

It was the Irish wit, George Bernard Shaw, who pointed out that a thief isn't someone who steals, but someone who has been caught! Tom Rayne is a talented forger who soon discovers that the police may be the least of his worries.


In For a Penny, In for a Pounding

By Kregg P.J. Jorgenson

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In For a Penny
In For a Pounding



KREGG P.J. JORGENSON



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Chapter 1

“Whoa!” I laughed as I came out of the restaurant and was startled by a cold gust of wind coming in off the ocean.

The quarter moon over the Atlantic was barely visible in the evening sky, as dark tumbling clouds and strong gusts were pushing a seasonal squall. The storm, though, was still a few minutes out as I was making my way around to the back parking lot.

This early in November, though, there was no real threat of snow, just the decided chill and the coming rain, but I didn't really mind. Even with my head down and my hands in my pockets, I was in a comfortably warm and happy mood and damn near dancing. The sales meeting over dinner had gone well, and life, well at least this kind of life I was enjoying at the moment, was very, very good.

Fortune doesn't just favor the bold. It favors those who get off their butts and take the opportunities and risks to make things happen.

“Excuse me,” a man said, coming up behind me. “Do you *half* the time?”

“Sure, no problem,” I said, looking at the face of my watch as I started to turn around to tell him. “It’s nine twent...”

The sucker punch caught me in the left kidney and almost doubled me over. The second punch, a just as vicious right hook in the same exact spot, did.

His *have* that came out *half* should've been the warning. If I hadn't been thinking about the pile of money I was going to rake in from the pending sale I had just lined up, then maybe I might've caught the accent in time, and maybe I might've been able to make a run for it instead.

It was one too many maybe's, and because I was so lost in my soon-to-be good fortune I hadn't immediately recognized the familiar voice. I hadn't placed it until it was regrettably too late, a regret that also came with a bruised kidney that would likely have me pissing blood for a day or two.

I also hadn't counted on them tracking me down way in the Hamptons on Long Island, and certainly not this soon. That costly mistake left me sucking air and hurting.

The Cossack, who had hit me, braced me against my car door to keep me on my feet. The man I knew only as Alexi at six-three or four, was tall, heavily muscled, and sneering. With his red tracksuit and runners, gold chain over a wife-beater white tee shirt, buzz cut haircut, and assorted tattoos, he had the look and disposition of someone who spent considerable time in a second-rate gym pumping iron or in a prison exercise yard coming up

with better ways to shank somebody or, quite possibly, both.

Alexi was holding me upright so as not to draw any unneeded attention from anyone coming out of the restaurant, not that it was a real concern this time of night or the location. The one outdoor light covering the restaurant's kitchen door and back lot kept it in the shadows, unlike the valet stand and the well-lighted main parking lot around the corner in front of the restaurant. I'd parked in the back lot next to the ocean dunes to avoid getting a dent or scratch on my Mercedes and from having to pay a \$10 tip to some high school kid and part-time valet who'd likely rifle through my center console and glove box after he parked the car.

Most people in the Hamptons didn't park their own cars at exclusive restaurants, but then I wasn't from the Hamptons. I lived in the city. The ten bucks, though, would've saved me a lot of pain and aggravation.

The overflow lot was just out of view from the restaurant's large, ocean facing plate glass windows. Besides selling an expensive menu, the restaurant sold elegance and ambiance, so in the dim light the secondary parking lot was purposely overshadowed by the scenic ocean views that were designed to present, ironically, a more peaceful and placid setting.

The light rain that was beginning to fall and the low light and shadows obscured the attack as well, all of this the second slightly smaller man who accompanied the attacker, had taken into consideration. Unless you were

close by, it looked like a casual conversation. Both the hitter and the second man with his shaved and polished melon-sized head, ugly smile, and distinctive voice were all too painfully familiar. It was the tag team of Alexi and Dimitri.

“And do you *half* Mister Bodolev’s money, Mister Rayne?” said Dimitri.

Dimitri’s accent was an odd sounding mix of street cred New York with Slavic thick, elongated syllables and a distinctive cadence that was nowhere near as thick as the neck of his pal who had sucker punched me.

Even in the thin light I could make out the faded blue and black ink prison gang tattoos of daggers and religious crosses that were peeking out of the big thug’s tracksuit collar. If the dagger tattoos that were meant to show that he had murdered someone, or a few someones, with a knife for his gang weren’t enough to frighten me, then the man’s dead eyed disposition did. That I clearly meant nothing to him was evident in his eyes and the indifference on his face, but fortunately for me, I meant something to his boss.

“No...not all...not all of it,” I said to Dimitri, still wincing from the hits to my kidney while trying to steady my breathing. “\$165,000 is not easy to come up with all at once. That’s... that’s why I’m here. I’m getting it. I’m getting it! Jesus, there’s no need for this.”

“Is reminder, yes? You should not play this *Hiding Seek.*”

“I’m not running or playing *Hide and Seek*. I swear to God, you’ll get your money.”

“That is good,” Dimitri said, gently patting my face and smiling. “This restaurant,” he said, turning to admire its chateau-like setting, “it is very nice, yes? French, I think?”

“Yes.”

“And expensive too!”

“No, it’s not all that expen...” I was saying when Dimitri’s smiled disappeared and the friendly pat was replaced with a hard slap that cut me off and immediately shut me up.

“Is expensive,” he said correcting me and emphasizing the point for my purpose. This time I remained quiet and instead, nodded.

“I like Costco hot dog meal,” he said, changing the subject as he turned to his partner. “And you, Alexi? You like Costco hot dog meal?”

“*Da*. Polish hot dog meal was good meal,” said the big man still holding me in place. “Good price.”

“Yes, is good price,” echoed Dimitri. “But no more Polish dog meal. Is shame.”

“*Da*, is shame,” agreed the big man. Back to me he said, “So, tell me, Mister Rayne, how can it be that you can afford to eat at expensive French restaurant like this when you owe Mister Bodolev so much money?”

His ‘so’ came out ‘*zo*.’

“I was just meeting someone arranging to get the rest of the money!”

“Is coincidence, then, so are we,” laughed the bald man. “So, you *half* this money, yes?”

“No, not yet,” I said. “Soon.”

“Then yes, to next Saturday, the money?”

“I’m not sure I’ll have it all by...”

A hard slap on my face from the big man cut off the rest of my excuse.

“The answer is *yes*, yes? *Da* in Russian. Say *Da*.”

“Yes, *Da*,” I wheezed. “Jesus, *Da*...”

“That is good also,” said Dimitri. “Because if you do not have in *seffen* days then we will find you again. You understand?”

“*Da, da*, yes, fucking *da!* You don’t have to hit me again.”

“Do not be so foolish as to make us have to pay you a surprise visit wherever you are. Long drive from Brighton Beach in bad traffic, no good. Puts Alexi in bad mood.”

“*Da*, shit traffic,” agreed the big man.

Dimitri turned and said something in Russian to the muscled mobster, who grunted and produced a slithering smile as he pulled out a folding knife and thumbed it open with well-practiced proficiency.

Alexi bunched up my shirt and tie in his left hand and pulled my face into his. He smelled of too much of stale tobacco, and what I suspected were a few shots of Stoli, as he brought the three-inch serrated blade up to my eyes and slowly tapped the small scar on my left eyebrow where he'd cut me the last time.

This time, though, he refolded the blade back into its handle, chuckled, and then thumped me three times in the proximity of my liver in rapid succession with the closed knife to make sure I got the message. He didn't need the blade to make his point. I was nearly pissing myself.

"The next time you run from us, and we have to find you, yes?"

"I won't run...I didn't run. I only came out to Long Island to raise the rest of the money, that's all. You'll have it soon. I swear."

"And *soon* means you will be back in the city with the money next Saturday, *da*?"

"Yes, *da*, yes..."

"That is good," replied Dimitri.

"I'll...I'll have the money."

"Of course, you will." Dimitri's 'will' came out '*vill*.'

Back to his buddy he said something in their common tongue that had Alexi straightening out my bunched-up coat, shirt, and tie, before he playfully slapped me on the right side of my face. Alexi's smile was more like that of

a pit bull daring you to take away his favorite Michael Vick chew toy.

“Oh, and car keys, please.” Dimitri said, holding out right hand and wiggling his fingers.

“My, my keys?”

“Yes, to your car. To help pay down your debt.”

“How...how will I get home?”

Dimitri shrugged. “If you can afford to eat at expensive restaurant, you can afford to call Uber.”

“Uber is German?” asked a perplexed Alexi.

“Someone’s car taxi,” said Dimitri and then back to me added, “Keys?”

He was holding out his hand, palm up, and wiggling his fingers.

I dug my key ring out of my coat pocket, removed the key to my condo, and then handed the car keys over to the Russian thug.

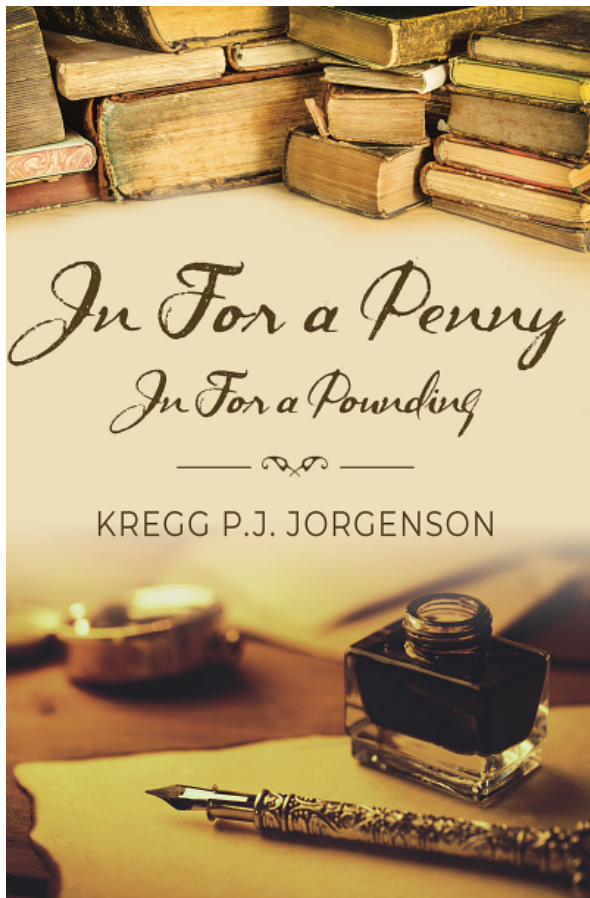
“Please to move?” he said, motioning me away from the car door. Dimitri unlocked and opened the car door, climbed in behind the steering wheel, adjusted the rear-view mirror, and then fired up the engine.

The driver’s side tinted window opened with an electric whirr. “*Seffen* days and no more *Hiding Seek*,” Dimitri said, reminding me one more time before closing the window.

The car tires kicked up loose, wet gravel as he sped out of the parking lot and out onto the street. Alexi followed in a large, black Chevy Tahoe with dark, tinted windows, big rims, and an unnerving reminder of my fate if I didn't comply. The red taillights of both vehicles soon faded to a blur in the distance with the rain that just beginning to fall.

“Seven days,” I said, hunched and holding my bruised side. "Great...just fucking great."

I glanced at my wristwatch. It was 9:40, the train station was a half-mile away, and the clock was ticking.



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