



Two American operatives penetrate a secret lab to stop a plot to clone world leaders.

CODE NAME: MISANTHROPE


By Anthony Genualdi

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ANTHONY GENUALDI



***Code
Name:
Misanthrope***

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CHAPTER ONE

Harry Vollmer was home from his latest assignment for The Trust. The movies always made the secret agent game seem so glamorous, but it was often mundane. This last assignment was typical. It was really a heist job. It was time to relax and sleep and get prepared for debriefing the next morning. As Harry entered his home, he headed for the kitchen to get a drink and unwind. He almost made it there when something caught his eye. Someone had left a trail for him to follow.

At the start of the hallway, he saw a pair of flip-flop sandals. He walked up to them and found, going down the hall, a pair of jean shorts, a camisole top, and at his bedroom door, a black bra. The door was slightly open. He pushed it aside to find his bathroom door open a crack and the light on. He slowly stepped up and pushed it open.

A woman with a familiar pair of legs had her back to him, running a brush through her long dark hair. She had on his red flannel shirt, and as Harry stood there, she set the brush down and, raising her arms just enough to pull up the shirttail to give

him a hint of her cheeks, pulled her hair into a ponytail. As she secured the ponytail, Harry looked at those legs. They were long, strong, and barefoot, and she stood with them crossed at the ankles to make an “x”. He knew she liked to go by her codename.

“Amber?”

She turned to look at Harry. The shirt had the top four buttons undone, and Harry could also see her white thong panties. She had piercing blue eyes, high cheekbones, and an inviting smile. “Hi there, Harry.” She stepped up to him, and as they embraced, they shared a quick “hello” kiss.

“Well, this is a sexy surprise.”

“I know you like me in this shirt.” As they stepped into the bedroom, she said, “I have a new assignment for us.”

Harry said, “We haven’t had debriefing from the last one. Plus, I’m taking leave for the next two weeks.”

The couple stood so that she had her back to the door. “But The Trust needs us.”

“They don’t need me exhausted. I’m going to take my leave.”

He turned to undress, but she put her hands on his shoulders. “But there *must* be some way I can talk you into it.” She put her chin against his shoulder and nibbled on his ear.

Harry turned and chuckled. “You only do that when we play a vacationing couple, and people can see it.”

“But I know how much you love that.”

Amber usually doesn’t do this, he thought. She knows how I like her, but she doesn’t like me in that way. She’s half my age, and I thought she had a guy. That’s what she’s told me. But she’s so beguiling. He looked her in the eye. Such an enticing smile. He wrapped his arms around her waist. “OK, you can try to persuade me.”

She smiled and said, “All right.” They kissed. It wasn’t right, he thought. Not what they were doing so much as how her lips felt. This wasn’t Amber’s kiss. It doesn’t feel like her. Their lips parted, and she slowly opened her eyes and smiled at him.

Harry heard a loud click. The woman let out a startled gasp, her head tilted back, and her eyes widened. There was another click, and she gasped again. She arched her back, closed her eyes tightly in pain, and moaned and gasped as she slowly went limp. She opened her eyes and slowly shook her head. She moaned and her body jerked slightly a couple more times. She turned her head to her left, and with her eyes partly closed, one more soft moan was it for her. Her left arm dropped to her side and her right arm stayed over his shoulder. As Harry set her down on her back, he looked up to see a woman silhouetted in the doorway with a pistol in her hand. She lowered her arm and stepped into the light.

It was Amber!

Harry's jaw dropped and after a moment, he stammered, "Amber! I thought this was you."

Amber shook her head and pointed to Harry's left. "Do I seem like the type to scratch you?" Harry looked to the dead woman's hand, and, indeed, there was a knife.

Harry got up and walked up to Amber. "I need an explanation."

“And I think you need to thank me.” Yes, I do, he thought. Amber threw her pistol onto the bed and embraced Harry. They kissed. That’s more like it, he thought.

As they parted, Amber said, “You’re welcome.”

“Now for that explanation.”

“Let’s have a drink.” They went into the kitchen, where Harry took two beers from the fridge. He opened them and handed one to Amber. They clinked bottles and took a drink. “OK, I was coming over to talk about the last assignment. I wanted our stories straight for tomorrow.”

Harry nodded. “OK.”

Amber continued, “I parked a couple doors down and walked up to find a strange car in front of your house. I went to the driver’s side and found a man asleep. I knocked and he woke and opened his window and said, ‘You got him already?’”

“Oh.”

“So I put my gun to his crotch and said, ‘Who am I?’”

“You’re good at that,” Harry chuckled.

“So he was with the opposition. He told me they had made a clone of Amber to kill Harry and put the blame on her.”

“A clone? How did they do it?”

“Remember our assignment in Mazatlán? Well, the maid got a skin tag from a hair in my brush. They made it from there.”

“Damn.”

“It took them a year to teach her about me, and us. She was going to find me next and get rid of me and take my place. Who knows how much damage she’d have done?”

“What did you do with the man?”

“I killed him and came inside. I hoped I’d get to her first, but when I got in, I heard you two talking and got to your room. You were kissing and I saw her take the knife from her sleeve.”

“Thank you again. You got there just in time.”

“How was her kiss?”

Harry shook his head. “Close, but not like yours. That’s one thing they couldn’t have taught her.”

Amber smiled. “I’m glad to know that.”

“So, about tomorrow, first, how do we explain the money? Second, how do we explain you being here? We’re violating Trust policy by being together before debriefing.”

Amber thought for a moment as she sipped her beer. “Well, women are famous for their intuition. That’s what I’ll say. I had a bad feeling, and came over.”

“They’ll just say, ‘You could have called.’”

“I got your machine, and I couldn’t wait, so I came over. That’s a better excuse, right?”

Harry nodded. “That’s why you’re the smart one, Amber.”

“I know,” she grinned. “I know.”

“One thing I would ask for the future.”

“What would that be, Harry?”

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“When I get a new red flannel shirt, would you model it for me?”

Amber rolled her eyes and shook her head. “You’re such a boy, Harry.” She paused. “I’ll think it over.”

CHAPTER TWO

Harry and Amber entered The Trust headquarters using their keycards and proceeded to the blue light in the far wall by the door. The computer greeted them in a baritone voice. "Hello. Please be seated for retinal scan."

Harry sat down and looked into the blue light. The computer ran a check on the image it saw and responded, "Recognize Harold Vollmer, code name, Misanthrope." He got up and motioned for Amber to sit. She curled her lip and sat facing the light. The computer scanned the back of her eye and said, "Recognize Beatrice Altenburg, code name, Amber."

As they passed through the second door, Harry smiled, "I still don't see why you hate your name. It's sweet. It's old-fashioned."

Amber curled her lip again. "You didn't have to grow up with it. I got picked on and beaten up for having an 'old money' name. That is until my growth spurt. It helped a lot to suddenly be taller, and running track helped. Suddenly having long muscular legs stopped the bullying."

“And how.”

Amber turned and smiled. “You were dying to work that in, weren’t you?”

They stopped at the junction of the corridors. Harry looked at his watch. “We have a few minutes before debriefing. Do you think the teacher has a minute for us?”

“I don’t see why not. The trainees can use our words of wisdom.” They turned right and went to the lecture hall. They went in to find the trainees taking their seats and Teacher, a pleasant older lady, turning to see who had entered.

“Misanthrope and Amber,” she exclaimed, “My star pupils! Come in.” She turned to the class. “Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning, and welcome to the first day of training. A little history to start us off. The Trust was founded in 1971, during the height of the Cold War. We provided, and still provide, service to the United States as outside contractors for various dirty jobs, so as to give plausible deniability in whatever needs to be done. As time has passed, governments of this country have not exactly stayed with our line of thinking, but when they ask, we work with them. If they

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are ignoring something, we act on it anyway. This has been happening a lot with the governments our country has had since the turn of the century, but when the government needs us, they call us. They'd probably have a tough time shutting us down if they wanted to. We have some former government operatives in our ranks, both executives and field agents, to guide you, the new field agents, and show you what not to do, so you can keep your cover and stay alive." She turned to Harry. "Two of our agents have given us a minute of their time to talk to us. Misanthrope?"

Harry stepped forward. "Thanks, Teacher. Well, like many of you, I was approached in college by a recruiter. A man came up to me one day and asked me how I felt about the country. I told him I grew up loving it, and I wanted what was best for it. He gave me his card and told me about The Trust. I was intrigued, and followed up with him. I have to say it beat the finance degree I was working towards. I'm sure my partner could say the same. Amber?"

Amber stepped up. "Thanks. Well, I was in college on an athletic scholarship for track and field. I broke my leg in training, and was sitting, feeling sorry for myself, and not

knowing what I'd do. A woman approached me with a story similar to Misanthrope's. She drew me in and got me working here. It's been a great adventure."

A man in the front row stood up and asked, "How did you get your code names?"

Harry replied, "That's up to your training officer. When I was training, I had a chip on my shoulder. I pretty much gave the world the finger every day. My trainer was a big reader, so he knew the big word for guys like me. He told me I had a misanthropic attitude, and gave me the name when the time came." He shrugged. "I'm used to it."

Amber spoke next. "For me, it was a song. My trainer happened to like a song with the word 'amber' in the title and she said I had 'that energy'. She may have been sarcastic when she said it, because I was always snapping at people. I happen to like my code name."

The computer came over the intercom. "Team Eight, please report to The Chairman's office. Team Eight to The Chairman's office."

"Oh well," Harry exclaimed. "Off we go. Thanks, Teacher."

“Thank you, Misanthrope.”

Harry and Amber walked briskly down the hallway and crossed the junction, getting to The Chairman’s office in just under a minute. They entered and Harry said to the secretary, “Team Eight reporting.” She got up and used her keycard to open the door and said, “Team Eight reporting, sir.”

“Have them come in.”

The secretary pushed the door open enough for the operatives to enter. “Team Eight reporting, Chairman.”

Mr. Jones looked up from his tablet for a moment. “Be right with you. Thank you, Miss Smith.” The secretary closed the door. “Be seated.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The older, but still fit man, who with his rolled-up sleeves and loose tie looked like an office worker, got up and moved around the desk, still reading the tablet. He took off his readers and asked, “Did you enjoy your trip to Colombia?”

“Yes, sir,” Amber replied. “Fun for us, and profitable for The Trust.”

The Chairman put his readers back on. “Not as profitable as we were hoping. It seems we only got \$97 million, when we were expecting \$100 million.”

Harry and Amber looked at each other. “Somebody up the chain must have counted wrong,” Amber said. “We each carried half the cash and it looked like what we were told to expect.”

Jones took off his readers again. “If you indeed skimmed from us, it’ll be a black mark for both of you, and if you spent any of it, you’ll get fired.”

Harry nodded. “We know, sir, but as Amber said, we thought it was all there when we got home.”

Mr. Jones looked at his watch. “Well, go to briefing room one and have your official debriefing. Then I’ll be along to give you your new mission.”

“I take it my leave is postponed, sir?”

The Chairman looked sideways at Harry. “No shit, Sherlock.”

CHAPTER THREE

The debriefing went as Harry hoped it would. He and Amber told how they got to the drug money vault, took the cash, and got out undetected. The duo were at a loss to explain how the count was so different from what they'd been told it would be. They repeatedly denied having light fingers, and the people questioning them seemed to accept the protestations of innocence.

As a courtesy to the operatives and Mr. Jones, the debriefing team had sandwiches and coffee brought in, and The Chairman showed up at the same time as the food, so everyone had their lunch and the mood lightened. The conversation went from soccer scores to Amber's luxuriant mane to Harry and The Chairman's balding pates.

Mr. Jones finished his coffee and exclaimed, "Well, that was a nice change. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I'll take over from here." The debriefing team smiled and waved as they left. When the door closed, The Chairman grabbed the remote, shut out the lights, and started the slideshow. The face of a Chinese man, in the uniform of a major general in

the medical corps, showed on the screen. “This is Major General Meng Lin Pao, Surgeon General of the People’s Liberation Army Ground Force. He has a master’s degree in microbiology, as well as one in biochemistry, and did postgraduate studies in the U.S. He has held his current post for five years. Two years ago, he lost his daughter and her fiancé in the crackdown against pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong.” The Chairman looked Harry in the eye. “It was after this loss that Meng became a Trust asset. He’s been able to give us information, verified by outside sources, about biological warfare advances China has made, as well as with those they’ve stolen from us. Your little... encounter last night dovetailed with a report from Meng that hit my desk this morning about a Chinese human cloning project. Their copy of Amber was the result of much trial and error.” He turned to Amber. “It’s a shame you couldn’t have brought in her handler alive.”

“If I’d let him go, he’d have shot me. I’m sure of it.” Amber replied.

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“Well, at any rate, she was very convincing. The report from the morgue said she was a perfect genetic copy of you. I had to reassure them it wasn’t you.”

Amber grinned. “I have lots of fans everywhere.”

“No doubt. Anyway, we are trying to get hold of Meng so he can give us more detail. He did tell us this cloning facility is in the Northern Theater Command, so it’s probably in Manchuria or along the eastern or southeastern border with Mongolia. He also spoke of scientists from around the world being part of this work. There are Russians, Iranians, Pakistanis, and people from Central Europe, including Germans and Slovaks. We hope to use that to get you in.”

“My German is rusty,” Harry said, “I’ll refresh it before we go. How about you, Amber?”

“I don’t know any, but I did learn some Mandarin. That should help.”

The Chairman nodded. “It should. We’ll be sending you by way of Japan to Beijing. You’ll be furnished with documents that will list you as Germans. Meng seems anxious to have you there as soon as possible. You need to find out why.”

“Yes, sir.” Harry replied.

“You leave tomorrow morning. Best of luck.”

Harry and Amber had gone to their homes to pack and get a little sleep. As Harry filled his suitcase, his phone rang. He saw it was Amber’s number. “Hey girl.”

“Hey boy. Almost packed?”

“Just about. What’s on your mind?”

“My boyfriend and I had a fight.”

“Aww. What about?”

“He wanted to go camping this weekend, and we have this assignment. So he threw a fit.”

“You poor girl.”

“He hates how I have to go on trips for my consulting work. He wishes I could stay in town. But I like the rush. How about you?”

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“I’m getting near 50. I don’t really feel I could go in the field as much as I used to. If there’s a desk, I wouldn’t mind being behind it.”

“You’d have me as your secretary?”

“That’d be cool.”

“Sure. You’d have me sit on your knee or chase me around the desk, wouldn’t you, you old lecher.”

“I’d be respectful. I swear I would.”

“No thanks. I’d stay in the field. If my boyfriend can’t deal with it, I’ll find another.”

“Good for you.”

“Well, thanks for talking, boy. See you in the morning.”

“Bye, girl.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Amber looked out on the Pacific Ocean from her window seat. The layover in Honolulu was behind them, and Tokyo was next. The Beijing trip would come hours later. She had also expected a leave, like Harry did. Instead of camping with her boyfriend, she now had to make this trip to come to grips with people who had made a clone of her to murder her colleague. But was it all worth it? The company she worked for was working to protect a country that deluded itself about who was its friend and who wasn't. Even if she could tell what she really did, her generation wouldn't believe it or even care. They waved black flags and threw stones and burned things. She let out a sigh.

Harry woke up to that sound. "What's wrong?"

Amber glanced over to Harry, who was yawning and pulling down his blanket. "Is what we do worth it?" she asked.

Harry tried to keep his voice down. "I like to think so."

"But would people back home even care, or have any sympathy for us? We act on our own."

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“We have an employer who has the best interests of the U.S. at heart. What we’re up against is monstrous. It needs to be stopped.”

“But it feels like we’re spinning our wheels sometimes. This last job felt like it. Who was that for? What were we doing? Were we being Robin Hood?”

“Well, when the government won’t hire us, we have to fend for ourselves. Who better than the drug dealers to steal from? No one minded.”

Amber thought for a moment. “Well, aside from that. We’ve taken on China before. Once we’re being ‘rogue operatives’, then we’re doing a job for our country. Now we’re being ‘rogue’ again. Even if we win, we’re not getting more than a pat on the back from our bosses, and not even thanks from the government. They’d do something to us if China could show our pictures to them.”

Harry shook his head. “That’s not the way to think. We don’t do this for ourselves alone. Even other countries look at things like we do. Our media just doesn’t talk about it. They tell you to pay no attention to the man behind the curtain. We

know it will pay off one of these days. Something too big to cover up will be exposed and the blinders will come off.”

Amber shook her head. “It’s strange to have you come off as the optimist. How are you doing that?”

“Well, I guess as time is passing I’m sort of mellowing out. Yes, it’s easy to only see darkness out there, like right now. We’re going over the Pacific in nighttime, and seeing the night above and below us is easy. But the moon and the stars cut through it.”

“Who else sees the light?”

“Maybe the Arab world will. Maybe when they see what China does to their religious brothers and sisters, they’ll do something. We’ve seen what they can do. Maybe China will feel it one day, and I mean hard. But in the meantime, there’s us and whoever else will do something.”

“The sad part”, Amber said, “is that no one cares now. I mean, if I could tell what we’ve done, and what we’re going to do now, I’d love it if I could get a ‘way to go’ from my own people. How long will it take for us to get that recognition? How long, Harry?”

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“I don’t know, Amber. I hope you at least get to see it.”

Amber turned to look out the window again. The moon was nearly full, and the stars shone brighter than she’d seen on her camping trips. She let herself get lost in them. If someone up there is looking at us, they must think we’re crazy, she thought. They’d tell their friends to ride clear of Earth. Don’t even bother with them if they break the light barrier. They make war upon themselves for the slightest reasons, and hate so strongly. They don’t even listen to those who preach peace.

But then, Amber thought, I wouldn’t have a job.

CHAPTER FIVE

Harry and Amber stepped into the terminal in Beijing's second airport and gathered their luggage. As they proceeded out the door, they saw a limousine with a driver holding a placard with Chinese and Latin characters. The words in German were "*Menschenhasser*" and "*Bernstein*." Harry pointed and said, "Those are our codenames in German."

"Nice touch." Amber replied. The duo stepped up to the driver and Harry told him in German that they were the scientists whose names were on the card, and there were invited by General Meng. The driver nodded and helped them put their luggage in the trunk, while a second man held the door for them to get in. Amber nodded and thanked the man in Mandarin.

The limo brought them into the Haidian District, to General Meng's office at the Fourth Military Medical University. Its shimmering glass and white concrete façade were sterile and cold, yet strangely compelling, all at once. The limo took their bags to the hotel and would come back for them after their meeting with the general. At the reception

desk, Harry said their names and Amber said they were there to see General Meng. The receptionist called up the office, and then told them to wait by the elevators.

A female lieutenant stepped from the elevator and said their names. She asked them to come with her and they took the elevator to the top floor. Harry looked her over as they rode up, and bemoaned how skinny he thought Asian women were, with hardly any curves, as well as only being able to see her knees between her boots and the hem of her uniform skirt.

As they exited the elevator, Amber told the general's secretary who they were. Before the woman could get on the intercom, the general emerged from his office. The Chinese women came to attention. Meng's wrinkled face was stern, and he looked Harry in the eye for a moment before smiling and offering his hand. "*Wie Gehts, Herr Doktor?*"

Harry shook hands and bowed. "*Guht, Herr General.*" He gestured to Amber and said, "*Fraulein Doktor Bernstein.*"

"*Fraulein,*" the general said as he shook Amber's hand.

"*Herr General,*" she replied.

Meng gestured for them to enter his office, and closed the door behind them. Everyone sat down and the general finished the tea in his cup. The general spoke English with a flat, Midwestern tone. “Does anyone want tea?” The operatives both shook their heads. “Did you have any trouble?”

“No,” Harry replied, “we got through with no extra scrutiny.”

“Your cover story is that you’re microbiologists.” Meng refilled his teacup. “Do you know anything about microbiology?”

Harry shook his head. “I’m more up on explosives. I’ve come to believe there’s no problem that can’t be solved without them.”

Meng chuckled and turned to Amber. “What about you?”

“Me neither.” Amber smiled. “I can kill with my hands, a garrote, a knife, or with firearms. That’s my specialty.”

“Can you seduce a man in order to kill him?”

“Easily, and it seems my clone could, too.”

Meng nodded. “She had to be taught. She nearly succeeded with your partner, too. It was only a wild stroke of luck that saved him.”

Amber smiled again. “That’s how I earn my pay.”

Meng shook his head. “I’ve never taken life. I’ve always worked to preserve it. I created it, too, with my wife in having our daughter. It’s also how I chose to serve the Party and China.” He sighed. “When my daughter was killed, I realized how she was right in her criticism of the Party and their work to have China be a new superpower. That’s when my wife and I made up our minds to work with The Trust.”

“What does your wife do?” Harry asked.

“She is a captain in the PLA Support Force.”

“Space and cyberwarfare.”

Meng nodded. “In her case, hacking. She’s stolen plans from your country for planes and quiet submarines.” Meng turned up his teacup. “That brings me to the point. In three days, her section will conduct a security test on the cloning facility. She will work to break in and download all our data on

human cloning and send it to your people. When that's done, you can destroy the computer servers and the storage tanks. We have more clones, I don't know of whom, that are nearly finished. That can't be allowed."

Harry and Amber looked at each other. "Now we know what the urgency was." Amber said.

Harry turned to Meng. "We'll notify our superiors."

"Good," Meng said, "my wife will signal when she's ready on that morning. It should be just after midnight." Everyone stood and bowed. "I'll collect you from your hotel at 6 AM. Goodbye."



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