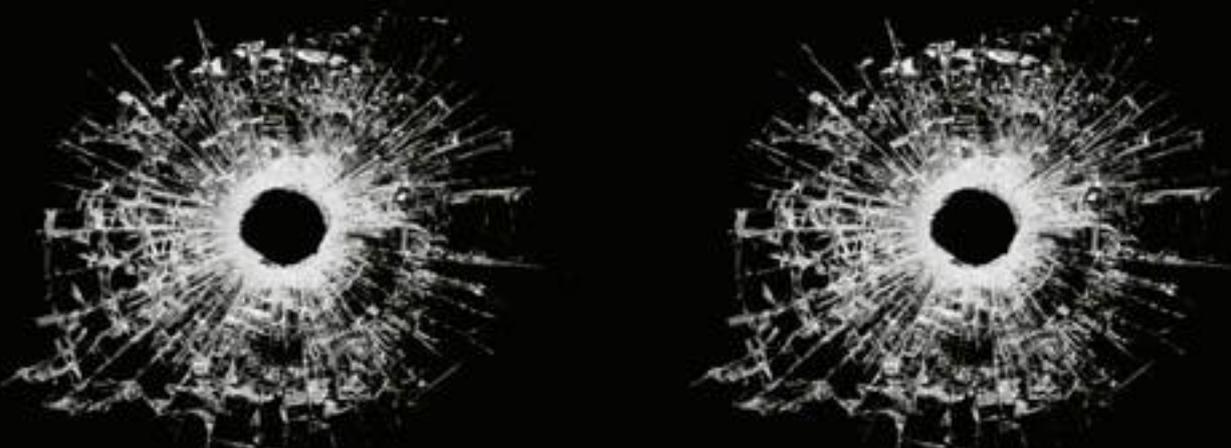




EXIT



STRATEGY

He just wanted to retire -
They just wanted him dead ...

A thriller by
MAX DRAYTON

THE STRATEGY TRILOGY

Part 1 - EXIT STRATEGY

A thriller by Max Drayton

My thanks to Joy Tilbury, who pushed words into place
and Mandy, for keeping them there.

There is strong language, violence and scenes of an adult nature.

Cover by Phil Lewis

If you enjoyed this novel, please let me know.

If you didn't ... I have other novels.

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SAMPLE OF: EXIT STRATEGY

James has placed the fragile Olga in the care of his prostitute girlfriend, Lucie. Neither knows much about the other, or about the real James. But they are about to find out.....

James left an hour later, my head now reeling. I had to sit and think about what he said. Needing a cigarette I went out onto balcony and smoked there. I needed drink, but only Brandy left. I sat on chair and placed bottle on table. I was very sophisticated; I used glass to drink it.

I realised air was cold and had been talking to James and Lucie in just underwear! Was that what she meant by awkward? I went back into my bedroom and found a guest dressing gown, warmer to sit outside now.

I was half asleep when I had feeling someone now next to me. Lucie now sitting, smiling at me. She was drinking coffee. I glanced at my watch and realised it was nearly midday.

‘A penny for them, sweetie?’

‘Penny for what?’ I asked.

She smiled again. ‘Sorry. An old saying, you’ve probably never heard it. A penny for your thoughts, means....would you like to talk about what’s on your mind?’ I shook my head and sipped Brandy. She sipped her coffee. ‘Lovely day again?’ she smiled, staring at me over mug. I nodded and watched river. ‘James leave?’ she asked, and I nodded. ‘Say where he’s going to?’

‘Home I think. He did not say.’

‘Never does, sweetie. Highly secretive. Likes to be mysterious, don’t you think?’

I felt her watching me. I stared at her before saying, ‘Can I trust him?’

She grinned, ‘I do. Completely. Why d’you ask?’

‘Nothing.’ I said and stubbed out my cigarette on my lighter case. I would find somewhere to get rid of that later. And the rest of them.

‘He’s dug you out of a hole already, hasn’t he?’ I nodded. ‘I helped a little too?’

I glanced at her and smiled. 'You have, thank you.'

'I'm thinking it's about time you trusted both of us. Don't you, sweetie?'

She was staring hard at me now and I knew she wanted to talk. I decided. 'He said he would go to my home and make sure my family would be all right.'

'That's very...noble of him. Where's your home?'

'Hungary. Near, Budapest.'

She was thinking, what to say and not upset me. She seemed very kind like that. 'Why are your family...not all right, now?'

There was something about Lucie. She was very relaxed and gave impression she'd be the good friend, a good listener. A shoulder to cry on. She was the experienced woman of world. Which I am not.

'I spoke of Luca...?'

'Your boss, yes. What about him, sweetie?'

'He is... gangster. I think is what you call him. A hollgan.' Her mug paused before her lips. 'He has gang in my home town and they frighten... terrorise people into giving them food and money. They make people do things ... they do not want to.'

'Like you? They threaten you too?' She was leaning forward, very concerned.

'Yes. I have to obey, or my family suffer.'

'Wooow.' She put mug down and leaned further forward. 'What sort of things do you have to....you know...do?'

I looked at her to make sure she was not making fun of me. She was interested. I knew she would be good listener.

'I am an asset, an assassin. I shoot people for them.' Her eyes and mouth widened together.

It was few seconds before, 'You WHAT?'

'This surprises you?'

'I should say so...an assassin? Jesus Christ!'

'You think it is strange, when James is one too?'

She leaped out of chair and stood over me. 'YOU ARE KIDDING ME!'

'Why would Ikidding you? You know what he does?'

'Not a fucking clue. I thought...detective. Even that was a bit far-fetched. Are you SURE he's an....assassin?'

'Yes. He told me after I tried to kill him.'

Her face was now bright colour and her mouth would not close. When it did, 'WHAT!' was all she said.

Judging by her reaction she did not know about James being contractor. I suddenly felt guilty about letting out what must have been secret he wanted to keep. I could not back the track now.

'You tried to KILL him?'

'Yes. But I screwed up.'

'Thank Christ you did. Why did you try to kill him?'

'Luca told me to.'

Lucie took up my glass of Brandy and swallowed it in one. 'This I don't believe!'

'But it is true. I shot several times and missed him. I killed other man, but James got away. Tracked me and caught me. He should have killed me really, but he did not. Instead, he would try to help me. So, you see...I need to know if I can trust him.'

'Him? Trust him! He should be wondering if he can trust YOU. You tried to KILL HIM!'

'I did not, though. I think he was grateful for that. I am useless.'

Lucie poured another Brandy and sat down with glass. She took long drink before saying, 'You're not on drugs, are you, sweetie? Making this all up? Because I'd know if you were!' A shake of my head. She was looking at bottle of Brandy next to me and slowly she made connection. 'How much of this have you had today?'

I shrugged. 'A few glasses. Why is there no more left?'

She stared at me hard for a few seconds then quickly got up from chair and went back into sitting room. I moved over and picked up my glass, drank what was left and refilled it.

She briskly walked back onto balcony with mobile phone already dialling.

She watched me as call went through. I knew the moment person on the other end of line answered.

‘James? It’s me. Yeah fine...no, not fine. This...girlfriend of yours has a story to tell.....James, you there?...hello, oh you are. Yes, a story. I can’t even bring myself to say it but....she says you’re an assassin. You kill people for a living...’

She lost control of her face muscles and collapsed into chair. She listened for a while then phone dropped into her lap. Her other hand was holding her head.

I moved across to her and took phone and pushed glass into her hand. ‘James...look I am sorry...no, I did not know. I thought you and she were...well I do not know that, but...I am sorry.’

He was not even angry. He was calm, telling me to say no more to Lucie and to put her back on phone. I handed phone to Lucie, but she waved it away and ran into one of her many bedrooms.

‘Hello, James. I do not think she wants to talk to you right now. Okay, I will. See you later.’

The line went dead, and I put phone on table. I lit another cigarette and tried to decide whether I should go and talk to her. James had asked not to. So, I decided to wait.

A while later Lucie came back out. She was calmer and gave me small smile, ‘Sorry, sweetie.’

‘I’m one who say sorry. My big mouth.’

She moved and hugged me tightly. ‘It was a bit of a shock. But...now I’ve had time to think about it, it all makes sense. How I have misjudged him?’

We sat down, and I stopped urge to top up glass again, Brandy had nearly gone.

She stared out across river and looked sleepy. ‘He’d call me a day or two in advance to arrange a visit. He was always stressed. It must be after...what do you people call it..."a hit"?’

I shrugged. ‘Many names. Project. Contract. Sanction, whatever.’

‘He needed to unwind, get back to normal. I knew he had a stressful job, but never guessed.....’

She leaned on balcony rail and stared at river . ‘There was a time, a few years ago now, when I was having trouble with someone called, Rico. No need for details, you can figure it out. It sounds like a similar abusive relationship - like you and Luca. I happened to mention it to James, because I was frightened Rico might turn up at any time and I wanted to forewarn James as a client. I had to warn several clients.’ She looked straight at me. ‘I never saw Rico again.’

I joined her at rail, ‘So, you think James might have.....?’ She nodded.

‘It looks that way now. I feel bad about causing the death of somebody. It’s like....I ordered the Contract myself and James did the job for me. Don’t get me wrong, sweetie. There were times I wanted to kill Rico myself. But then, that’s easy to say, isn’t it?’

I put arm round her shoulder. Not sure what to do, or say, ‘We all have hate and violence, given right push. But you have to look at it this way. What James does, I am sure for most part, is get rid of people like Rico.’

She frowned at me, ‘But you were about to kill James. A man who we both know is a kind man. With us, anyway.’

‘I have to do what I am told. I do not make judgement.’

‘And you think he does? I mean... he only kills people who are not nice people?’

‘I think is good guess, no?’

She nodded and stared across river. ‘What he did for me with Rico, he’s now attempting to do for you with Luca.’

I shook my head and rested my hand on her arm, ‘No, no, no. He will not kill Luca.’ This puzzled her, ‘No. I asked him not to.’ She nodded as if she understood. ‘I want to kill Luca myself, I have earned right.’

Her mouth dropped open again, and I almost laughed. ‘It is all bit much for you to take in, right?’ She nodded. ‘Do not worry, all will be okay. I will take care of Luca. James takes care of Luca’s thugs. Then James can forget about English Mafia.’

Her eyes flew wide again, ‘The WHAT?’

‘I think that is what you call them. The Italy hollgans.’

‘Shit in a basket!. Who the fuck are the Italy hollgans?’

‘The men that ordered contract on James. They pay Luca, Luca pays me – or not.’

‘Jesus Christ!’ she cried, her head falling to rest on her hands.

‘I have said too much again. Sorry.’

‘What can of worms is this...?’

‘Worms? What worms?’

‘Figure of speech. Jesus! Anything else I should know?’

I shrugged. ‘How would I know? I do not know what you know already. How can I know....?’

She waved hand for me to stop. ‘I need to talk this through with James. I need to know what I’ve got myself into here.’

LATER IN THE STORY:

James has to face the threat of another assassin hunting his friends in a farmhouse. The assassin doesn’t know he is now being hunted by James. Yet.

It was dark before I made my journey. A hundred and fifty metres to the cowshed, but all open ground. With a sniper with Infra-red waiting to kill.

I took my best guess at his exact position and moved to keep the cow shed between me and him. If he was using Infra-red I might show up as a prone figure on the ground. But if cows were in the line of sight, perhaps it would be a little confusing. I had to take the chance.

The longer I took, the more chance he’d sweep that area with an Infra-red scope. The quicker I moved, the more attention I might get, as movement can trigger interest. I hoped Justin’s inexperience would benefit me, as I took my time, crawling every metre of the way. Pushing and dragging my backpacks.

It took over an hour, but I was finally lying in the dirt of the cow shed, breathing a sigh of relief. I found the rifle, scope and ammunition leant against the door jamb. Well done Tamas.

I checked the mechanism, loaded the gun, then locked the scope in place and wished for a ranging shot. I’d have to shoot quickly and as accurately as possible. After that, I’d have to wing it.

It was ten o'clock. Dawn due around five. I decided to wait. Let him get anxious and unsure.

I was a long while talking to Olga and Henrik on the mobile. Mamma wanted a word and so did Tamas. It passed the time, but I got weary of whispering. It was unlikely the asset with the high-tech rifle would hear me over two hundred metres away, but he might not be there. He might move around, scouting the perimeter.

It occurred to me that he might monitor phone conversations. In which case he'd know where I was by now. I hoped he wouldn't have the sense to do that. Or, perhaps the right equipment, or experience.

Naomi said he'd come by private jet. The car was not a rental, so that too must have been provided by The Brethren. Perhaps the equipment was a bonus. I had to assume Justin was well armed and high-teched up to his eyebrows. Which were probably blond like his twin sister's.

The sun was coming up, striking the clouds a bright orange.

Time to get ready.

If you enjoyed this sample please consider reading the whole novel.

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