

SOULS ON THE WIND

CHAPTER ONE

Tom Cavanaugh had been seeing phantom sights for about a month now. As he dozed off, they came again. Men and boy ghosts, stalking toward him out of a gray mist. Rifles up in firing position. Yellow flashes blinking from some of them. They vanished, every one, replaced by a cornfield. And that too, gone. Now a tiny white chapel. There. Gone.

Cass touched his arm. “Hey, you okay?”

Tom opened his eyes. He’d never had these visions until a month ago. But now . . .

The interior of the Swissair DC-10 came into focus. The engines thrummed away as they had for hours. Cass Nesbit slipped her headset from her ears, the sleeve of her jacket brushing his shoulder.

“Yeah, fine,” he answered. “Where are we? How long was I out?” Steam rose from the coffee cup on the fold-down tray in front of him.

“Where are we?” Cass said, running a hand through her rust-colored hair. “Still about an hour out of Munich. You only closed your eyes for a few seconds. Were my tales of woe that boring?”

Tom remembered now. Cass had been telling him about the backlog of work in her office at the Capitol—he’d been getting drowsy.

“You had a weird look on your face,” she said.

Something was going on in the hollows of Tom’s mind, hovering just beyond his grasp. “There was a flash of something,” he said, “something real interesting, but I’ve lost it.”

“Something interesting in your mind?” Cass squeezed his hand.

“That’s a breakthrough.”

Teasing jabs like that were just one aspect of this complex woman who’d swept into his life with all the serenity of a tornado. He often joked about her needling a narc, Tom being a narcotics detective.

“Yeah, they were just fragments, flickers, like a slide show on uppers. When I try to focus, they slide right off like those little floaters in your eye you can never quite catch hold of. For the life of me, all I can remember later is some guys with rifles in a cornfield, and sometimes a chapel.”

“I think your vivid imagination just makes for weird dreams.” Her eyes turned playful. “But you’re supposed to dream about me.”

“Oh, I do.” Tom smiled defensively. “These other things, though, I don’t think they’re dreams. I can remember dreams if I concentrate as soon as I wake up. These little devils are something else, something a little scary.”

Cass mentioned the various theories: how all life is one vast continuum and each of us is connected to all human experience; or that we have parallel lives being lived out simultaneously in shadow universes; reincarnation; genetic memory.

Tom nodded. He hated to think what his fellow cops back in Sacramento would say if they knew he was developing an interest in these theories.

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. He felt blessed, lucky that she so willingly put up with him and his crazy ideas—and this trip. She hadn’t wanted to come. As a top aide to the governor of California, Cass Nesbit had a damn big job and the workload was a monster. She’s a trouper all right, he thought, glancing at the ring on her left hand that had cost him a nice chunk of his cop’s pay.

When they finally reached the Munich airport, Tom was glad to get up and stretch his jeans-clad legs. Traces of cold seeped into the jetway, reminding him it was still February. In the terminal, he took Cass’s hand and smiled into her hazel-green eyes.

Then he noticed the stern-looking Customs men in their dark uniforms, staring hard at each passenger before stamping their passports.

Ninety minutes later, Cass was yawning as their rental car headed south for the Alps and the resort of Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

She reached in front of her and turned the heat up a notch. She knew she should be happier. Skiing in the German Alps, then Vienna—a dream trip—but it wasn’t coming at a good time. The governor had hesitated a few seconds too long before saying, “Go. You deserve it. The state will get along.” Cass knew she should be mad at herself, not Tom, for feeling guilty. She could have just told him no.

As the car droned on, she saw frequent signs warning of *Schnee*. “That means snow, doesn’t it?”

“Right babe, snow,” Tom said. “And tomorrow we’ll be out there on it.” She caught his sideways glance at her. “Then you’ll be glad you came. You’re a great skier.”

She kept her face neutral.

“What?” he said. “Still thinking about those meetings you’re missing?”

“I guess so. Sorry. But we’re in the middle of the budget.”

Tom said, “They have telephones and fax machines in Austria, I believe.” It sounded like he was going to say more but had stopped himself with an effort. A moment later, his right hand reached over and squeezed her thigh.

The road wound higher and higher. Patches of snow appeared in the larch- and

birch-studded hills, hills that soon gave way to granite mountains.

Conversation gradually resumed. Cass brought up the extraordinary story that Tom's father, a retired police chief, had told him.

"I'd heard a lot of Dad's war stories," Tom said, "but never this one."

"And you never had those visions before—"

"Hearing that particular war story from Dad? The one that brought us here? Nope, not before then."

At dinner in an old lodge in Garmisch, they sipped Franconian white wine, studied the menu, and listened to light classics from the piano. All the while, Tom scanned the huge room, which was half filled, and their fellow diners. He said he admired the high, timber-beamed ceilings and the Bavarian and Tyrolean flags that hung every which way.

"What I like best is that roaring fire," Cass said, glancing at a huge fireplace of gray stone, drawing in her shoulders and rubbing her arms. "And those wooden skis mounted crisscross up there on the wall. They look ancient."

"Probably from the Twenties. That kind of leather binding hasn't been used for years."

Tom saw two men come in and look around. One was slight, dark-haired, wore glasses, probably late thirties. The other was older with a rounded, prosperous-looking face.

Tom studied the other people around them. A chubby couple with a bored-looking teenage girl. A dark-skinned pair eating in posture-perfect silence, a red dot in the center of the woman's forehead. A relaxed group of six sunburned beer drinkers, animated and noisy, looking as if they'd skied all day.

If these people knew what I'm here to do, Tom thought, they wouldn't believe it.

"You're casing the place again," Cass teased. "Can't stop being a cop, can you?"

He cased her lustrous eyes and smiled his crooked smile. "That huge bed with the down comforter looked pretty inviting, didn't it?"

"Now that you mention it." She touched his hand, mischief in her smile.

"Aha, you *are* glad you're here."

The two men who'd just come in seated themselves at the next table. Why did they take *that* one, Tom wondered, when so many were available?

The waiter broke that thought, appearing and refilling their wine glasses.

"*Danke*," Tom said. He'd been advised that ordering German wine would please the locals and it seemed to. Besides, it was good stuff. "*Wie hier ist der Schnee?*" he asked, trying out his college German.

"*Sehr gut*," the blond youth replied, adding in English, "a five-meter base and good powder."

Tom glanced at the two men at the next table. The older one had a straight, milky scar—as if cut by a saber—on the left cheek.

“So, you’re going native on me already,” Cass said. “How much German do you really remember?”

“Not much, I’m afraid, but I’m going to try.” He took a sip of wine. “This trip will do us both good. A little skiing tomorrow, then on to Vienna and the main event. One of the curators at the *Kunsthistorisches* Museum should be a good place to start.”

“The *Kunst* what? Can’t you just say the Fine Arts Museum?”

He returned her smile. “Anyway, if they can’t tell us how to do it there, they can probably steer us in the right direction.”

“What about Salzburg, the biggest carrot you held out?”

“That’s on the way back, remember? First, the slopes of Hausberg. Tomorrow will be great,” he said, opening and closing his fingers as if gripping ski poles. “I’ve wanted to do this ever since I saw a downhill race from here on TV. You’ll have a great time. “Stop that,” he told himself. “You’re selling too hard.”

“So, in Vienna,” she said, “you’re going to walk up to the curator and tell him in your schoolboy German that you’d like to return a—”

Tom stopped her with a quick “shh” shape on his lips. He fished a pen from his pocket, scribbled something on a cocktail napkin, and slipped it in front of Cass.

“Those guys at the next table are listening to us,” it said.