

Consent to Kill

Vince Flynn

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PRELUDE

To kill a man is a relatively easy thing—especially the average unsuspecting man. To kill a man like Mitch Rapp, however, would be an entirely different matter. It would take a great deal of planning and a very talented assassin, or more likely a team, who were either brave enough or crazy enough to accept the job. In fact, any sane man by definition would have the sense to walk away.

The assassins would need to catch Rapp with his guard down in order to get close enough to finish him off once and for all. The preliminary report on his vigilance did not look good. The American was either hyperalert or insanely paranoid. Every detail of their plan would have to come together perfectly, and even then, they would need some luck. They'd calculated that their odds for success were probably seventy percent at best. That was why they needed complete deniability. If whoever they sent failed, Rapp would come looking, despite their positions of great power, and they had no intention of spending the rest of their lives with a man like Mitch Rapp hunting them.

1

LANGLEY, VIRGINIA

Rapp stood in front of his boss's desk. He'd been offered a chair, but had declined. The sun was down, it was getting late, he'd rather be at home with his wife, but he wanted to get this thing taken care of. The file was an inch thick. It pissed him off. There was no other way to describe it. He wanted it gone. Off his desk so he could move on to something else. Something more important, and probably more irritating, but for now he simply wanted to make this particular problem go away.

His hope was that Kennedy would simply read the summary and hand it back to him. But that wasn't how she liked to do things. You didn't become the first female director of the CIA by cutting corners. She had a photographic memory and a hyperanalytical mind. She was like one of those high-end mainframe computers that sit in the basement of large insurance companies, churning through data, discerning trends, risks, and a billion other things. Kennedy's grasp of the overall situation was second to none. She was the depository of all information, including, and especially, the stuff that could never be made public. Like the file that was on her desk right now.

He watched her flip through the pages with great speed, and then backtrack to check on certain inconsistencies that he had no doubt were there. Preparing these reports was not his specialty. His skill set had more to do with the other end of their business. There were times when she would read his work with a pen in hand. She'd make corrections and jot down notes in the margins, but not now. This particular file could turn

out to be toxic, the type of thing that would ruin careers like a tornado headed for a trailer park. Kennedy knew when he came to her office, either early in the morning or late in the day, and refused to sit, that it was a good idea to keep the cap on her pen. She knew what he wanted, so she kept reading and said nothing.

Kennedy wanted final review on things like this. Rapp wasn't so sure that was a good idea, but she had a better grasp of the big picture than he did. She was the boss and ultimately it was her pretty little neck on the chopping block. If the pin got pulled, Rapp would jump on the grenade without hesitation, but the vultures on the Hill would want her hide too. Rapp respected her, which was no small thing. He was a loner. He'd been trained to operate independently, to survive in the field all on his own for months at a time. For some people that type of work would be unnerving. For Rapp it was Valhalla. No paperwork, no one looking over his shoulder. No risk-averse bureaucrat second-guessing his every move. Complete autonomy. They had created him and now they had to deal with him.

Guys like Rapp didn't do well taking orders unless it was from someone they really respected. Fortunately, Kennedy had that respect, and she had the clout to make things happen, or as in this case, simply look the other way while he took care of things. That's all Rapp wanted. What he preferred, actually. He didn't need her to sign off or give him the green light. She just needed to give him the file back, say good night, and that would be the end of it. Or the beginning, depending on how you wanted to look at it.

Rapp had the assets in place. He could join them in the morning and be done with it in twelve hours or less if there weren't any surprises, and on this one there wouldn't be. This guy was a moron of the highest order. He would never know what hit him. The problem was in the stir it might create. The aftermath. Personally, Rapp couldn't care less, but he knew if Kennedy hesitated, that would be the reason.

Kennedy closed the file and removed her reading glasses. She set them down on her desk and began rubbing her eyes. Rapp watched her. He knew her well. As well as he knew anyone. The rubbing of the eyes was not a good sign. That meant her head hurt, and in all likelihood the discomfort was due to the pile of crap he'd just dumped on her desk.

"Let me guess," she said as she looked up at him with tired eyes, "you want to eliminate him."

Rapp nodded.

“Why is it that your solution always involves killing someone?”

Rapp shrugged. “It tends to be more permanent that way.”

The director of the CIA looked disappointed. She shook her head and placed her hand on the closed file.

“What do you want me to say, Irene? I’m not into rehabilitation. This guy had his chance. The French had him locked up for almost two years. He’s been out for six months, and he’s already back to his same old tricks.”

“Have you bothered to think of the fallout?”

“Not really my forte?”

She glared at him.

“I’ve already talked to our French colleagues. They’re as pissed off as we are. It’s their damn politicians and that goofy judge who let the idiot go.”

Kennedy couldn’t deny the fact. She’d talked to her counterpart in France at length about this individual and several others, and he was not happy with his country’s decision to set the radical Islamic cleric free. The counterterrorism people in France didn’t like it any more than they did.

“This guy is a known entity,” Kennedy said. “The press has written about him. They covered his release. If he turns up dead, they’re going to jump all over it.”

“Let them jump. It’ll last a day or two . . . maybe a week at the most, and then they’ll move onto something else. Besides . . . it’ll serve as a good message to all of these idiots who think they can operate in the West without fear.”

She looked back at him, her eyes revealing nothing. “What about the president? He’s going to want to know if we had a hand in it.”

Rapp shrugged. “Tell him you don’t know anything about it.”

Kennedy frowned. “I don’t like lying to him.”

“Then tell him to ask me about it. He’ll get the picture, and he’ll drop it. He knows the game.”

Kennedy leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs. She looked at the far wall and said, more to herself than to Rapp, “He’s a cleric.”

“He’s a radical thug who is perverting the Koran for his own sadistic needs. He raises money for terrorist groups, he recruits young impressionable kids to become suicide bombers, and he’s doing it right in our own backyard.”

“And that’s another problem. Just how do you think the Canadians are going to react to this?”

“Publicly . . . I’m sure some of them will be upset, but privately they’ll want to give us a medal. We’ve already talked to the Mounted Police and the Security Intelligence Service . . . they wish they could deport the idiot, but their solicitor general is hell-bent on proving that he’s Mr. PC. We even have an intercept where two SIS guys are talking about how they could make the guy disappear.”

“You’re not serious?”

“Damn straight. Coleman and his team picked it up this week.”

Kennedy studied him. “I have no doubt that our colleagues will privately applaud this man’s death, but that still doesn’t address the political fallout.”

Rapp did not want to get involved in the politics of this. He’d lose if that’s where they ended up going. “Listen . . . it’s bad enough when these religious psychos do their thing over in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, but we sure as hell can’t let it happen here in North America. To be honest with you, I hope the press does cover this . . . and I hope the rest of these zealots get the message loud and clear that we’re playing for keeps. Irene, we’re in the middle of a damn war, and we need to start acting like it.”

She didn’t like it, but she agreed. With a resigned tone she asked, “How are you going to do it?”

“Coleman’s team has been in place for six days watching him. This guy operates like clockwork. No real security to worry about. We can either walk up and pop him on the street, in which case we might have to hit anyone who’s with him, or we can take him out with a silenced rifle from a block or two away. I prefer the rifle shot. With the right guy, the odds are as good and there’s less downside.”

Her index finger traced a number on file and she asked, “Can you make him disappear?”

“With enough time, money, and manpower I can do anything, but why complicate things?”

“The impact will be significantly reduced if the press doesn’t have a body to photograph.”

“I can’t make any promises, but I’ll look into it.”

Kennedy began nodding her head slowly. “All right. Number-one rule, Mitch, don’t get caught.”

“Goes without saying. I’m very into self-preservation.”

“I know . . . all I’m saying is if you can come up with a way for him to never be found, it might help.”

“Understood.” Rapp reached down and grabbed the file. “Anything else?”

“Yes. When you get back I need you to meet with someone. Two people, actually.”

“Who?”

She shook her head. “When you get back, Mitch. Meanwhile, you have my consent. Make it happen, and call me as soon as you’re done.”

2

MECCA, SAUDI ARABIA

I want a man killed.”

The words were spoken too loudly, in front of far too many people and in a setting that hadn't heard such frank talk in decades. Twenty-eight men, bodyguards included, were standing or sitting in the opulent reception hall of Prince Muhammad bin Rashid's palace in Mecca. Rashid was the Saudis' minister for Islamic affairs, a very important position in the Kingdom. The palace was where he liked to hold his weekly majlis, or audience, in the desert sheik tradition. Some came to ask favors, many more came just to stay close to the prince, and undoubtedly there were a few who came to spy on behalf of Rashid's half brother King Abdullah.

With the utterance of this blunt request any pretense of discreet eavesdropping, normally an art form at these weekly audiences, was dropped. Heads swiveled in the direction of the prince as words hung on lips half spoken.

Prince Muhammad bin Rashid did not look up, but could feel the collective gaze of the men around him. He had felt only the briefest discomfort at his friend's brazen request, and it wasn't because it involved killing. Rashid had expected that. For some time now he'd been feeding his friend the information that would incite this desperate plea. In truth the only thing that annoyed him was that his old friend would be so reckless as to utter such a thing in front of so many who could not be trusted. The Kingdom had become a very dangerous place, even for a man as powerful as Muhammad bin Rashid.

Rashid clasped the kneeling man's hand and carefully considered his reply. The request, and what was said next, would be repeated all over the Kingdom and possibly beyond by sunset. There was a division in the House of Saud. Brother had been pitted against brother, and Rashid knew he needed to be very careful. Royal family members had already been killed and many more would die before it was over. His chief adversary was the king himself, a weak-kneed leader who all too often lent his ear to the Americans.

Resisting his cultural tendency toward bravado he chided, "You must not speak of such things, Saeed. I know the loss of your son has been difficult, but you must remember Allah is mighty, and vengeance is his."

The man replied angrily, "But we are instruments of Allah, and I demand my own vengeance. It is my right."

The prince looked up from the pained face of his old friend, who was kneeling before him, and gestured for his aides to clear the room. He then reached out and touched the knee of a man sitting to his right, signaling for him to stay.

After the room was cleared, the prince looked sternly at his friend and said, "You lay at my feet a very serious request."

Tears welled in the eyes of Saeed Ahmed Abdullah. "The infidels have killed my son. He was a good boy." He turned his anguished face to the man Rashid had asked to stay: Sheik Ahmed al-Ghamdi, the spiritual leader of the Great Mosque in Mecca. "My son was a true believer who answered the call to jihad. He sacrificed everything while so many others do nothing." Saeed looked around the large room hoping to direct some of his anger at the privileged class who talked bravely, threw around money, but gave no blood of their own. He'd been so immersed in his own pain he hadn't even noticed they'd all left.

Sheik Ahmed nodded benevolently. "Waheed was a brave warrior."

"Very brave." Saeed looked back to his old friend. "We have known each other for a long time. Have I ever been an unreasonable man? Have I ever burdened you with trivial requests?"

Rashid shook his head.

"I would not be here now asking for this if the cowards in Riyadh had honored my simple request and stood up to the Americans. All I asked for was the body of my youngest child, so that I could give him a proper burial. Instead, I am told he was defiled by Mitch Rapp so as to intentionally bar him from paradise. What would you expect me to do?"

Rashid sighed and said, "What is it you ask of me?"

“I want you to kill a man for me. It is no more complicated than that. An eye for an eye.”

He studied his friend cautiously. “That is no small request.”

“I would do it myself,” Saeed said eagerly, “but I am naïve in such things, whereas you, my old friend, have many contacts in the world of espionage.”

For eight years Rashid had been Saudi Arabia’s minister of the Interior, which oversaw the police and intelligence services. Then after 9/11 he was shamefully dismissed by his half brother, the crown prince, who had caved into pressure from the Americans. Yes, Rashid had the contacts. In fact he had just the person in mind for the job. “Who is this man you want killed?”

“His name is Rapp . . . Mitch Rapp.”

The prince concealed his joy. Rashid had been planning this moment for months. It had started when his friend had asked him to find out what had happened to his son, who had left the kingdom to fight in Afghanistan. Rashid had used his sources in the intelligence community and discovered a great deal more than he ever revealed. Slowly, he fed his old friend the information that he knew would lead him to demand nothing short of vengeance.

“Saeed, do you know what you ask of me?” The prince spoke in a well-rehearsed and dire voice. “Do you have any idea who this Mitch Rapp is?”

“He is an assassin, he is an infidel, and he is the man responsible for the death and defilement of my son. That is all I need to know.”

“I must caution you,” Rashid said very deliberately, “this Mitch Rapp is an extremely dangerous man. He is rumored to be a favorite of the American president and the king as well.”

“He is an infidel,” the bereaved father repeated as he turned to the religious man. “I have listened to your sermons. Are we not in a war for the survival of Islam? Have you not told us to take up arms against the infidels?”

What little face that could be seen through the thick gray beard showed nothing. The sheik simply closed his eyes and nodded.

Saeed looked back to the prince, his old friend. “I am not a politician or a statesman, or a man of God. I am a businessman. I don’t expect either of you to publicly or privately support what I am going to do. All I am asking, Rashid, is that you point me in the right direction. Give me a name and I will handle the rest.”

With the exception of Saeed's public proclamation, Rashid couldn't have been more pleased with how things were proceeding. He had predicted his friend's response almost perfectly. He sat stolidly, not wanting to appear too eager. "Saeed, I know of a man who is very skilled in what you ask. He is extremely expensive, but knowing you as well as I do, I doubt that will be an issue."

Saeed nodded his head vigorously. He had easily made billions, first by putting up phone and power lines around the kingdom and other countries in the region and now by laying thousands of miles of fiber-optic cable.

"I will send him to see you, but you must make no mention of our meeting here today to him or to anyone else. I share your anger, and I wish you success, but you must give me your word as my oldest friend that you will never speak of my role in this to anyone. The Kingdom is a very dangerous place these days, and there are brothers of mine who would not be as sympathetic to your plight as I." Rashid's reference to Saudi Arabia's pro-American government was obvious.

Saeed sneered. "There is much I would like to say, but as you said the Kingdom is a very dangerous place these days. You have my word. I will speak of this to no one. Not even to the man you send."

"Good," smiled Rashid. He stood and helped his friend to his feet. The two began walking across the cavernous room, leaving the cleric sitting alone. "Because, my friend, if you succeed in killing Mr. Rapp, and the Americans find out you were behind it, the king will cut off your head. If you fail, and Mr. Rapp finds out you were behind it . . . he will visit you and your family with more pain than you can imagine."

Saeed nodded. "How will I recognize the man you send?"

"He is a German. There will be no mistaking him. He is infinitely capable. Just tell him what you want, and he will take care of the rest."

3

MONTREAL, CANADA

Rapp arrived the next morning on a Falcon 2000 executive jet leased through a front company in Virginia. A certified pilot, Rapp was the acting copilot on the flight and was dressed accordingly. With the uniform, and a well-used, but fake passport, he breezed through a cursory customs inspection at the private airport and hailed a cab to the hotel where the team was staying. It was Saturday morning. The team's seventh day. There were four of them, including Coleman. Their history with Rapp went back a decade and a half. Each knew how the others operated, and they all trusted one another, which in their line of work was no small thing.

Coleman was waiting for him in the hotel room, ready to bring him up to speed on the tactical situation. The other three men were out keeping an eye on the target. The former SEAL was about an inch shorter than Rapp. He normally kept his blond hair close cropped, but he'd let it grow out, so it spilled over the top of his ears and touched his shirt collar in back. There was a wave to it with a slight curl. He was lean and athletic, but had a relaxed way about him that could be very deceptive. Confident in his abilities, he no longer felt the need to prove anything. He had done it all, survived some really nasty stuff, and lived to keep his mouth shut. That was the way of the SEALs. They might exchange war stories with each other, or other operators, but that was as far as it went. They were a tight fraternity—one that didn't like braggarts.

Rapp set his flight bag down on the one bed and looked down at the map spread out on the other one.

“Here’s the hotel, here’s the mosque”—Coleman pointed to one spot and then the other—“and here’s his apartment.”

Rapp looked down at the map of downtown Montreal and the surrounding neighborhoods. “How long does it take him to walk from the mosque to the apartment?”

“He averages five minutes and twenty-three seconds. Quickest time is four minutes and eighteen seconds. He was late for prayer and in a hurry. Longest time was just over ten minutes. He stopped to talk to someone along the way.”

“Any signs of surveillance by the police or the intelligence service?”

“Nothing.”

Rapp frowned. “That’s strange.”

“I thought so at first, but then I got to thinking that maybe they’ve got someone on the inside.”

“A fellow worshiper?”

“Yeah.” Coleman pointed to an eight-by-ten surveillance photo of the mosque. “We’ve picked up some chatter. Not everyone agrees with his radical interpretation of the Koran.”

Rapp’s right eyebrow shot up in surprise. “You’ve got the mosque wired?”

“No. We’ve been able to monitor the worshipers as they come and go using parabolic mikes. Caught a couple older guys yesterday after Khalil delivered his Friday afternoon sermon. They think he’s a cancer in their community. A bad influence on the kids. Filling their heads with all of this talk of jihad and martyrdom.”

This did not surprise Rapp. The overwhelming majority of Muslims did not agree with what these terrorists were doing in the name of Allah. Rapp just wished they were more vocal about it.

“Anything else?”

“Yeah. He’s a real pious bastard, this one. We got into his apartment yesterday during the afternoon sermon. The whole building empties out, so we figured it was pretty safe. We took a look at his computer.” Coleman extracted a memory stick from his pocket. “Copied his hard drive for you.”

Rapp grinned and took it. “Thank you.”

“It’s filled with porn.”

“No way?”

“Dead serious. A lot of really kinky shit. Mostly bondage.”

Rapp studied the memory stick. “You just never know with these idiots, do you?”

“Nope, but it doesn’t surprise me one bit.”

“Yeah, I suppose you’re right. They’re all running from something. What else?”

“Best spot to hit him is obviously between the mosque and the apartment. Five round trips a day. Before sunup, just after noon, late afternoon, just after sunset, and then my favorite . . . his ten o’clock trip.”

“Why not early in the morning?”

“It would work,” said Coleman, “but the sunrise call to prayer has double the attendance that the evening one does. By the time he heads home it’s almost eleven, and the streets are empty.”

“He walks alone?” Rapp asked, still not believing the intel report he’d received earlier in the week.

“Yep.”

This guy was a real moron, but pretty typical when you looked at his early years. Khalil Muhammad, Egyptian by birth, had grown up in the clutches of an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, indoctrinated into the strict unyielding brand of Islam perpetuated and funded by the Wahhabis out of Saudi Arabia. At the age of fifteen he and a group of peers stoned a reporter to death for writing an article that was critical of the madrasa they attended. The religious school he attended had sent every single one of its graduates off to fight in the Afghani war against the Soviets. It was rumored that many had been sent against their will.

While the others stood trial for the stoning, Khalil fled to Saudi Arabia, where he received further religious instruction at the hands of the Wahhabis. In his early twenties he completed his studies and became an Imam. At twenty-six he immigrated to Canada with the express purpose of building a new mosque and spreading the Wahhabi faith to North America. His mosque grew rapidly and as a reward he was granted funding to build a second mosque in France.

Khalil’s comings and goings went unnoticed for the most part. Until 9/11. After that everything changed. When Khalil was finally arrested by the French it was due to his involvement in a plot to pull off a Madrid-style train bombing in Paris. He had recruited six young men, none of them over the age of seventeen, to act as martyrs. Khalil had promised them great rewards in paradise. They would be purified and exalted. They would be remembered as heroes and their families would be taken care of and given great respect. His recruits would do all the heavy lifting.

Khalil would remain in the shadows. It would have worked, but the CIA was already on to Khalil. The hackers at Langley were breaking through firewalls as fast as they could in an effort to track the money the Saudis were sending overseas. They stumbled across Khalil and alerted the French DST.

When the authorities went to raid his apartment they came up with nothing incriminating. But the dogs that had come along on the raid seemed unusually interested in a separate apartment down the hall. They broke down the door and found suicide vests and enough explosives to level the building. Khalil went to jail along with the six boys. They all kept their mouths shut and there they sat for over a year while the intelligence services tried to figure out how much they could tell the police without giving away the family jewels. By the time the case ended up in front of a judge, Franco-American relations were near an all-time low. The judge was appalled by the lack of hard evidence put forth by the state. In the case of Khalil, no crime had been committed. He was a religious man who was guilty of nothing more than association with some bad apples. The judge ordered his immediate release. The six boys were charged with possession of dangerous materials and given a paltry sentence. Khalil was sent back to Canada. Within a week he was back in his mosque calling the young men to jihad and decrying the very authorities who protected his right to do so. The French judge had infused him with a false sense of invincibility.

In truth Rapp had bigger problems to worry about, but this guy had gotten under his skin. Three weeks earlier in Afghanistan a car had smashed into a barricade outside a U.S. facility. When the guards approached they found a rock on the gas pedal and a semiconscious boy chained to the steering wheel. The car was filled with explosives which thankfully didn't go off due to a faulty detonator. The boy was cut free and soon afterward began telling his story to anyone who would listen. He said that his parents had immigrated to Canada from Yemen when he was a child. Sheik Khalil Muhammad had arranged for him to go to Saudi Arabia for religious instruction, but upon arriving in Mecca he was bound, gagged, and knocked unconscious. The next thing he remembered was being pulled from the car by American soldiers.

All of this information was passed on to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service who in turn tried to question Khalil about the boy's kidnapping. Khalil became instantly belligerent and got his lawyer and the Muslim Council of Montreal involved. Canada's solicitor general, a wimp

if there ever was one, balked at the specter of being labeled intolerant, and yanked on the Intelligence Service's chain. They were told to stay away from Khalil and his mosque. People went missing all the time the world over. Just because the kid got grabbed did not mean Khalil had a hand in it.

Rapp was not so trusting. He put Marcus Dumond, his best hacker, on the case and within thirty-six hours Dumond was coming up with all kinds of irregularities in Khalil's banking records. He was still up to his neck in Wahhabi money, and he had also sent two other boys to Saudi Arabia for religious instruction. Thus far they had not been able to verify if the kids were actually in school, but the parents had confirmed that they had not heard from their children in several months. They had been told it would probably be a year before they would hear from them due to the strict religious regimen of the school. Rapp smelled a rat, and the rat was Khalil Muhammad.

There were worse offenders out there, to be sure, but this one was too close to home. Too brazen. Who knew what he would try next if he was left unchecked? No, it was better to deal with him now. Make an example of him. Kennedy wanted him to disappear, but Rapp had an even better idea. The more he mulled it over the more he liked it.

Rapp walked over to the window, looked out at the gray sky, and said, "All right, here's what we're going to do."