

Spy Sisters: The False Flamingo Flag

written by

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Prologue

ROBERT TRECLE LOOKED STRAIGHT AHEAD AND LISTENED WITHOUT OPENING his mouth.

“Don’t engage, just observe. We’ll get her tonight. Or tomorrow. We need this to go smoother than Tallahassee. No tripped alarms. No dead dogs. We get in, we get out, we get our money.”

The forty-five year old man shut his eyes and soaked in the relatively cool blasts of the car’s AC vents. He could hear the man next to him breathing. *He really should get that apnea rechecked.*

“We good?”

Robert opened his eyes and looked at his brother’s very pale face which was very similar to his own. *Irish twins.* He’d heard that phrase over and over growing up. He’d been born in January, and then Alfred had come along in November. *Robbie and Alfie.* He had no idea how his mother survived any of it or the following eighteen years. An abusive husband. Sons who were criminals before they were teenagers. The cancer that broke her body and, eventually, her spirit.

“We’re good.”

But to be clear, we’re not doing this. I am.

He hoisted himself out of the low-riding sedan and shut the door behind him, leaving the air conditioning and entering the hellish heat of the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles. It was July and summer was just getting going. He cursed the long-sleeved shirt he’d pulled out of his suitcase that

morning.

He wiped his brow with his hand and then wiped his hand on his pants as he crossed the street without looking for oncoming traffic. An e-bike nearly clipped him as an older woman in a purple bike helmet gave him the finger. He reached for his gun but his hand slid down his side. He'd taken off his holster and tossed it into the back of the car like his brother had told him too.

He looked back at Alfred, who waved him forward. Robert could see the full blast of the AC ruffle his brother's hair. *Lucky bastard.*

Robert strode up the sidewalk and rang the doorbell. It wasn't a video doorbell, thank Christ. A surveillance state made their line of work that much harder. He counted to twenty and rang the bell again. Still no answer. He moved toward the side of the house. The gate was unlocked as they knew it would be. It was the day the lawn guys had done their thing.

He moved through the gate and into the backyard. Robert paused to listen for dogs. He hated dogs, though he couldn't get Alfred to believe that's not why he killed the one in Tallahassee. It had posed a real threat, whether Robert liked it or not.

The coast was clear so he moved through the backyard and accessed the fence. Twenty years ago he could have scaled it in mere seconds. But lately his sciatica was bothering him. *Add it to the list.*

He grabbed a spare propane tank that was sitting next to a gas grill and plopped it down next to the fence. It took a few minutes but he didn't think anyone had seen him. The neighborhood was mostly at work or encased in their air conditioned bubbles. Finally, he stood up on the other side of the fence and looked at the pool before him. A swim would certainly help his sciatica. It would be a shame to let this pristine in-ground beauty go unused. The pool at their motel had beer cans floating in it. Maybe after they did the job.

THE WOMAN SCROLLED THROUGH HER PHONE, LAYING ON HER STOMACH ON A one-story roof of a mid-sized ranch. The lemon tree next to her needed a good pruning but the smell was lovely.

She stopped scrolling when she hit an ad for lip gloss. *Too orange.* She looked up while reconsidering. *The bright shade might work for summer. With the right dress. Black women can wear whatever...*

Then she saw him.

Here we go.

She moved her eye to the scope and her hand to the trigger of the gun which rested on the bipod mount in front of her.

She watched as the slightly overweight man assessed the backyard. The swimming pool, the brown grass, a blue patio table sitting on the chipped concrete near the door to the house.

They hired multiple assassins for this job. Fine but why?

He moved around the back perimeter and peeked in the windows like a little kid looking in a candy shoppe.

A Treble brother? Where there's one, there's always another.

She tracked his every step through her scope.

He tried the patio door, which was locked, and seemed poised to go back over the fence when they both heard it. A truck door slamming shut. He crouched next to an apple tree and she checked her phone. A text bounced on the screen: **They're back.**

Without a second's hesitation, she slid her gun over a few centimeters. He moved away from the cover of the apple tree, and toward the patio door, instead of back toward the fence where she'd hoped he go.

Bloody hell.

She squeezed the trigger.

1

LILAH REHLE STOOD ON THE PORCH OF HER BRAND NEW HOUSE. SHE IGNORED the discolored cement walkway and the broken brick edging as she tried to push the door open with her hip. She shifted the boxes she was carrying and glanced back at the moving truck in the driveway. It didn't have working air conditioning and the power steering was not very powerful. She couldn't wait to return it to the rental depot. She failed to move the door with her hip. "ALLISON!"

She was about to scream again when the door was flung open by a gorgeous gazelle of a woman. The woman wore impossibly tiny jean shorts, the kind with the pockets hanging out the bottom because they were cut that short, a crop top, roller skates that looked like they were from the seventies but had actually been custom made for Allison by a brand new roller skate company, and a pair of oversized sunglasses that were tucked into her long dirty blond hair. She looked all dewey and fresh and well-rested.

Lilah considered her own ensemble as she set down the boxes. She was sweating profusely and her Converse had sprung a leak leaving her big toe showing. She needed a pedicure.

Some day.

Lilah watched as her sister skated through the house on the laminate floors they'd loved when they'd first been shown the place. She spun around and did a little ta-da before winking at Lilah. She'd been winking at Lilah

since she was four years old. If you got a wink from Allison, your world was better.

Lilah was older by four years, shorter by six inches, and heavier by thirty pounds. The math equaled sisters who resembled each other, but only after close examination. It didn't help that Allison was tweezed and plucked and surgically enhanced to the point of cover girl perfection. Lilah recognized her own browned, freckled skin on her sister's body, her own brown eyes on her sister's face, and that was enough for her to know Allison. That and the three decades they'd spent being each other's constant companion.

"We did it!" Allison bellowed as she slid her arm through Lilah's. "Our very own house!"

A red light blinked at Lilah from the corner of the ceiling. She squinted and moved closer, pulling Allison with her.

"Are those cameras still working?!"

"Just their backup batteries. It's nothing to worry about lovelies!"

The sisters turned toward the sound of the voice. The voice that was always just a little louder than it should be. Like its owner had consumed a half a glass too much wine at lunch, when maybe wine at lunch wasn't appropriate to begin with.

"You left the door open!" Allison hissed at Lilah, who sighed and took a step forward toward Patrice, the fifty-something Realtor with the over-sprayed bottle blond hair and perfectly manicured nails and too tight blouse that showed too much of her tanned, surgically enhanced breasts. They had spent months with Patrice, attending Open Houses, signing papers, listening to inspection reports. Lilah just really wanted to never see Patrice again.

"I think we're all set, Patrice," Lilah said, taking another step forward, hoping to usher the Realtor out the door.

"Your extras, as promised!" Patrice handed a key ring to Lilah with an unnecessary flourish. "I'm so glad we could get the house rekeyed for you girls before you moved in. Safety first!"

Lilah handed the keys to Allison, who took them and skated into the

kitchen, which given the open floor plan of the house, took her just a few feet away. But the distance provided protection, something Allison was accustomed to receiving from those she knew best. Those she trusted.

Much of the time the protection wasn't actual physical protection but more protecting her from dealing with all the crap of normal life. That crap fell to the older, not famous, sister. Allison, the star, was far too important to deal with such trivial matters.

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ALLISON PUT HER TOE DOWN TO STOP HER SKATE AND PLACED THE KEY RING on the island in the middle of the kitchen. She looked out the side window, over the kitchen sink, and stared at the cement wall as Patrice and Lilah talked.

Patrice was annoying but harmless. She was just another person in Allison's life who wanted something from her. It was usually an agent or manager or director or executive or casting agent or charity or...the list could go on forever. And most of the time, she did what they wanted. She learned the last minute changes to the script. She signed the swag for the silent auction. She dyed her hair. She got the boob job. But sometimes, it was nice to not have to deal with stuff. And Lilah was just so good at it anyway.

"Thanks, Patrice. Allison and I really appreciate everything. I'm so glad she found you," Lilah said in her almost aggressive, I'm in charge here, tone.

Allison turned and watched as Lilah moved her out the front door, onto the porch. "Have a great weekend!" Allison knew Lilah didn't actually mean that and she snickered to herself.

"Toodles!" Patrice said and turned to leave. "Tell all of your friends about Patrice's Properties and OH MY GOD! GET AWAY!"

Patrice put her arms up for cover as a large black crow swooped very close to her head. Allison's snicker turned into a giggle and Lilah shut the

door quickly.

“How do we know she didn’t keep a copy of our key?” Lilah turned to Allison, whose response was to spin on her wheels, arms out, as if she were in a tampon commercial and there was a rainbow behind her.

“Don’t let her ruin today,” Allison sang out. “It’s nearly perfect!” As she skated back toward the front door, it opened again.

“Trevor’s here!” Allison called out and careened directly into his arms upon hitting the corner of a duffel bag.

The six foot five guy with movie star good looks and a goofy grin caught Allison by the waist, simultaneously moving a box to his other arm without dropping it, and smiled down at her. He had a really great smile, and Allison knew smiles. She fluttered her eyelashes as she laughed and he set down the box.

2

“IS ALL OF YOUR STUFF HERE?” LILAH ASKED IN A TONE THAT SHE HOPED indicated her extreme annoyance. Allison hung her head slightly and moved away from Trevor’s grip.

“One more load,” Allison sang and her perfectly-capped teeth sparkled in the sunlight streaming through the windows. She skated toward Lilah and grabbed her arm. Lilah let her shoulders relax and couldn’t help but be infected by Allison’s smile and good mood.

Nearly perfect. Allison was right. They’d been talking about buying a house for the ten years they’d been in Los Angeles. And after a decade of pooling their tips at the end of each shift, making sure they both had health insurance and decent vehicles, and looking at way too many shitholes, they finally found the perfect place. Adios, crappy landlords. Au revoir, on-street parking. Adieu, black mold and gross carpet and white walls.

Trevor moved several boxes into the bedrooms and then stopped next to Lilah. He bent down and kissed her on the lips, for a long moment. She let herself melt into him.

“Gross,” Allison rolled her eyes and skated away.

“Happy looks good on you,” Trevor looked into Lilah’s eyes. In the year they’d been dating she’d not known him to lie once so she was inclined to believe him this time as well. Maybe it did look good on her.

“And on me!” Allison laughed and spun once more on her skates before collapsing into a dizzy heap of legs and arms on the kitchen floor.

“Can you help me take those down?” Lilah pointed toward the blinking

red light in the corner, and similar lights in every other corner.

"I thought Patrice had a guy," Trevor began but Lilah didn't let him finish.

"No more Patrice," she said. She moved closer to him and ran a hand up his chest and he smiled and kissed her again. He tried to pull a camera down but when it didn't budge he said he'd get a ladder and a screw driver.

"What was the old owner so worried about? There's gotta be a dozen cameras on the property," Allison remarked from her spot on the kitchen floor where she took dozens of selfies. "Maybe he sold drugs. Or trafficked in exotic animals."

"Maybe he just liked looking at himself," Lilah said with a pointed glance at Allison, who was too busy with Instagram filters to notice the dig.

"There's also a valet key lockbox in my closet, and all of these wires that don't go anywhere."

"I know a guy, a friend at work who just had his whole house rewired, I'll get his electrician's number," Trevor said over his shoulder as he moved even more boxes into the bedrooms. Lilah stepped past Allison and opened the refrigerator door.

"Someone needs to go shopping," she lamented, knowing full well it would fall to her and not her little sister. Allison would tap a couple of times on her phone and Thai or Indian or Italian would appear and she'd say problem solved. And there still wouldn't be cream for their coffee.

"I'll go," Trevor smiled and headed out the front door. Lilah grinned after him, thankful for the opportunity to not get into her car for the tenth time that day.

"I'm going to propose to him when he gets back," Lilah shut the refrigerator door and looked down at Allison who was taking off her roller skates.

Maybe I will. It doesn't have to be anytime soon. He's still figuring life out. I'm still figuring life out. But I have this job. This house. It all seems OK. Maybe I will...

"Double gross," Allison teased and stood up. "I should go turn in my

keys, get the last of my stuff, but..."

"You'd rather try out the pool with me?" Lilah surprised herself a little with the invitation. She knew there was so much to do, and then dinner to make or at least order but she really just wanted to go swimming.

"Are you serious?" Allison's eyes bugged out.

"Do you know where your bathing suit is? I think mine..."

In ten seconds flat Allison had her clothes off and was standing in front of Lilah in a glittery gold bikini.

"You wore that all day?" Lilah asked. *So. Itchy.*

"A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do."

Lilah chuckled and headed to her bedroom to dig through boxes and suitcases. She finally found an old tank suit that she pulled on just as Allison appeared in the doorway with two pink plastic margarita glasses.

"Tequila and La Croix is the best I could do," Allison lamented and Lilah smiled. They clinked glasses. Lilah paused. *Fuck it.* She downed the entire contents of her glass.

Then she followed Allison outside through the guest bathroom door. They both squinted in the afternoon sun.

"We should go look at patio furniture tomorrow, and umbrellas," Allison said, sipping her drink. "Do we have beach towels?"

As they rounded the corner Allison said something about sunscreen but Lilah didn't hear her. She was already fixated on the backyard. The trees creating a private oasis. The blue and white tiles of the pool, the water that glittered.

And as her eyes moved from one end of the pool to the other, she felt the tequila move in her stomach, threatening to return back up her throat. She clasped her hand over her mouth as she tried not to throw up or scream or both.

Right there, in the middle of her perfect pool, face down, fully clothed but not moving, was a body.