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PART ONE

1

Luke was looking at the computer games and didn't notice a thing when Toni slipped the DVD into his shoulder bag. Shoplifting was a crime, Toni had told himself, but Luke was still only fourteen, so the police here in Finland couldn't touch him.

Toni then reached for another copy of the same DVD, showing it innocently to Luke. 'Bet your dad wouldn't like this. He's so uptight, it's a wonder you have a TV at all.'

'*The Butcher of the Bronx*.' Luke shook his head. 'Pathetic. It's not even Blu-ray.'

'What a snob,' Toni said, putting the DVD back.

'What are we doing here, anyway?' Luke asked. 'You don't have any money and nor do I.'

'That might change.' Toni took something from his breast pocket. 'If we sell *this*.'

The burgundy booklet in Toni's hand was the French passport the boys had found near a lay-by on the Helsinki motorway the day before. They'd taken Toni's car for a spin and had been stretching their legs at the lay-by when Luke spotted a slim hard-shell briefcase lying in the ditch. They'd forced it open and found the passport inside. Slipped between its pages was something very intriguing:

a boarding pass that looked like a credit card, with a photo of the passport-holder's face and a hologram of a ship, the *Ocean Emerald*. Tiny letters were printed on the back: *Property of Emerald Cruise Corporation, Miami, FL, U.S.A. Reward if found: US$100.*

'We should hand it in,' Luke said. 'The ship will be in Helsinki on Thursday. That's only an hour's drive. What do you say?'

'For one hundred dollars? It's an insult. The passport's worth at least a thousand on the black market, maybe more.'

Luke made a grab for the passport, but Toni didn't let go.

'She's not bad,' Toni said, grinning over the passport photo. 'Juliette du Pont,' he said, trying for a French accent. 'A bit like that actress in *Scream*, which of course you haven't seen.'

'Thankfully not.'

'I saw this TV series about a guy who sold EU passports to illegal immigrants,' Toni said, letting Luke take the documents. 'Criminals are always looking for new identities.'

'Go right ahead. I'll visit you in prison.'

Luke carefully slid the passport and boarding pass into the back pocket of his jeans. He followed his friend to the games section, where the manager was locking the glass cabinet containing PlayStations, Xboxes and Nintendos. The man was in his shirtsleeves and had massive sweat stains under his arms. He grunted something in Finnish and wagged his finger at Toni.

'What did he say?' Luke asked. He wasn't quite fluent in Finnish, his mother's language.

'They close in half an hour. And if we're not buying, we're welcome to leave right away.'

Luke expected Toni to answer back, or at least ignore the manager's words, but instead, he bowed his head, turned round and headed back towards the front of the shop. Luke hurried after him, between the shelves and towards the cash desks. Suddenly, he glimpsed a familiar face. Emma. Her parents were regular customers at Gran's antique shop. Her beautifully sculpted ponytail was held together by a black velvet scrunchie that gave her a sophisticated look. She sauntered towards him. Their eyes met and Luke felt the blood rushing to his cheeks.

'Luke!' Emma said.

'Hi,' was all he managed in reply.

Emma slowed her steps, then brushed past, stopping at the music section. She had looked surprised to see Luke, probably thinking he should have been back at school in whatever country he happened to be living in this year. Luke had lived in Switzerland until recently, but now he was based in Brussels, Belgium. His parents moved around a lot. Emma and he had known each other since they were in pushchairs, when their grannies used to take them to the playground here in Porvoo, on the southern coast of Finland. He had spent many summers here.

Luke stumbled past the cashier, feeling hot and clumsy. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Emma flicking through the CDs under a large poster of Amy Winehouse.

'Why are *you* so flustered?' Toni had caught up with Luke and was staring back at Emma. 'Oh, right… And what makes you think she'd go for a runt like you?'

Luke didn't bother to reply.

He stepped through the exit turnstile and jumped as the alarm burst into life and an orange light began to flash. The customers and cashiers turned to stare as the manager came striding from the shop and slapped his hand on Toni's shoulder.

The manager switched off the alarm and with visible relish began frisking Toni's pockets, then marched him back to the turnstile and told him to walk through again.

'Toni, what's going on?' Luke whispered, staring at his friend.

Toni had turned white.

Everyone else in the shop was just loving the show – except Emma. With a blast of shame, Luke met her eyes. He could barely breathe. Toni had embarrassed him before, but this went too far.

Toni stepped through the turnstile. Nothing happened.

With a sadistic frown, the man turned his attention to Luke. So did the customers. So did Emma.

'*Sinun vuorosi*,' the manager said.

'Your turn,' Toni said, blushing.

Luke swallowed. 'I haven't done anything.'

Luke could feel Emma's eyes on his back as he stepped through. At once, the alarm began to wail. The light pulsed. The manager took Luke to one side and asked to see his bag.

'You need to have that machine checked,' Luke said in English, but his voice came out weaker than he had hoped.

With shaking hands, he offered his bag. The manager pulled out a DVD: *The Butcher of the Bronx*.

'Do you have a receipt for this?' the manager said in heavily accented English.

'No, I don't . . .'

'Then follow me.'

'You creep,' Luke hissed at Toni. 'I can't believe this.'

'What shall I do?' Toni's fat cheeks were red. 'Should I come with you?'

'We don't need an audience,' the manager snapped. 'Move!'

Staring at the floor, Luke followed the manager into the office at the back.

Then Luke thought of something that made matters even worse. *He still had Juliette du Pont's passport and boarding pass in his pocket.* A stolen DVD was one thing, but what would the police say if they found him in possession of these documents? Cruises on the *Ocean Emerald* cost thousands of dollars, and a passport was a personal document. Nor did he fancy having to explain how he'd found the items.

He bowed his head. He felt totally miserable. Little did he know that a much worse nightmare lay ahead of him. One that would tear apart his summer holiday in Finland and terrorize thousands of innocent people.

2

Fifteen hundred kilometres from Luke, the *Ocean Emerald* was moored in the Port of Amsterdam. In a warehouse not far from the port, a minor delinquent named Ronny de Jong eased a plastic bag of explosives into the belly of a gutted swordfish.

He scooped crushed ice onto the fish and shook his freezing hands, cursing under his breath. Pulling a face, he reached for the massive, slimy octopus that lay on the stainless-steel work surface and slapped it into the polystyrene box, on top of the swordfish. Then he took a shrink-wrapped sub-machine-gun from his backpack on the floor and slid it inside the octopus

Ronny's breath steamed in the walk-in fridge, but he could feel sweat trickling under his shirt. A few more handfuls of ice, then the lid. He blew into his stinging hands, picked up a filleting knife and carefully marked both ends of the polystyrene box with a scratch. There were twenty boxes in all. Six were marked.

Ronny stepped into the sparsely furnished office and closed the door of the fridge behind him. He had packed all twenty boxes himself, after the rest of the staff had left. With numb hands, he printed out the invoice, folded it

into his back pocket and stepped into the yard, where the delivery van was ready for loading. PIET HAARHUIS – FISH AND SEAFOOD was painted in Dutch on the sides and back of the van. Ten minutes later, the boxes were safely stacked inside and he was done.

Ronny swung the van onto Zuiderzeeweg and began to weave his way through the evening traffic towards the port. Explaining the assignment five months before, the Big Boss had told Ronny to get a job with Piet Haarhuis and to wait for further instructions. Having received them, Ronny had decided to execute his part like a real pro. That way, the Big Boss might give him an even better paid assignment next time.

As he approached the familiar port area on Java Island, Ronny switched his attention to his surroundings. The lights of the cranes and the customs houses shimmered in the thickening gloom. Suddenly, it hit home: *this wasn't a rehearsal any more*. The fish didn't contain metal bars. They were stuffed with powerful explosives, weapons and ammunition. Ronny's heart began to race. He reached into his pocket for the packet of chewing gum he'd brought specially and put a piece into his mouth.

Ronny flicked on the indicator and turned into Panamaweg, which led into the port from the west. Most cruise ships docked at the passenger terminal near the city centre, within walking distance of Amsterdam's restaurants and museums, but the *Ocean Emerald* was simply too massive. So the world's most luxurious cruise ship had to find a berth here, among the humble tankers and container ships.

A gusty wind blew from the sea and the headlights of the oncoming traffic flashed in the puddles on the street. Lorries were returning from the port, having unloaded

their innocent cargo into the cruise ship: provisions, clean laundry, spare parts and the luxuries sold in the duty-free shop, everything from gold watches to perfume.

The first gate was flanked by a small shelter for the security guards, who were drinking coffee inside. No one came out. With shaking hands, Ronny put two more pieces of gum into his mouth. The van's wipers laboured on the windscreen. At last the door opened and a guard stepped out into the rain. Ronny wound down his window.

'Piet Haarhuis, a consignment of fish for the *Ocean Emerald*.'

The guard yawned and waved his arm. Ronny passed through the gate and drove slowly into the brightly lit port.

Behind the warehouses and stacks of shipping containers, a majestic apparition towered against the night. It sparkled in the rain, a magic castle awash with light. The garland of electric bulbs decorating the funnel and the masts shone with festive brightness. The rows of balconies seemed to go on forever: two hundred and forty metres of luxury, forty-five thousand tonnes of extravagance, nine decks of privilege. Exotic cities, faraway lands, new continents… Voyages for the moneyed jet set. The *Ocean Emerald*, queen of the seven seas. This week, she would sail from Amsterdam to Helsinki, St Petersburg – and Hell.

Ronny suppressed an involuntary shiver and forced himself to focus on the task at hand. You had to take risks in life, if you wanted to get ahead. He'd never live on unemployment benefit again. The Big Boss paid well. Ronny would show him what he could do.

The long quay bustled with activity. Sewage was being pumped off the cruise ship, and rubbish truck after rubbish truck pulled up to receive the waste generated on board. Fresh water and tonnes of fuel flowed in the opposite direction, into the enormous tanks deep inside the ship.

A luxury bus had driven up to the *Ocean Emerald* and elderly tourists were shuffling onto the glass-walled gangway while their luggage was unloaded for security screening and delivery to the cabins. These passengers had flown into Schiphol airport in order to join the Baltic leg of the cruise in Amsterdam. They came from all over – the US, Asia, South Africa and South America – but they had one thing in common: they were rich.

The driver of the van in front of Ronny's hopped out into the rain and opened the back doors of his vehicle. Ronny swallowed as he watched the security guards wrench open one of the wooden wine crates. *A random check.*

The rain fell, heavier and heavier, engulfing the wipers.

Ronny rubbed his clammy palms against his thighs and forced himself to take deep breaths. Sheltering under a huge golf umbrella, one of the guards held a wine bottle against the light, mimed taking a swig, then handed it back to the driver. Maritime security had been tightened all over the world after 9/11, especially on cruise ships carrying a significant number of Americans – which meant *most* cruise ships.

Ronny released the clutch and eased the van up to the yellow line. He fought down the panic, trying desperately to focus on something innocent. For the first time, he regretted his greed.

* * *

A stack of CCTV screens filled a whole wall of the control room deep inside the *Ocean Emerald*. An alert pair of eyes darted from screen to screen, observing the stream of passengers passing under the chandelier in the ship's foyer. There were also cameras on the gangway, in the loading area on the quayside and above the airport-style conveyor belt that fed the luggage through the X-ray machine.

The head of security, former FBI agent Craig 'Coyote' Thomson, knew that the safety of one thousand passengers and six hundred crew depended on him. He liked his job and, being one of the world's finest security professionals, was proud of it, too.

He leaned closer to the topmost screen on the right. It showed a white delivery van marked PIET HAARHUIS – FISH AND SEAFOOD.

3

Luke glanced at Dad's strong hands on the wheel. The left one was bandaged: the tip of the little finger was missing. Luke had no idea what had happened to it and Dad refused to say. Something had gone wrong at work – and work was a topic Dad wouldn't discuss with Luke. What was the point of having a dad who worked for Europol if he never shared any stories with you?

'Looking on the bright side,' Luke said, 'you now have fewer fingernails to cut, and—'

'Were you alone in that shop?' Dad interrupted.

'Did you know that the longest fingernail ever grown measured 68.58 centimetres?'

'I asked you a question.'

Luke bit his lip. 'I was with Toni.'

Dad looked at him for the first time since they had got in the car. 'And did you tell the manager that?'

'The manager saw us together.'

The engine groaned as the old Volvo estate climbed a small cobbled street lined with cheerfully painted board fences and past the medieval church in the centre of Porvoo. Gnarled maples leaned over the dark river behind the old Finnish houses with their wooden porches. The

lampposts cast a yellow glow against the black sky, reminding Luke of the gaslights in the old Sherlock Holmes films he used to watch as a little boy with his English grandfather in Dad's home in East Sussex.

Of course, Luke knew he had to cover for Toni. It was a question of honour: no matter what your friend did to you, telling tales was even worse. Revenge was another matter. Oh yes. Toni would pay for what he'd done. Luke would get hold of Toni's Visa card and use it to buy gambling tips online… He knew how easy this was, having borrowed his gran's credit card for the same purpose a couple of years ago, to his lingering shame. Gran, being a good sport, had never breathed a word to Mum and Dad, and Luke had sworn he would never do it again. But the promise only concerned *Gran's* card…

'Ring Toni and tell him to come over to Gran's.'

'Why?'

'Because I say so. Right now.'

Luke wriggled in his seat and extracted his mobile from his back pocket. Toni replied after a single ring.

'Dad wants to talk to you at Gran's,' Luke said.

'*I'm already here*,' Toni replied meekly.

'Right… Well, we're almost there.'

Luke cut the line. He felt much better. This was the best way out. He had done his utmost to protect Toni, but Dad had guessed everything, and Toni himself was clearly getting ready to own up to what he had done – which, in turn, would impress Dad.

'He's already there,' Luke said.

'Good. That's good.'

Luke knew exactly what to expect now: a calm, rational rebuke for Toni, and a lecture to Luke about the

importance of choosing one's friends carefully. Tough words, but no shouting. Had it been Toni's dad, the shouting would have been the least of it. Dad slowed down and steered the Volvo through the narrow gate into Gran's yard.

Toni appeared from the shadows in his baggy jeans, black fleece and trainers. A dim bulb shone above the front door of the wooden house.

'You go in,' Dad told Luke. 'Toni and I will have a little word alone.'

Toni took Luke's place in the passenger seat, and avoiding his friend's eyes, Luke hurried across the yard and up the stone steps of Gran's little house.

'Luke, where have you been?' Mum asked.

'I'll explain . . . ' Luke sidled past her, and went straight into the tiny box room, no larger than a walk-in wardrobe, which was reserved for him every summer.

'Luke, what is it? Where's Dad?'

'He's coming,' Luke called. 'He's in the car.'

Luke looked at the suitcases crammed into his room. Dad had just returned from Washington, and Mum was due to leave for a science conference the following week. Luke threw himself onto the bed and let out a deep sigh. He could smell pancakes – Dad must have been cooking dinner when he'd been called to the record shop. Once or twice each summer, Dad impressed Gran by making Finnish pancakes from scratch. She refused to eat pancakes made from a mix, or anything made from a mix, for that matter.

Luke turned onto his side, resting his cheek on his palm. He'd been looking forward to Dad's return, but what he wanted right now was to fall asleep for a week, until things had calmed down.

The small writing desk beside the bed was where he kept his treasures: a laser pointer, a compass and a pair of night-vision goggles. The items on the book shelf above the desk were even more interesting, especially the two books that Luke had recently ordered online: *Hostage Rescue* and *Covert Surveillance*. Dad had frowned when the parcel arrived, but that same day Luke had caught him reading *Hostage Rescue* in the kitchen. Luke had been thrilled: it made him feel mature in Dad's eyes. Maybe one day soon Dad would open up about his job with Europol.

Luke's bookshelf also contained four well-thumbed volumes of *The Guinness Book of World Records* and an embarrassing detective set that his own dad, of all people, had given him last summer, which contained a kit for collecting fingerprints, a magnifying glass and a fake nose with huge eyebrows attached. Under the writing desk was a powerful PC that Luke had assembled all by himself, using second-hand components harvested from junk shops and eBay. The plasma screen on the desk looked out of place against the faded floral wallpaper and the wooden window frame.

Gran used the PC to send Luke emails during the school year, and Luke was secretly designing a website for her as a birthday present. She could use it to market her antiques, if she wanted. Gran would be seventy this winter, but she still put in long hours in her small shop in Porvoo, a short walk from the house.

In former years, the family's summer routine had included swimming trips, picnics, berry-picking expeditions and of course bathing in the sauna on Saturdays. Their summer life in Finland was quiet. TV was rationed.

Loud music was forbidden altogether. The summer was supposed to be a time when Mum, Dad and Luke were all together, but last year, and again this year, Luke had spent most of July and August alone with Gran. Mum was writing a scientific paper that seemed to have taken over her entire holiday. Like Dad, she had an important job and loved what she did. Had it not been for Toni, Luke would have died of boredom.

The door opened. It was Mum, *The Journal of High-Energy Particle Physics* in hand.

'Luke, what's going on? Why is Dad talking to Toni in the car?'

'It's no big deal.' Luke bit his lip. 'By the way, if you have any more suitcases to store, there's plenty of room, for example, on my bed.'

'Sorry, darling. Peter just shoved his stuff in here when he arrived, and I'll be off in a few days, so it doesn't seem worth hauling them upstairs... Oh, you put it on the wall!'

'Yeah, it's cool. Thanks.'

Luke glanced at the huge, colourful poster representing a carbon atom. Mum had brought it back from a science symposium in Tokyo and Luke had pinned it above his bed at the beginning of the holiday. Mum had only just noticed. Next to the poster was a facsimile copy of an ancient star chart, which Dad had found in Krakow.

'Well, there's dinner when you're ready. Dad made pancakes. He's jet-lagged. I'm just going upstairs to do a tiny bit more work.'

Mum closed the door. Luke squeezed past the suitcases to the window just in time to see Toni solemnly shaking hands with his father, then skulking out of the gate. The

front door opened and closed and Dad's footsteps went towards the kitchen.

Toni had confessed, Luke felt sure of it. He knew it would have been best to join his parents right away, so as to get the awkward discussion over with, but he couldn't face it. They'd lay into Toni as usual, and this time they had a reason. Luke rubbed his face. Toni was his best mate in this part of the world. Or had been, until tonight's incident.

Suddenly, his mobile vibrated. It was Toni. Luke hesitated, then took the call.

'*I've told your dad everything that happened.*'

'And that makes it OK, does it?'

'*Sorry, mate. Really.*'

Luke let out a sigh. 'Whatever.'

'*I was stupid. Look, about the passport . . . If you want to ask your dad what we should do, that's fine by me.*'

Luke hesitated. 'He doesn't need to know everything,' he finally said, keeping his voice down.

'*So the road trip to Helsinki is still on?*'

'Sure it's on.'

Toni was silent for a moment, then said, '*Excellent, Mr C.*'

'But after we've split the reward, I get ten per cent of your share.'

'*What for?*'

'For stress and aggravation caused. And this will be only the first instalment.'

'*In that case I want some money for the petrol.*'

'No way. See you on Thursday. Try not to get arrested before then.'

Luke cut the line, sat in front of his computer and nudged the mouse. He typed in the address of his blog,

www.heliocentrist.net, and entered the password that was only known to his inner circle. Two hits and no replies. With a sigh, he clicked on his favourites, chose www.OceanEmeraldCruises.com, and the *Ocean Emerald*'s resplendent home page filled the screen. He took the Frenchwoman's passport and boarding pass from his pocket, preparing to continue his research into her identity, then rushed to hide them under his mattress when he heard Gran's footsteps behind his door. She knocked her discreet knock.

'Come in, Gran.'

Gran's eyes twinkled. She was clutching the straw hat she always wore when she read the newspaper on the garden swing. Luke saw from her expression that she knew he was in a spot of trouble and had come to show her support.

'Hungry?' she said.

'Starving.'

She slipped her hand under Luke's arm. 'Then let's go and see what your dad's pancakes are like.'

'How was business today, Gran?'

'Middling. I need to modernize! But how do you modernize an antique shop, tell me that?'

'I've told you, Gran. Go online.'

'Talking of which, when do I get my next computer lesson?'

'Whenever you like! Except on Thursday…'

'What are your rates again?' Gran said, pretending not to remember.

'Ten euros an hour.'

'That's the discounted family rate, isn't it?'

Luke laughed. 'Yes.'

‘Sounds reasonable to me. What about right after dinner?’

‘Sure, Gran. That sounds great.’

‘Very good.’ Gran pretended to be thinking hard. ‘In fact, I might go for a double lesson this time. Twenty euros, very good . . .’

Screaming seagulls dipped in and out of the darkness as they circled the battery of floodlights over the quay. Ronny was grateful for the rain, which disguised the nervous sweat streaming down his face as he unloaded the van. He spat his gum onto the asphalt and dried his forehead on his sleeve. Glancing at the man inside the fork-lift truck, he lifted another polystyrene box onto the wooden pallet on the fork. The scratch at the end of the box was clearly visible.

From the corner of his eye, Ronny saw the approaching figure of yet another security guard, this one armed with a torch, which he swung like a truncheon. Bending inside the van, where several boxes still remained, Ronny chose one without a scratch mark, then changed his mind and took a scratched box instead. He walked back to the fork-lift truck, heaved the box onto the pallet and turned to face the security guard, who pointed his long torch inside the van. Ronny grabbed another box.

‘Wait.’

‘I’m late as it is,’ Ronny said.

‘Open it.’

The lid of the polystyrene box squeaked when Ronny removed it. The guard scrabbled at the crushed ice with his gloved hand, revealing the mottled skin of a large

salmon. Ronny replaced the lid and put the box on the pallet, on top of the others. The guard didn't move. Ronny could feel his heart hammering inside his ribcage. The next box had a scratch on it. Inside the box was a swordfish, and inside the swordfish was a two-kilo packet of Semtex, one of the most powerful explosives available. The charge couldn't be detected by X-rays or electronic screening, and sniffer dogs would be thrown off by the stench of fish. An anti-explosive swab taken from the seal between the lid and the box would, however, give the game away, and of course the guard could detect the explosives with his own hands and eyes if he probed inside the fish. Ronny leaned into his van and reached for another box.

'Hang on,' the guard said. 'Step aside.'

Ronny put the box back down on the floor of the van. He could only pray that the numbing cold would account for the frozen expression on his face.

The guard leaned forward and pulled the box closer.

'Heavy, aren't they?' he said.

'Tell me about it,' Ronny said.

'What's in here? Stones?' The guard prised off the lid of the box, revealing the dull-eyed swordfish on its bed of ice.

The lorry behind Ronny's van hooted its horn.

'Come on, man,' Ronny said, tensing his muscles, ready to act. 'Can't they inspect them on board?'

'I'm only doing my job.' The guard gave the fish a shove with the end of his torch. 'OK, off you go.'

Ronny barely felt the weight of the remaining boxes as he carried them from the van. When the last box was safely loaded onto the pallet, he nodded at the operator of

the fork-lift truck and hurried back to his driving seat. As he sped off, feeling completely drained, Ronny caught a glimpse of the passengers filing up the glass-walled gangway.

He felt a faint twinge of pity, but of course it was too late for that.