

Reservations For One In Hell

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PROLOGUE

LOS ANGELES AIRPORT

PRIVATE JET EXECUTIVE LOUNGE

SEPTEMBER, 1995

Two men took seats at a corner booth in the rear of the Jetport bar.

Mitch, the bartender, was immediately aware of the handsome, Nordic-looking blond because of the distinctive cut of the travelers gray, Armani suit and huge wraparound dark glasses.

His Middle Eastern-looking companion was clad in a long black duster and full quill ostrich boots. Iranian was the barkeep's best guess. Both gentlemen exuded extreme wealth. The spirit vendor speculated that each would be big tipplers. Though the men made no motion for him to approach, Mitch hurried over and inquired, "A drink for you, good sirs?"

The blond ordered scotch, "Neat." The dark haired fellow nodded for the same.

Moving from the table, the bartender pondered over the appearance of the fair gentleman. At first glance, the profile had been that of an extraordinarily handsome fellow. In close proximity however a tragic deformity was revealed. Had Mitch not seen every type in his years of tending bar he probably would have visibly flinched at the cruel travesty some freak accident had made of one side of the man's face. The blonde's eyes were concealed by the huge Polo shades that did little to hide the burned contortion of his left cheek and forehead.

No attempt had been made to camouflage the purple skin that stretched ghoulishly over the left side of the man's face. In fact, when ordering seconds ago, the blond seemed almost to flaunt his deformity, to challenge Mitch to stare at him with pity or disdain. The bartender hastened to fill their order, delivered it with a flourish; and then left them alone.

There was an air of intrigue about these two, and after many decades on this job, Mitch had learned, no answers openly gleaned, no repercussions later. That was fine with him. These men were the solo drinkers in the bar, a rarity for the private jet lounge, but given that fact, the bartender was assured of overhearing their tête-à-tête. There was nothing to buffer their conversation.

The Iranian glanced stealthily about as if suspicious of being overheard. Assuring himself that the barkeep was clearly occupied with the TV News, he proceeded with his dialogue.

To Mitch's delight he began talking furtively to his fair-haired companion. "Sven, it's been forever since Cindy was spotted." He looked around again, assuring himself there still was no one within earshot but the man at the bar. "What makes you think she'll show for their thirty-year class reunion? Only a suicidal fool would expose herself that way. She's got to remember how close you came to getting her in 1975."

Mitch smiled. The bounce-off acoustics of the corner booth paid off as he tuned into the conversation that was as clear as if he had a front row seat at a Hollywood Premiere.

The blond sipped his drink, answering in a low-pitched growl. "Hell, Hamil, she never knew my intent. It was nothing but a speed and ditch affair to that high-strung Langford bitch. In her line of work she probably has events like that happen to her all the time. I'd have caught her if my tire hadn't blown. She'll show I'm sure. She'll want to brag about her undercover spy career to all her old friends. I hear she always was an egotistical

bitch. The lure of working for the FBI was probably too glamorous for her to pass up. I'll bet she thought it was like all the spy flicks we grew up with. What she has never counted on was my perseverance in dealing with her all this time. Mark my words, Cindy Langford will be at this class reunion to boast to her buddies. Then she'll live to rue the day she ever messed with one of my kin."

The dark haired man stated flatly as he continued to regard his friend. "Sources say she's not been heard from since the last reunion meeting in '75. What makes you so sure she'll show at this one?"

"I trust my instincts, and it's a chance I'm willing to take. I'm telling you, this time Cindy Langford is dead meat. I owe that much to Lars. Fucking cunt is entirely responsible for my brother's untimely death." The rage in his statement was expressed a bit too loudly. Both fell quiet and looked about.

Mitch covered the sudden silence between the men by asking, "Another, gentlemen?"

The answer from the blond. "Thanks, man, but no. We need to get moving. Our ride is about to take off."

Mitch went back to polishing the glasses, furtively continuing to listen as the conversation wound down.

"Sven, chill out. We have till October to bait this trap."

The fuming blond nodded, saying, "Our Cessna leaves for Aspen in ten minutes, we'd better get going. We have hot stuff cooking and can't afford to let things slip because of that elusive Langford broad. We can pull any strings we need to from there." Picking up his leather Hartman valise, he left with the man called Hamil.

Departing words growled from the Swede, "That Langford bitch thinks she's on her way to a class reunion. I'm making her reservations for one in Hell, instead."

Mitch hurried out from behind the bar and removed the empty glasses from their table. As expected, his reward was a hefty tip of two crisp one hundred-dollar bills. Mitch pocketed them, shaking his head in confusion at the parting remark.

Momentarily, he reflected on the entire conversation. He returned to stand at the bar, contemplating a phone call to the cops. Yet, what did he really know?

Some man named Sven was talking about getting to a lady named Cindy Langford who'd be attending a reunion. Reservations for one in Hell? What was that all about? Little to go on really. It was a needle in a haystack, at the very best.

Mitch withdrew the recently crumpled bills from his pocket, stared at them for a few moments, then looked in the direction of the two men that had just exited and negatively shook his head. Money like this was hard to come by so he hoped they came back soon. Maybe when they did, he would have a better take on what was coming down.

"Nope." He audibly vowed, chatting himself up, a frequent habit he had developed over the years of tending bar. "Anyway, it's too god damned much trouble to get involved with too few clear facts." Abstractly he fiddled with the dial on the overhead TV and landed on a re-run of Bruce Willis in 'Die Hard II'.

"Fuck," he muttered out loud, again. "Probably just a couple of Hollywood types practicing lines for a new movie shoot or something. 'Reservations for one in Hell' was probably the name of the damn thing. Nothing is going to come from my nosing in but trouble and questions for me."

At that point, a security guard poked his head around the corner, inquiring, "Hey, Mitch, buddy-boy. Anything shaking in here, today?"

The bartender shrugged his shoulders, replying, "Same old shit, Randy, different day, nothing ever changes."

Mitch shook his head with wonderment again as he thought further to himself. Someday he'd write a book about the odd balls that filter through here on a daily basis at Jetport LAX.

CHAPTER ONE

Sven Theurson and Hamil Jamoul had settled into the plush velvet seats at the rear of their Cessna.

Hamil was comfortably dozing, having automatically dropped off to sleep the second they had taken flight.

Sven looked out the window and watched the snowcapped Sierra Madres become misty behind smoke puffed from his expensive Havana cigar. The Swede settled more comfortably in his seat and gazed contentedly out the window again.

At this point in his life, he thought of his maimed looks as a predetermined fate. The accident that occurred because he was careless had indeed scarred him for all time.

Some years ago, he'd been careless while freebasing cocaine. Something had gone wrong, and the next thing he knew, he was in the hospital with his face swathed in bandages like a mummy.

The day they unwrapped the damage, he was mortified at the horrendous ruination of the left side of his face. All the doctors said that with extensive skin grafting and repairs, perhaps some semblance of normalcy could be restored.

Sven had been hopeful, then; but after a series of excruciatingly painful grafts and his body's subsequent rejections, he'd been discouraged and angry at the physician's inability to reshape his face. Finally, after going for help at several expensive clinics, all ventured the same opinion; that Sven had skin determined to reject any effort to be repaired. Indeed a rare occurrence, but the doctors suggested he learn to live with his deformity, because their skills were wasted on the severely damaged man.

Sven's mutilated face shocked some people, some were oddly fascinated, and others were repulsed. But over the course of time, his foreboding looks and reputation preceded him in deals and in the end always swung things to his advantage. It gave him an intimidating edge that few in his business were able to wield.

So he came to regard his grotesque deformity as a tool of his lucrative drug trafficking and decided that he was fated to wear the handsome mask on his right side and a caricature of a ghoul on the left. His face represented good ruined by evil; a symbol of what he personified in both his chosen lines of work.

They were returning from a successful business wrap-up in posh, star-studded Bel Air, having made another contact to adjust someone's lives.

Things were good.

His mountain home nestled high in the Starwood development was a perfect spot to front their lucrative businesses. No one suspected that among the rich and famous, such as Goldie Hawn and Michael Douglas, resided the Rockies' kings of distributing high-grade powder. Their product, however, bore no kin to the stuff that blanketed the peaks in the popular ski resort.

Any more than their other clandestine trade was what it seemed to be. 'Peace of Mind' was listed in the business directory along with two other 'Estate Liquidators.' The description beneath their ad simply stated, "Let us resolve your troublesome issues during these difficult times."

However, what they liquidated was a bit more on the edge than mere 'estates'. They were listed to fool the public as to their bent. To the real clients, their business was known for what it was; he and Hamil were world-class hit men.

So while cocaine was one game, the killing was their ultimate claim to fame. Business was excellent on all fronts these days.

Everything was going his way.

Money pouring in like Perrier from a never still fountain from both the snow and the hits. Clients were flocking to them in droves on both lucrative fronts.

But the best news had come with one phone call seconds after they became airborne today. His brief inquiry to the alumni office at Westlake School for Girls had finally hit pay dirt. Cindy Langford had positively replied to the reunion invitation. He'd known the bitch's ego ultimately would get in her way. This time, he swore to himself, she'd find no escape. He'd covered all his bases.

The young girl who had answered the office phone at the school had been a naive little fool. She'd spilled information to him as if he was a long lost pal. Sven simply asked the question and was rewarded more than ten-fold.

Cindy was coming by car from Vail with three other women who were graduates of the class of '65. They would have no notion how neatly this fit into his plans. The desolate and deserted stretches of Utah's highways were the perfect spot to kidnap Langford.

No witnesses no muss or fuss. Slam, bam, thank you ma'am, and the bitch would finally pay and die. He'd murder the other three, and then drug Cindy and stuff her in his car trunk. A quick dash for his Aspen aerie and the torture of the bitch would begin.

It bothered him not at all that Stuart Donahue's wife was involved. He surmised that having her death on his hands could cause some difficulty, but nothing he couldn't handle. Some years ago, his partner, Hamil warned him that trouble would rear its ugly head if Sven ever messed with a woman from Vail named Beau Donahue. Something about a hit contract gone wrong during a formidable will contest. Hamil had been counseled that Donahue's network of protection was unapproachable. At the time,

Sven had factored it in his brain as 'on file'. But when her name resurfaced today regarding the reunion, he dismissed it with a shrug. No one kept a protection network over a woman for years on end, of that he was certain.

Anyway, the actual hit was always the easiest part. They'd be long gone, without a trace or a lead, when the women's bodies were found by the side of the road in a deep ditch.

For Cindy, though, he would reserve his special martial arts.

People laughed at the stupid movies, never realizing how lethal the skills of the Ninja actually were. He and Hamil had been in Vietnam together. In some parts of Asia, killing had been refined to state of the art. When Sven witnessed it for the first time, rather than being repulsed, he was fascinated by the laborious details that the masters executed while eliminating their foe.

Cindy would pay with a grizzly termination, torture, as only he and Hamil could exact, death being the final price.

In her last hours, the cunt would rue the day she'd entrapped his brother in that Palm Springs drug bust. Her undercover narcotics work had played havoc for the last time. She would wish she'd never heard Sven's brother's name, let alone helped convict Lars of the prison rap that had been served with his brother's life.

Twins form lifetime bonds. Twenty-five years ago, Sven was enraged when his brother Lars had been imprisoned at Chino. However, everything had been fixed, and Sven had arranged for bail and a retrial, assured of acquittal, having bribed the judge who was slated to review his brother's offences.

Then Lars was brutally knifed to death before he could even be sprung from behind the prisons' walls. He'd been in Chino a mere ten days. It had been over, ended, irretrievably terminated because of the Langford bitch.

No matter how much money was offered, his twin's life had been snuffed for all time.

During the agonizing months that followed Lars' death, Sven began to formulate a plan for revenge. Yet by the time he launched his attack, Langford had disappeared. Apparently her identity had been changed. Her department must have suspected enormous repercussions from the bust and subsequent man's death. Sven's informants were finally forced to abandon the untraceable trail. All tracks of the agent were gone.

That was until Sven had gotten the bright idea to check about her graduating class at Westlake School for Girls. In 1975, a seemingly harmless inquiry regarding the date of the 1965 class reunion gleaned that Miss Langford had responded that she would attend. Sven had almost gotten her then. But an unexpected flat tire during the chase foiled his attempt at revenge. From then on, she vanished without a trace.

Methodically Sven continued to try to stalk her down. No word from her regarding the 1985 reunion, so, again, Sven realized he might have missed his one and only chance. She'd apparently gone underground for good.

Sven continued to bide his time. He refused to let his vendetta rest.

Upon today's inquiry regarding the upcoming 1995 reunion gala, Cindy had unexpectedly responded that she intended to attend. The chatty class liaison had babbled on about subsequent MIA's that had miraculously surfaced, but Sven gave little thought to any response but the one. Langford was his intended target, and the egotistical little blowfly was about to get caught in the waiting spider's web.

He knew her type. She had much too inflated an ego not to finally return to show off her fancy undercover spy career and boast of all the chumps that she'd personally landed in the slammer over the last thirty years.

Well, the way he had it planned, the lovely Miss Langford would not be attending her class reunion. She'd be entertaining him in Aspen instead.

"Your lunch, sir?" His flight steward set a silver tray in front of him.

A fresh bagel, shaved Nova lox, cream cheese, onions, and capers were displayed on a silver charger. A white rose in a crystal vase sat to the left of a snowy linen napkin, a frosty gold goblet was filled with Stolichnaya. The steward bowed and handed his employer his cutlery, a sterling knife and fork. He exited; then returned with an identical plate.

Gently, he touched Hamil's shoulder to rouse the sleeping man who instantly came awake.

Smiling, he accepted the proffered salver from the offering man. "Thanks bro."

"Enjoy your lunches, sirs."

Sven responded. "Yes, thank you. We won't need anything more for the moment."

The man disappeared into the galley of the plane.

With relish, Sven took the knife and slathered cream cheese onto his bagel. He built the sandwich methodically. From his pocket he extracted an enamel snuffbox. Opening it, using the small spoon from inside, he sprinkled a portion of snowy coke on the pink salmon, and then placed the top of the bagel over the sandwich just made.

Looking at Hamil, who was making a similar concoction, Sven advised, "I told you Langford would bite. I just got off the phone with some broad at Westlake School who spilled that she was coming out for the reunion with a bunch of pals from Colorado."

Hamil raised an eyebrow at that, asking, "And?"

Clearly Sven was elated by the news. "Then we do them during the road trip. Along one of those long deserted stretches of Utah highway. Say your prayers, girls."

Hamil nodded as he savored his own meal. “Nice fucking choice, my man. Nice fucking choice.”

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