

Tom Clancy Code of Honor

1

Had the young woman at the bar been slightly more attractive, Geoff Noonan might have smelled a trap.

"Know your number." That's what they said. Oh, he knew his number, all right, and this was going to work out just fine . . .

The security goons at work were jealous of everyone else's travel, relying on acronyms, spooky statistics, and stupid rules like that "know your number" bullshit at every single meeting. These destroyers of joy gleefully pointed out that a five in Plymouth was still a five in Phuket or Phnom Penh-or anywhere else, for that matter. They liked to remind everyone that eights and nines didn't magically try to hook up with a five. Ever. If the situation was too good to be true, it was a setup. Noonan was an engineer, a software designer, smart enough to know the knuckle-dragging goons were right, mostly. But sometimes . . . Sometimes the circumstances indicated otherwise. Sometimes a hot girl didn't realize she was a hot girl, especially if she was just hot enough.

Noonan watched the Indonesian beauty at the bar curl her toes on the crossbar of the stool, like a cat might flick the tip of its tail back and forth to rid itself of excess energy. This was good, all right, but not too good. Was it? Nah. It's not like she was an eight or anything.

The Magma Lounge at the Hilton in Bandung, Indonesia, had oversized leather couches that swallowed people up, especially if they had short legs, which Noonan did. Mired in impossibly soft cushions, he didn't think about his wife, his two kids, the baby on the way, or his wife's father, who was a federal judge in Hartford. The danger level of his actions and the consequences of an affair should have made him think twice before he asked this woman to join him, but they never entered his mind. He was preoccupied with how to stand up without looking like an ass when the time came.

The girl at the bar was good-looking enough for Noonan's taste, though not so handsome as to set off alarm bells. It was doubtful he would have heard them in any case. His pastor at the First Congregational Church in Beacon Hill had pointed out during a recent marriage counseling session that Geoff appeared to lack the capacity for what he called pre-transgression guilt-that little tickle in the back of the neck that warned most people away from bad behavior before they engaged in it. Noonan had a conscience. It just took a while to kick in. Moments after, whatever the deed, Noonan always found himself wallowing in guilt. He just couldn't seem to remember that feeling prior to any action, and that inability kept him in constant trouble.

He caught the girl's eye again.

For now, trouble was looking pretty damned sweet.

Her honeyed complexion and flawless features suggested she was Sundanese, the most prevalent ethnicity in Bandung-and West Java, for that matter. Sundanese were often said by Indonesians to be the most attractive people in their country. Hard to argue, though Noonan had to admit he hadn't seen many ugly girls since he and his bosses had arrived in Jakarta for the computer gaming trade show five days earlier. Bandung was even better-and worse, but mostly better.

Blue eyes and straw accents in the girl's dark hair suggested she had more than a few Dutch branches in her family tree-a remnant from Dutch East India plantations that had raised tea and cinchona, from which quinine was still derived. A skintight fire-engine-red dress had a heart-shaped neckline below her collarbones. The sultry, fist-size swell of visible cleavage provided a sexy counterpoint to the nervous way she curled the toes of one dainty foot and dangled a shoe off the end of the other.

Noonan scooted forward on the deep cushions to take his third dirty martini of the evening from the waiter. He held the glass up toward the girl. Dangerous stuff, those air toasts. There was always a chance she was looking at someone or something behind him. Noonan held his breath until her smallish mouth blossomed into a petite smile and she returned the gesture with her own drink-fruit juice, from the looks of it. That wasn't surprising, since most Sundanese were Muslim. He wondered if her piety

would keep her from hooking up with a guy at a bar. Maybe she was just here to meet a friend.

He was about to find out.

She was up, padding across the floral carpet toward him, red dress so tight across her belly he could see the depression of her navel against the fabric. The nervousness was gone now. Her steps were confident, though not haughty, like she knew she was attractive but didn't plan to use it as a weapon. Noonan shot a glance over his shoulder, just to be sure. He didn't want to look the fool if he stood up to greet her and she walked past him to talk to some girlfriend she'd seen across the bar.

There was no one, a fact that shot a surge of adrenaline from the top of Geoff Noonan's head to the tips of his toes. This might actually work out.

Noonan was self-aware enough to know he was probably a borderline six. The girls at work called him the Poison Dwarf, which wasn't fair because five-seven wasn't really all that short. He suspected it had more to do with the kind of jokes he told in the breakroom.

He stood when the woman was halfway there, working extra-hard to keep from wallowing to his feet from the oversized couch.

This one was a solid seven, a little square-hipped for Noonan's taste, and she didn't have as much up top as he normally liked, but yeah, she was a seven for sure. A seven hooking up with a six. That could work. Plus, he was an American. Worth a point. Right? Maybe she just wanted a free drink while she practiced her English, but even that would be better than sitting alone in a bar after the day he'd had.

His gut churned with something far more pleasurable than guilt.

Two weeks before, Geoff Noonan had been a brilliant if somewhat creepy software engineer at Parnassus Games in Boston, content to gamble online and maybe sneak over to a strip club near Boston Common while his wife was at her maternity checkups. He wasn't exactly a man overflowing with

scruples, but up until recently, he'd never considered selling out his company to the highest bidder.

Todd Ackerman changed everything when he broke both his legs in a bicycling accident. Ackerman was supposed to have been the one to attend the Jakarta tech conference, but with his injuries, that duty had fallen to Noonan. They had developed several pieces of tech together, tech that got them noticed by the bosses. The two software engineers were antipodal in virtually everything but their knowledge of computer gaming. Ackerman had been a college baseball star. Noonan was still the last picked for every team, sport or not. Ackerman liked conferences in faraway lands. Strange food gave Noonan the runs. Crowds made him feel like someone had a pillow over his face. Ackerman was Canadian-stereotypically agreeable-and smiled more than a normal person should smile. The bosses liked to spend time with him, have drinks, play golf. They tolerated Noonan because of his brilliance. If they'd suspected either of the two engineers of corporate espionage, it would have been Noonan, hands down. He was awkward and quiet and hardly ever cracked a smile unless it was at one of his own dirty jokes.

Nobody suspected Ackerman. He was the nice guy.

Ackerman had been the one to arrange the side trip to Bandung after the conference to meet with the rep from an up-and-coming Indonesian gaming company. Ackerman set up the foreign bank accounts, the alibis, the escape plan-all of it. Noonan was well aware that he wouldn't have been brought in on the deal had Ackerman not wrecked his bike. He was a necessary evil-now a rich necessary evil.

Noonan had demurred at first, not because it was the right thing to do, but because he thought it might be a trap. Then, when Ackerman had explained how much money was involved, the deal had been a no-brainer. Noonan would go to the stupid conference and meet with the buyer and he'd get fifty percent of twenty-five million dollars. Not too shabby. His wife went to church every Sunday even if she didn't have a single sin to confess as far as he could tell. Even she'd be able to understand twelve and a half million dollars when he got around to explaining it to her.

If he ever did. That kind of money made it easy to disappear.

And anyway, it wasn't even stealing. Ackerman and Noonan had, after all, been the ones to develop the technology. Why shouldn't they be able to sell it?

The trade show had been packed with geeks-adults who made a life playing and designing computer-based gaming systems. Like many of the attendees, Noonan was a loner at heart, an introvert who preferred the company of a computer screen in a dimly lit basement to actual flesh-and-blood people. Where a gathering of like-minded folks might exhilarate some, the milling crowds and endless panel discussions sucked the life out of him and left him with a pulsing headache.

The bigwigs from Warner Bros., Ubisoft, Sega-everyone in the gaming industry was there. The Japanese had the biggest presence, of course, but the South Koreans, the Chinese, and reps from Silicon Valley (which included a hell of a lot of Japanese, Korean, and Chinese) all made a healthy showing. Russia had a small presence, as did India, and an Australian company. The Indonesians, eager to dip a toe into the gaming market themselves, hosted the trade show, and Suparman Games was their de facto industry leader.

The security goons in Boston-Noonan called them Larry and Curly, for no particular reason but that they hated it-had warned him that there would be people at the show who would be extremely interested in some of the company's recent innovations. Corporate espionage was the number-one threat to American national security, they said, acting all official and serious, like they were still Feds and not stooges for a company that made computer games. But they had no idea Calliope even existed, let alone her capability. No one did, beyond Noonan and Ackerman. If the bosses had known all of it, they would have put every existing copy under armed guard.

Ackerman kept one locked up in a safe-deposit box somewhere. Noonan had come to Jakarta with two. He kept one for insurance. Twenty-five million was supposed to guarantee fidelity. And it would, so long as the Indonesians didn't try any funny business.

The conference was a nightmare, with the bosses eyeing him constantly for three days. He was sure they suspected something at first, but he finally realized they always looked at him like that, like they were disappointed he

was such a rock star in the field of artificial intelligence that he was impossible to fire, no matter how much they didn't like him.

Ackerman was smart, and he knew that the bosses might hang around Jakarta to hobnob after the conference wrapped up. He'd set up the meeting with the buyer in Bandung, a three-and-a-half-hour drive to the southeast nestled in the Parahyangan Mountains. Noonan told the bosses he wanted to experience a little of the mountain air before he left Indonesia. They were heading to Australia on some camel tour anyway, so they couldn't really say much about him wanting to soak up a little culture. At least he wasn't trying to tag along with them.

Bandung was all right, Noonan supposed. The third-largest city in Indonesia was cooler than Jakarta, and only slightly less crowded. They called it the City of Flowers or something like that. Noonan had hoped it was because of the girls, but it turned out to be because of the actual flowers. The rocky gray face of Tangkuban Perahu, an active 6,800-foot volcano, rose above the green mountains thirty kilometers to the north of the city and gave the air an odor that was far from floral.

Noonan met the buyer at a teahouse a block from his hotel. The guy looked like an Indonesian gangster—at least what Noonan thought an Indonesian gangster would look like—with dark slacks, black Oakley shades, and some kind of prison tattoo showing on the muscle of his upper arm below the short sleeve of a white linen shirt. The transaction was surprisingly simple, considering how much it would change Noonan's life. Hand over the thumb drive, money gets transferred, Ackerman sends the activation codes. Bing, bang, boom.

It wasn't like the movies, with any witty repartee or hoarsely whispered threat. The gangster dude just pushed back from the table and left with what he came for. Geoff Noonan had all but stumbled out of the teahouse, wrestling with the heady fact that he was now a multimillionaire. He'd walked for the better part of an hour through the teeming Bandung streets, dodging traffic and tourists who had fled the crowds of Jakarta to crowd into this new place. Stunned, that's what Noonan was. He paid little attention to where he was going. The cacophony of horns, bike bells, and people jabbering away in a tongue he could not understand assaulted him like countless slaps coming in from every direction.

A little guy at a meat stall called out to him in a high-pitched voice, waving the piece of cardboard he used to fan the smoke away from his grill. It occurred to Noonan that he could buy any of the lowly schmucks on this street ten thousand times over. More than that. Most of these guys probably didn't have more than their food stall and some shithole hovel somewhere. He'd always known he was smarter than everyone else. Now he was richer, too. The smug feeling vanished as soon as he saw his first policeman. He was a felon now. A thief. He needed to try to blend in.

Street vendors selling everything from chicken satay to Dutch pastries were everywhere. He'd bought a bowl of chicken porridge from a cart because the girl was pretty, and thrown it away after two bites halfway down the block. It tasted fine, but he was too queasy to eat. He kept walking, hoping that would help, deciding to check out the central square. He needed to tell his bosses he'd done something besides sit at the hotel bar. The Grand Mosque was right there, so everyone took off their shoes. The sulfur from Tangkuban Perahu volcano, mixing with the odor of other people's feet, left him feeling bilious.