

A PRICE FOR GENIUS  
**LIN WILDER**

## PROLOGUE

*Lausanne, Switzerland*

Suddenly regaining consciousness, Rich Jansen attempted to stand, then instantly regretted the movement. The pain began at the base of his head and exploded in successive and increasingly intense waves of agony, forcing him to close his eyes, hang his head and wait motionless. Remaining on his hands and knees for a minute then two for the pain to subside, for the nausea to fade, Jansen risked opening his eyes. Squinting at the bright light, he very slowly and carefully moved his head from right to left.

*So far so good. Linoleum floor, shiny black and white. That noise what is that sound? Aw no, don't tell me, please God...*

The memories flooded back as Rich raised himself up enough to crouch, knowing better than to immediately stand up. Gingerly reaching behind his head with his right hand, he winced when his fingers probed a large wet and sore swelling at the back of his head. Slowly he stood, swaying a bit while the vast room spun about him.

*Whatever they hit me with carried a hell of a wallop.*

The phone call from Reardon had happened last night? Or was it yesterday? The minute he hung up the phone, Rich had called the airport to secure a seat on the next flight to Zurich. Sixteen hours later, he had arrived at the animal research labs in the corporate offices of Andrews, Sacks, and Levine, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, located in Lausanne Switzerland.

The elfin Ariana had been showing him where the test mice were kept when everything went black. Looking around for her Jansen saw only a few spots of blood and some scuff marks. He saw mice scurrying all over the lab; for whatever reasons, whoever broke in decided to free hundreds of mice and Ariana was nowhere to be seen.

*The letter...where is the letter?*

Jansen reached into the pockets of his sports jacket, the copy of the one he'd had on since leaving San Luis Obispo, California and breathed a sigh of relief when his right hand pulled out the single page. A page now bloodied from his head wound.

*Hello Mr. Reardon,*

*By the time you get this letter, it will be too late. We'll already have her.*

*Here are the steps you must **not** take:*

- *o not call the cops.* D
- *o not contact Interpol.* D
- *ell no one.* T

*We'll know if you contact the police or Interpol. We'll know and we'll kill her instantly. But we are civilized businesspeople; this is all about business after all. Do nothing at all until you hear from us. And you will hear from us, Mr. Reardon.*

*You must know Sir, there is a price for genius. We trust you will pay it if you want to see your daughter alive.*

In the other pocket of his jacket, Jansen found his cell. He hit her number.

*Please pick up, please pick up.*

Heart hammering as he counted the rings, Jansen's knees nearly buckled with relief when his wife answered her phone. "Lindsey, where are you?"

"Neither. I'm at the track, I was just starting a run with Max." Lindsey stopped still. She could hear the tension in her husband's voice.

"Honey, I need to you to get here as soon as you can find someone to take care of Max and get a flight out to Zurich. We'll pick you up at the airport."

"What's happened Rich, what is going on?"

"Someone clubbed me while Ari was showing me around the lab. When I woke up, Ariana was missing and hundreds of mice were running around loose. Ari and I must have surprised whoever has decided to steal Liisa's research. Hank is...well, you can imagine how he is." Grabbing a nearby chair to steady himself, "There's a letter from Liisa's kidnappers. We need you to figure out how we meet their demands, we don't have a lot of time."

"Are you okay?" Lindsey was on her phone searching for flights out of San Francisco to Zurich as she waited for his answer.

Rich swayed from another wave of dizziness and nausea, gulped and replied, "Other than a mega lump on the back of my skull, yeah, I'm fine.. Whoever it was just wanted me out of commission for a few minutes. Ari and I must have interrupted whoever it was."

Rich surveyed the disarray in the lab. Cages were overturned and he could hear the squeals of mice and the scrabbling of their feet on the tiled floor. That had been the noise he had heard when he was coming to. He was way too old for this crap and knew just who he'd call once he ended the call with his wife.

"I can get there faster from San Francisco. I'm calling Kate to make sure it would be okay to bring Max to their house. I'll aim to be in Zurich tomorrow, will call you when I know the time I'll get in. Be careful Rich, please." But there was only dead air.

"Hey, McAllister, Rich Jansen here. Are you and Baron still roaming free around the country?"

"Yo, Rich!" Rich could hear the smile in Gabe's voice.

"Are you still looking to work for Zach and me?"

"You mean like as a private investigator?"

"Probably more than just investigation Gabe."

"What do you mean?"

"Gabe, this could get dicey. Two women have been kidnapped, Reardon has a note threatening that they'll kill his head of research at his pharmaceutical company Andrews, Sacks, and Levine

if he brings in the police or the feds. She also happens to be his daughter. And I've been attacked within my first hour here." Scanning the space once again, hoping that Ariana would materialize, Jansen added, "And it looks as if they grabbed the head of the animal research labs too. She was showing me around when we were suddenly assaulted. She is nowhere to be found. From the looks of what they have pulled off so far, these threats don't seem empty. This has got to be an inside job."

He took a shaky breath, trying to think past the excruciating pain in this head. "In other words, McAllister, we'll be working solo. No safety net. No backup."

"Jansen, this is by far, the best thing that has happened to me in the last three months. Baron and I are sick of the life of leisure down here in Baja. Where do I go and when?"

"Can you get to Zurich, Switzerland on the next flight out of the airport you're closest to?"

"Sure but I'm bringing Baron with me, Rich."

"Good, we can use him."

"Call me when you have your flight arrangements and I or someone will pick you up at Zurich Airport."

Dialing his law partner in Mustang, Oklahoma, Jansen closed his eyes in relief when he answered on the second ring.

"Hi Zach, I think we need Toni out here in Lausanne. But you need to know this looks bad, really bad. If you don't want her to take the risk, I'll understand."

Jansen smiled when he heard the reply.

"They have taken Ariana too, haven't they?"

Hank Reardon stood behind Jansen. For the first time looking every one of his sixty-eight years, the slight billionaire CEO needed no reply to his rhetorical question. As he looked around the research lab, the scattered cages, scurrying mice and the small pools of blood on the otherwise immaculate floor, the story told itself.

## CHAPTER ONE

*Six months earlier, New Waverly, Texas*

They stood in their driveway watching the disappearing white Ford truck towing a fifth wheel with one head leaning out of the driver's window and the second from the passenger window drive slowly down the dirt road to the highway. The head of the driver belonged to Gabe McAllister, former Afghanistan four tour Marine Captain, Texas State Trooper and acquitted Huntsville Prison inmate. The passenger's head belonged to Baron, a black and tan rescued Doberman. "I'll miss Gabe, won't you?"

Lindsey looked over at Jansen and grinned. "And our boy here will miss Baron. Maybe we should adopt another Dobie, what do you think?"

"Maybe, if you really want to, we can talk about it, Linds. Right now, I'd like to get some sleep in our own bed. Can I please interest you in some rest?"

They had been in the air on a flight from Switzerland to Houston for close to fourteen hours and were exhausted. Although it was three in the afternoon Houston time, it was eleven at night Swiss time. They had begun their day at four that morning.

Watching his wife's bright eyes and listening to her uncharacteristic chatter, he realized that she was as exhausted as he, she just didn't know it yet. Rich extended his arm to grab her hand and literally pulled her up the stairs to their bedroom where he trusted she would conk out as soon as her head hit the pillow.

Two hours later, Lindsey was sound asleep and Rich was wide awake, exhausted but unable to sleep. Very quietly, he slipped out of the sheets and stood at the side of the bed, hoping not to awaken either his wife or his dog. Lindsey had not stirred, but Max sat on his bed, watching warily. No way did he want to be left, again. Rich grabbed a pair of pants and T-shirt on the way out of the bedroom, signaling to the dog to follow.

Max and Rich stood on the porch: Max nervously, Rich restlessly. This was one of the rare times that Rich Jansen wished he smoked. It was too early for coffee, he knew, and more wine held no interest for him. He yearned for something to do with his hands, something to stop his mind; a run would be just the ticket, but running through the woods at two-thirty in the morning was stupid.

After five minutes of silence, the Doberman managed to insinuate himself between the porch railing and Rich. He sat, whined quietly and lifted his paw up to Rich.

"OK, Max, I know, you've been abandoned and ignored, I know." But he was smiling at the almost human personality of his dog. Sitting on the floor of the porch he sat with Max's paw in his hand and stroking the dog's head. Little by little, he was calming down and beginning to analyze the reasons he was so wired.

They had just returned from a two-week Christmas trip to Switzerland where their good friends Kate Townsend and Steve Cooper had married at a medieval castle, staying at the home of one of the wealthiest men on the planet and getting an invitation to partner with one of the best defense

lawyers in the country. All the stuff that movies are made and not the stuff of ordinary people like Rich Jansen, but all true.

Sighing, Jansen stretched out on the hard porch next to his dog, relishing the hard, unyielding wood surface under his cramped back after all those hours on an airplane. And fell asleep.

The next day in the very early morning Jansen opened his eyes at the feel of Max's nose on his mouth and the sound of Lindsey calling them. "We're out here, babe, fell asleep on the porch." Rich sat up, got to his feet and opened the door to the doorway of the house where they stood staring at one another. Lindsey was in her scrubs.

"I thought you weren't going in until next week?"

"I wasn't, but Monica called about thirty minutes ago. Then Bob called right after I hung up from talking to Monica. There is a 'situation' at the prison." Lindsey's generally sensual mouth was compressed into a thin line. She was stressed and unhappy.

"Do you need some help?"

"I'd love some, but you no longer work at Huntsville, husband dear, so I'm not sure that would be a really great idea." Sarcastic, almost caustic, not her usual style, she seemed frightened, trying to hide it, mostly from herself.

Jansen grabbed her by the shoulders and forced her to look at him. "What is going on there, Lindsey?"

"There has been some kind of riot between The Texas Syndicate, Mexikanemi, the Aryan Brotherhood and others that I cannot think of right now. Inmates have been wounded and the prison is on lockdown. To say that things are out of control is a bit of an understatement, Rich."

"There's something else, what is it?"

Lindsey took a deep breath, closed her eyes and said, "They got Devon Preston again. That's why Monica called: she knew I would want to know." When she opened them again, she could no longer suppress the grief, tears stood glistening in her eyes.

"OK, let's go. I'll drive."

"Honey, it's no longer your job, you have no authority there."

"Right. Come on Max, let's go."

More relieved than she could express, Lindsey managed a smile, reached up to touch his cheek and whisper, "This is one of the millions of reasons I love you, Rich Jansen." She took his hand, profoundly comforted by the feel of her hand in his and they climbed into her new SUV. Max scrambled up and into the back of the vehicle and settled on the bed she kept there.

Within fifteen minutes, the couple and the dog pulled up to The Walls. Despite the fact that Jansen had previously worked at the main Huntsville Prison for over two years, he remained impressed at its ominous appearance, earning its sobriquet. Particularly on this early morning when he knew there were prisoners rioting in there.

The prison itself was completely hidden behind a ten or twelve-foot dark, brick-walled enclosure with razor wire running between guard towers at each corner of the block-long and block-wide enclosure. Rich had seen his share of prisons, but the Walls seemed to emanate menace.

It was a little before seven in the morning but the rising sun did nothing to dispel this sense as Rich slowly drove around the block, seeking the parking space reserved for Dr. McCall, the Medical Director.

"Man, are you two a welcome sight!" Bob Cleary stood beside the armed guard at the employee entrance. His welcoming smile was real enough, but his eyes were darting all over the parking lot as if he expected to see a fusillade of armed prisoners any minute.

Lindsey started to move past the two men. Rich placed a hand on her gently and she stopped at the restraint. "Bob, what happened?" Jansen spoke so quietly that Cleary and Lindsey had to strain to hear him.

The Doberman was on a leash and stood on the right of Jansen, ears straight up, eyes wide open watching, sensing the tenseness, seeming to know there was danger in the air.

"Lindsey, I don't know what happened exactly. Devon Preston came back a few days after you guys left on vacation." The tall, lean, troubled Warden sighed deeply. "I missed it. I didn't find out he was here until early this morning, a few minutes before all hell broke loose."

Jansen suppressed a smile at Bob's reply to Lindsey. The guy was better than he had hoped when he'd selected him to be Warden of the prison a few months ago. No excuses or blame, shouldering all blame squarely on those wide shoulders.

"Had I known he was back, we'd have put him in administrative segregation of course..." Cleary's voice trailed off, anguish evident in his eyes and expression. "I don't know if he was set up again by La Emi or what but Lindsey, Monica just called me as I was on the way out here to meet you guys. Devon died on the way to the Emergency Center. This time, they succeeded."

Rich watched Lindsey's shoulders slump, head drop, and her slight body turn away from him and Cleary while she regained control. He knew what she was thinking.

Jansen asked again. "Bob, what's happened so far?"

"At" Cleary looked at his watch, "O-six-thirty, thirty-five minutes ago, three prisoners in G2 began a ruckus. Within a few seconds, the whole floor was involved and someone ignited a smoke bomb or managed to start a fire that emitted a helluva lot of smoke making breathing very unpleasant."

Cleary glanced quickly at Lindsey, lowered his voice and practically mumbled, "Devon was in G2 and was one of the ten inmates who were initially wounded. Only Devon has died...so far."

The Texas Judicial System classifies prison inmates into five custody levels. The levels rank each prisoner's threat to society if he escaped, where G1 represents the least threat and, therefore, can be housed outside the prison with periodic observation. While G5 requires that the prisoner be housed in a cell during most if not all of his waking hours, allowed outside only under armed supervision. Level G2 is dormitory housing between twenty to fifty prisoners.

"How many are involved and are they armed?" Jansen was watching his dog while keeping an eye on Lindsey then he turned back to the warden.

"If you mean do they have guns, no, thank god, no guns, at least none that we've seen or heard yet. But they have plenty of shivs and may have some explosive devices, we're not sure."

Although weapons are prohibited in prisons, the creativity of inmates can provide them with a most effective arsenal of weapons. Each prisoner is provided a toothbrush and a razor when they are checked in. The razor can be easily removed from its package and once the razor is embedded in the plastic handle of the toothbrush, a most efficient knife results.

Texas prison system inmates not deemed to be threats can work in a variety of industries from carpentry to textiles to furniture to metal work under the rubric of Texas Correctional Industries. The items are sold in showrooms and are available for purchase online with the proceeds returning to the prison system since the inmates are unpaid. Incendiary devices can be created from flammable materials obtained in the many workplaces on the premises such as the carpentry or metal shops and then smuggled into the prison with surprising ease.

"Have you called the governor?"

Cleary stared evenly at his former boss. "Rich, if you're asking if I think we need the guard out here no, I believe that we can quiet this down ourselves."

Like Jansen, Bob Cleary was a former Marine. Although he was the youngest of all the Wardens, barely thirty, Rich trusted his judgment implicitly.

Lindsey turned back toward the two men and her dog. The smile on her face was more a grimace and the expression in her green eyes could be described only as fierce. "Well, gentlemen, shall we go?"

Cleary began to object, "Dr. McCall, I'm not sure this is a good idea..."

Cutting him off, her voice cold, imperious, her expression flat. "Then Bob, why did you call me?"

There were times, Jansen thought, as he watched Lindsey intimidate the hell out of Bob Cleary that she almost scared him. She could be as warmly feminine and loving as a nurturing mother and one second later turn into an automaton. Like now. During times like this, she reminded him of some of the Marine Recons he had worked with while in the Corps. Sure of their authority and ability, they oozed command. Rich had never known a woman like her, at times like this, he wondered if he did actually *know* his wife.

To his credit, Cleary stood his ground. "Because I needed to call and tell you what is happening in there, ma'am. But we have already had one death. I am not interested in causing the death of my medical director as well." Cleary's usually expressive eyes were dark and hard.

Rich stood back and watched, sympathizing with both people. Idly, he wondered what he would do with this aggressive medical director if he were Cleary and also if he would be interested in help from someone who no longer carried any authority in the prison system. Like him.

While he waited for the standoff to end, Jansen considered the possibilities. Most likely, this was gang related, exactly as Lindsey had guessed, La Emi or the Mexican Mafia battling the Texas Syndicate or the growing Tango Blast gang. Gang membership within prisons in Texas is estimated at over one hundred thousand and climbing.

Back when Jansen was the captain of the Homicide department for Harris County, the gangs were becoming a serious threat to Houston. But close to fifteen years later, the menace of gangs to



Houston along with numerous major American cities had worsened for several reasons. Uppermost among them was simply that the gang organization and leadership had improved significantly; the structural twenty-first-century reality belied the public image of chaos, ignorance, and ineptitude. Effective gangs like the La Emi or the Mexican Mafia, the Texas Syndicate and Aryan Brotherhood were organized either like Fortune 500 companies or paramilitary with distinct hierarchies and clear allocation of decision-making authority along with detailed membership policies and procedures. Once a member, always a member was the rule. Attempts to leave were punished severely, often by death. Turnover in these organizations was, therefore, negligible and recruitment problems existed only with the rare exception, like Devon Preston. Most likely dead because he refused to join the gang. In fact, the word gang was misleading, connoting disorganization and adolescent behavior when the truth is far more dangerous.

The men at the top rarely get their hands dirty; dignified in appearance, behavior, and conduct; they are in charge of multi-million dollar drug and money laundering businesses. In Houston and other southwestern cities, the Texas Syndicate and La Emi were increasingly tied to the Mexican drug cartels like Sinaloa and had expanded into human trafficking for sex as well as drug transport.

Gang membership was estimated to be over fifty percent of the prison population and responsible for over fifty to eighty percent of prison homicides. Young, or old, vulnerable inmates were prime recruitment fodder for gangs. The appeal of belonging to influential groups for protection and contraband like drugs, liquor and cigarettes became irresistible.

Jansen's thoughts were interrupted by a command from Cleary. "Okay then, Dr. McCall, but my guys will lead the way." The stalemate had ended. Once again, Rich suppressed a smile. Lindsey had won. Big surprise.

Warden Cleary signaled a group of guards to step away from the doorway. Lindsey went through first, then two guards with nightsticks and tasers at the ready.

Just as Rich and his dog stepped forward, Cleary whispered, "Rich Jansen, you have no business being here, but I am thanking the good Lord that you are!" Teeth starkly white against his black face, Bob grinned at Max, as he crouched down on one knee. "And you, big boy, what a splendid addition you make to my troops. With Marine dog here, Rich, we'll get this thing calmed down!"

Obediently following the contingent of guards, Lindsey took a deep breath and tried to suppress her resentment at being called in several days early from what could be best described as a magical vacation. She began to explore it, at first, gingerly as if it were a wound. *Okay, who wouldn't be annoyed. Less than forty-eight hours ago, we were in Lausanne, one of the most stunning cities in the entire world. Pristine views of Lake Geneva surrounded by the Swiss Alps covered in snow and air that feels hyper oxygenated. Now, back in another Houston 'winter' where the average temperature is in the high eighties. And a rare week in the hammock on our porch reading novels highjacked.*

Lindsey smiled to herself but had anyone been paying attention, it would look more like a grimace. She knew she was lying. Lindsey McCall had lived in Houston her entire life and was

used to the absence of seasons. And the loss of a few vacation days was hardly enough to evoke this level of antipathy, too many years of working through holidays and weekends to mind the loss of five days. No, her problem was far deeper, one she had been suppressing ever since she and Rich had left Switzerland. One she knew she would need to deal with and soon. *Grow up McCall, in another year, you'll be forty...old enough to choose a career and stick with it.*

They were passing through the third set of automatic doors, her world lay minutes away. State of the art technology, the very best of trauma equipment, the Huntsville Prison Emergency Center rivaled any trauma center in the Texas Medical Center sixty miles north of the seven Huntsville prisons. Just a year before, Lindsey had personally funded the rebuild of the shabby infirmary making extensive use of suggestions from former colleagues at the Texas Medical Center. Easily able to afford a multi-million dollar renovation, Dr. Lindsey McCall was a wealthy woman several times over. Aside from her family inheritance, McCall had created an alteration of the digitalis molecule, one that eliminated the dangerous side effects in the body. Her drug Digipro had revolutionized the treatment of acute heart failure worldwide, in the process was making both her and the pharmaceutical company ASL billions.

Suddenly they were there. Moving quickly from the rear of the contingent of guards standing motionless in front of the closed doors to the emergency center, Lindsey surveyed the chaotic scene confronting her as she used her ID to open the sliding glass doors. Drawing on her years of experience in interventional cardiology and more recent in emergency medicine, McCall's practiced eye took in ten patients, three techs and Monica Bradbury admitting an eleventh. One who looked seriously injured. At the sound of the whoosh of the automatic doors opening, Monica looked up and smiled at her boss. Relief was apparent in her expression.

Rich watched while Lindsey transformed herself instantly. All expression left her face, leaving an appearance of calm and confidence. He recognized the drill- the same one he had used through the years as a Marine then later as Captain of the Homicide Division of Harris County. The readiness for combat was universal and apparent to all who had been there, whether Beirut or the city streets of Houston or an emergency room, the need for an almost inhuman self-discipline was critical.

Nodding to Bob, he whispered, "Let's go."

