

# DEADLY MISSION

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## CHAPTER 1

The man ran.

He sprinted along the street, clutching a hand to his shoulder. When he pulled it away, it was wet with blood. He quickly unzipped his black combat jacket. A red stain was spreading across the white T-shirt.

A car engine growled at the end of the quiet street. Had they found him? He looked left and right, then ducked between two parked cars, ignoring the throbbing pain in his shoulder as he ran across the road.

Was the car following? He couldn't tell. Couldn't look. Had to get to...

The man stopped to look at the sign on the wall next to a gate. **Blackthorne High School**. He pushed open the metal gate and sprinted across the empty playground.

\*

“So, if we think about the themes of the book and what the author is saying,” said Miss Maslen at the front of class, “that should help when you come to write the book report.”

Hildy rested her head on her hand, concentrating on Miss Maslen's words. English was her favourite subject, but it was a sunny afternoon and the corridors and classrooms of Blackthorne High were hot and sleepy. Two desks across sat her friend Ryan. She caught his eye and he grinned back. Luca was next to Ryan. He leaned in, running a hand through his deliberately messy black hair and rolled his eyes.

“I take it from your attentive silence that you’ve all got that?”

As one, the class laughed. “Yes, miss!”

\*

A car screeched to a halt. Three men scrambled out, looking frantically up and down the street.

“He can’t have got far!” growled one.

“Keep looking.”

The others grunted and fanned out along the pavement. All three were heavily built, wearing identical black leather jackets, dark blue jeans and black shades.

“It’s a school,” one called to the leader, looking up at the sign that said Blackthorne High School.

There was a flash of movement, causing the man to look across the playground. Through his dark shades he saw a door open into the main school building. “There!” he snarled. “He’s in the school!”

The three men ran into the school, a moving wall of leather and denim.

\*

“When you finish the report, go through it,” advised Miss Maslen. Hildy always enjoyed writing book reports, but as the afternoon went on she was equally looking forward to being out in the sunshine with her friends.

“See if you can find ways to make it more entertaining for the reader.” Miss Maslen smiled. “Otherwise known as me.”

\*

He opened the door and peered into the room. The pain in his shoulder was getting worse. The cloakroom was quiet and he slipped in, dust swirling in a shaft of sunlight. Bags and coats lined the walls.

They were here. He knew they’d seen him and wouldn’t be far behind. Stupid, leading them

inside the school, but he'd had no choice. No point worrying now. He had to act.

A bang somewhere in the distance. Movement. He glanced through the window. He could see another windowed corridor opposite the cloakroom, separated from it by a grass lawn. Three leather-jacketed men stalked quickly along the corridor as if they owned the place.

The man looked around. This was what he was trained for, but his mission was about to go horribly wrong. He didn't dare think about what that meant, only...

There was one way out of this. Risky, but he'd run out of options.

As the men neared the end of the corridor, he opened his jacket. His T-shirt was soaked with blood now and he felt dizzy. He gritted his teeth and pulled out a thin, grey plastic case. He undid the straps on the nearest bag and slipped it inside.

Boot steps thudded on the corridor outside. They were here. He staggered across to the other door, head pounding, getting weaker.

As he pushed the door open he was dimly aware of the door behind him smashing open and three heavily-built figures thundering after him.

He ran. There was always a lot of running in his job.

And as he ran, he only had one thought: *have I done the right thing?*

\*

Twenty minutes later, students streamed out of Blackthorne High. Another day ended. Laughter. Excited shouts.

With Ryan and Luca on either side, Hildy laughed and joked with them as they started their walk home. She hefted her bag onto her shoulder and didn't notice the three men standing by a silver car.