experienced agent like Grandin would be unlikely to leave behind any kind of digital or physical evidence."

“But...” Consternation creased Spider’s brow. “If he won’t talk, we’ll never know whether he’s blown Aydan’s cover. And we’ll never know who was paying him to abduct her, either. Somebody else could be hunting her already.”

Tension seized my shoulders. I had been carefully avoiding that thought.

Deep breath. Calm...

“Grandin will talk,” Holt said tightly. “Just give me a bit more time.”

Stemp inclined his chin in my direction. “Kelly, Webb is correct. Consider your Arlene Widdenback cover burned until further notice.” He transferred his attention to Holt. “The United States government has cancelled Grandin’s diplomatic immunity so that we can question him, but they are pressuring us to release him to their custody. Breaking Grandin is your top priority. This morning we’ll shake him up by having Kelly take over the interrogation.”

“But he’s *my-*” Holt blurted, then pressed his mouth shut, muscles rippling under the unshaven bristles that darkened his prominent chin.

Caught between dismay over facing Grandin and petty satisfaction at Holt The Magnificent’s discomfiture, I squashed my reaction and nodded like the professional I was supposed to be.

I should cut Holt some slack. He was a good agent and he’d saved my ass. And he was actually an okay guy when he wasn’t playing superhero...

“*She* won’t get anything out of Grandin.” Holt’s arrogant words shattered my attempt at a charitable attitude adjustment. “He won’t strike a deal with a loser agent that let him capture her.”

My fist clenched with the need to grab Holt’s bullshit attitude and shove it straight down his throat.

Holt added, “No offense, Kelly; but I know how these guys think.”

“Well, we’ll see,” I growled. In my mind I added, “...asshole.”

“Yes,” Stemp agreed, making my lips twitch with secret amusement. “We shall see.” His expressionless gaze drifted over Holt’s rampant five o’clock shadow and rumpled hair. “Go home and get some rest, and come back to relieve Kelly in the interrogation room at thirteen hundred hours.”

His reptilian gaze snapped to Spider. “You may go home for now, too, though we may need you to come back later today if we gain any time-sensitive intel from Grandin. Dismissed.”

As we all pushed back our chairs Stemp added, “Kelly, stay.”

Holt shot us a frown as he rose, clearly wondering why I merited special attention.

I kept my expression neutral to hide my rising anxiety. Oh, God, dealing with my shitty excuse for a mother was bad enough. What other bombshell was Stemp about to drop on me?

When the door had closed behind Holt and Spider, Stemp spoke again. “I have a second assignment for you.”

Great. I’d barely survived my last mission, and now he wanted me to do two at the same time. So much for ‘not optimum to return to active duty so soon’.

Stemp went on, "In each of your last two missions, you involved John Kane."

My stomach tightened.

"It is undesirable to involve civilians in clandestine operations." Stemp's cool precise voice felt like a scalpel poised over my jugular. "Furthermore, it was undesirable for the Department to be forced to accept Kane's resignation in the first place."

I resisted the urge to close my eyes before the killing blow. Instead, I stared past Stemp's left ear, keeping my gaze on the wall behind him as he went on, "So, since you have a close personal relationship with Kane..."

Shit, shit, shit...

"...your assignment is to recruit him back into the Department. An agent of his calibre is wasted in civilian life. We want him to return to active duty."

"No!" The word leaped from my mouth despite my best attempt to bite it back.

Stemp's eyebrow rose a fraction of an inch. "Pardon?"

"No! I won't. Can't. Don't you see..." I sucked in a breath and attempted to marshal my objections into something more coherent. "Ever since I've known him, Kane has said that active agent status isn't an appropriate role for a parent. Now that he has Daniel, he won't go back to being an agent no matter how much he might like to." I drew a slow breath. This was where it was going to get ugly. "And I won't manipulate him into it."

"So he *wants* to return to active duty."

“For shit’s sake, that’s the one irrelevant part of what I just said!” With an effort, I managed not to wave my arms in frustration. “It doesn’t matter if he wants to be an agent again, he won’t. Done. Over. End of story.”

Stemp’s deadpan façade never altered, but I sensed his satisfaction as the trap snapped shut around me. “If you are already certain he will not compromise his principles, then there is no reason for you to refuse the assignment on moral grounds.”

“You...” I was trying so hard not to yell *‘dickhead’* that words failed me completely. I knotted my fingers together and squeezed, wishing his throat was between them.

He gave me a look as level and emotionless as his voice. “I suggest you do not refuse this assignment.”

After allowing a moment for the veiled threat to trickle ice water down my spine, his stone-hard eyes softened. “I understand Kane’s objections, and yours. However, it is not your place to make that decision on behalf of either Kane or the Department. We are not asking you to coerce him, merely to highlight the potential benefits. If he truly has no desire to return, he will not.”

I met Stemp’s bland expression with a glare and countered, “Then you don’t need me at all. If you don’t plan to use sneaky persuasion or emotional blackmail, just send a recruiting officer to talk to him.”

We eyed each other in silence. Stalemate.

Stemp sighed. “Please don’t make me give you a direct and specific order.”

His odd phrasing registered just as I was opening my mouth to tell him where, how high, and how hard he could stick it.

I shut up, my mind accelerating to maximum RPM.

'A direct and specific order'.

Before I had gotten to know Stemp, I would have assumed he was only trying to threaten and manipulate me; but now...

Shit. It was a warning. I was already on thin ice with the chain of command for involving Kane. If I refused the assignment or disobeyed orders now, I could end up in prison. I replayed the conversation in my mind. So far Stemp had only given me an assignment, not a direct order.

He had left me a loophole. Don't force him to plug it.

Unclenching my jaw, I muttered, "Okay. I'll talk to Kane. But I can't promise it'll work."

The faintest hint of a smile quirked Stemp's mouth. "That is all we can ask. Go and question Grandin now. Dismissed."

Heading for the door, I didn't bother to wonder which of us had won that round.

Stemp, no contest. As usual.

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