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JUNGLE KILL

JIM ELDRIDGE

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The pistol in Paul Mitchell's hand was an H&K Mark 23. The man Mitchell was pointing it at stood with his hands clasped to the top of his head, sweat and blood running down his face. He looked terrified.

'This is the Mark 23,' Mitch told the man coolly, 'one of the finest guns in the world. Right now it's fully loaded and fixed with a silencer. No one will hear it if it fires.'

The man glanced around agitatedly. He had come at Mitch out of the bushes surrounding the building just a few minutes before, levelling an assault rifle. A Kalashnikov – the AK-47. He should have shot Mitch then, and his troubles would have been over. But he'd thought Mitch was unarmed.

That was his first mistake. His second mistake was to assume that because Mitch looked young he would have no real fighting experience. Mitch *was* young, but he'd served in the army since he was seventeen. And his last year had been with Special Forces.

The man's third mistake was to step towards Mitch and poke him in the chest with the end of the rifle barrel. Never do that to someone who's been Special Forces trained. First rule of pointing a gun at anyone: if they appear unarmed, there's no need to put yourself within reach of them. Mitch had knocked the Kalashnikov to one side then kicked the man in the groin. As he went down Mitch snatched the rifle from him and hit him in the face with the butt.

Mitch had then dumped the Kalashnikov on the ground and pulled out the Mark 23. 'I'm going to throw a mobile phone on to the ground near you,' Mitch said calmly, keeping the pistol aimed firmly at the man's head. 'You're going to bend down and

pick it up. This gun will be aimed at your head the whole time. If you attempt to make a run for it, or use the mobile phone as a weapon or a diversion, I will shoot you. Is that clear? Nod if you understand.'

The man nodded slowly. Mitch reached into his pocket, took out a mobile phone and gently tossed it so it landed on the gravel.

'You can take your hands off the top of your head, but spread them. Keep them away from your body. Bend down and pick up the phone.'

The man hesitated, then did as he had been told. Mitch kept the gun on him, not wavering.

'Dial Mr Zakhovsky's private number.'

'I don't have it,' the man began, but he shut up abruptly when he saw the expression on Mitch's face.

'Believe me, mate,' Mitch snapped, 'if you don't have it then you're no use to me and I might as well kill you right now. So, let's try that again. Dial Mr Zakhovsky's private number.'

The man began to dial, his hands shaking as he did so. He was obviously scared of what Mr Zakhovsky would do to him. But Mitch was the one holding a gun on him right now.

He finished dialling and held the phone out to Mitch, but Mitch shook his head and gestured for him to put it to his own ear. When the person on the other end of the line answered, he began to stammer out an apology in Russian.

'Stop,' Mitch ordered. 'Tell him Paul Mitchell is here.'

The man said something more in rapid Russian, then listened, nodding. He held out the mobile to Mitch.

'Mr Zakhovsky wants to talk to you.'

'OK,' said Mitch. 'Put the phone on the ground, put your hands back on your head and then step back six paces. Slowly.'

The man complied with the order. Mitch followed, equally slowly, keeping the gun trained on the man's face. When Mitch reached the phone

he bent down, picked it up and put it to his ear, still aiming the gun.

'Hello! Hello!' a voice was saying impatiently.

'Mr Zakhovsky,' said Mitch. 'I understand you want to see me.'

'How did you get into my private residence?' the man on the other end of the phone demanded angrily.

'That's my business,' answered Mitch. 'I'll be waiting for you tomorrow at ten a.m. in the lobby of the Excelsior Hotel in Knightsbridge. I think you know it.'

Mitch was taking no chances. Zakhovsky owned quite a few hotels in London but the Excelsior Hotel wasn't one of them. There'd be little chance of him rigging an ambush there at such short notice. Zakhovsky would come with his own protection, of course, but Mitch would be prepared.

There was a pause, then, 'Very well,' Zakhovsky snapped tersely, 'I will see you tomorrow at ten a.m.'

‘Good,’ said Mitch.

‘And one more thing,’ Zakhovsky sneered. ‘The fool you are holding at gunpoint. He has failed me. Kill him.’

‘Oh no, Mr Zakhovsky,’ replied Mitch, smiling. ‘I don’t work for you yet. We’ll talk about it tomorrow.’

As Mitch hung up, he bent down and picked up the Kalashnikov.

‘You can go now,’ he told the man. ‘Keep walking away from me for a count of one hundred. Slowly. Keep your hands on your head. Don’t look back. If you do, I’ll have to shoot you. Understood?’

The man nodded. He looked like he was going to collapse with relief.

‘Go,’ said Mitch.

The man turned and began walking away, hands still on his head. Mitch gave him a count of ten and then made his exit, back the way he’d come.