

## DNA

'How can you be The Assassin? You're just a child,' Igor wheezed as blood gushed out of him like a waterfall. 'Shouldn't you be in school, or playing football in the park? This life of death, money and greed is not a boy's game. You're what, twelve?' The kid laughed.

'But don't you see that's what makes me the best? I'm invisible. When you heard that The Assassin was after you, did you ever think it would be someone like me, a child? Or did you imagine someone more like Dave?' Igor's silence voiced his reply.

'Precisely. No one would think a child could be the most dangerous killer alive. No one suspects that a boy walking onto a rooftop might assassinate someone. Even if they ask what I'm doing, I can always just do this.'

He stopped, cleared his throat once, and lowered his shoulders, pathetically. 'Oh, I'm sorry, Sir, I'm looking for my dad. He's around here somewhere, I can't find him.' His voice had completely changed into a quiet, high-pitched voice, innocent and vulnerable.

'Then they either let me go or try to help me find my dad. I take them round a corner and. . .' At this point, the kid released the knife again and smiled.

'No one ever suspects a child - that's the beauty of it all. They don't know who I am, and they never see me coming. True, I have to make the most of it now, as once I'm older, I'll be just as suspicious as any man. But I could use the challenge. In fact I look forward to it,' he said with glee.

'You work for them?'

'For now,' the kid replied, 'I have several employers. Phoenix and Hurricane are but two. People who are going places. They have gathered their full strength and their time for world domination has come.'

'Hurricane? You worked for Hurricane?'

'Perhaps,' the boy smiled.

'World domination? Same old dream. . .' Igor chuckled, tasting blood in his mouth.

'*Dream?*' the boy echoed. 'No. Dreams are what we hope for, things that could happen sometime, way in the future. These people are ready now, *we* are

ready now. It has already begun, it is already in motion- it's inevitable and no one can stop it.'

'What happens then? What happens when you've destroyed the world, and everyone is gone? Once the world is yours, and the question of who has the most power comes up, what then? You'll fight and kill each other. That's the way that it has always been. Leaders will squabble amongst themselves, more blood will be spilt, and everyone will die. The entire human race could be wiped out!

'Any kind of pact between organisations is ridiculous: take over the world and then fight over it amongst yourselves? Whose crazy idea was that? Who is the true leader, the top rung of the ladder, the big cheese? Who will take control once they've had their way? What's to stop someone killing them, breaking that wrung on the ladder? It's all a big joke. They'll come after you, you do realise.' Igor spat blood as he spoke, but the boy only smiled even wider, stroking his blade.

'Once the world is theirs, you'll be nothing more than a loose end and a threat, as will any other assassin who doesn't swear allegiance. Imagine the price on your head. Every living person on Earth would hunt you down. You're already dead!' Igor shouted, his pale, withering face coughing out more blood.

'So?' the boy muttered. 'You don't think I can handle it, I'm the best for a reason: I'm unbeatable. No one and nothing can stop me. I'm a killing machine. They'll break against me like water on rocks, and they know it. Why do you think they hired me? Why do you think they want me on their side? I'm the best and they're scared of me. You forget that I'm invisible. No one knows my name. I can blend in with any crowd and be whoever I want to be. The title of The Assassin can die with me, peacefully in old age.' His smile faltered suddenly.

'The Assassin. . . The Assassin is both a curse and a privilege. To be among the best trained killers is an honour, known by men and women at the top of their profession, destroyers, Death's friends. To join a long line of greats. And yet, to live the rest of your life in fear, knowing that somewhere, someone is hunting you for that title, that you are destined to die. There will always be someone stronger, more powerful, quicker, more brutal, more skilful. . . younger. And they will come.' The kid stared into space in reflection, and in that moment there was something human about him, evidence of emotion. Then it was gone.

'But, they haven't come yet, so I live to fight another day. The same can't be said for you, my friend. But, as a comfort, half of my fee will go to your family. That is my trademark, my calling card: compensation. Perhaps it's the only bit of sanity left in me. Any adversary deserves a funeral, no matter who they are. My sister never had a funeral. She was killed, drowned, and her body was never discovered. I was just a little boy. She taught me all she knew. I killed her murderer and became The Assassin, but nothing will ever bring her back.'

For a moment, Igor actually felt something for the boy. Something. . . but Igor couldn't work out exactly what – his mind was dying. Maybe this hadn't been his choice, if his sister had raised him like this. Killing could well be the only thing that he knew. Perhaps his whole life was mapped out for him.

'Those guys with you, they're not your bodyguards, are they? They simply want to make you think that they are, you must see that. They aren't helping you, they're *watching* you. Making sure you're loyal to the big picture. . . making sure you're not a threat? Kid?' Igor didn't know whether this was a statement or a question, or even if it was true, but he said it anyway. The assassin nodded.

'They want me to think they're giving me protection, but they know I don't need it. I've survived on my own for over ten years.' He smiled at Igor's confusion. 'I'm a little older than you think, I shave every day to look younger, and stay invisible. . . Or was that a lie?' He laughed, adding mystery to his identity.

'But yes, the thought has crossed my mind. They're watching me to make sure that I'm their ally, before they make me their enemy, that is. I can work for whoever I want, I work both for and against them. It's so much *fun*!' He sighed once.

Then Igor couldn't control the pain, he screamed out in anguish. He couldn't feel his limbs, they were already dead.

'Your family will be compensated, you can count on that.'

'Hey kid!' Dave yelled, poking his shaven head up through the fire exit. 'Come on, the boss wants us.'

'The Assassin!' he corrected. 'And it's only *a* boss, the first of many. . . ' the kid muttered. 'Igor. Your betrayal of Phoenix could destroy the world, but in a way I understand why you did it. However, that doesn't change anything. You know

what I have to say now.' Igor grunted, unable to reply as he felt the very last drops of blood escape him.

'Phoenix is reborn.' The Assassin pulled out his handgun and, standing over Igor, shot him once in the head. The cry of the bullet echoed through the space, sending nearby crows and ravens soaring into the sky. The wind seemed to pause, hanging on a knife edge.

As was his custom, the boy pulled a phone from his pocket and took a photo of Igor's dead body, leaning in so the camera would identify that it was in fact Igor's face. He sent the image along with those three words that they seemed to live by, and walked away.

Hundreds of miles away a mobile phone beeped. The recipient picked it up and smiled at the message:

Phoenix is reborn.