

1

I had dressed for Chestnut Hill: a button-down tattersall shirt that Susan had bought me, crisp dress khakis, a navy blazer with gold buttons, and a pair of well-broken-in loafers worn without socks. The lack of socks implied a devil-may-care attitude understood by the wealthy. Even though the wealthy individual I was calling on today was a two-hundred-and-sixty-pound NFL linebacker with a twenty-inch neck named Kinjo Heywood. I'd seen Kinjo toss around quarterbacks like rag dolls and doubted that he'd notice the missing socks.

Kinjo's agent had sent a private car for me. A private car was not needed or requested to find Chestnut Hill, but there were some ground rules that had to be discussed on the ride over. I tried to remain attentive and alert as we turned off Route 9 and made our way up and around on Heath Street. The homes were very old

and stately, with lots of brick and ivy. The leaves had started to turn loose on the oak branches overhead. As we drove, it all felt like a ticker-tape parade.

“You can’t discuss this case with anyone, Mr. Spenser,” said Steven Rosen, Kinjo’s agent. He was a beefy guy with thick black hair and dark, humorless eyes. He smelled like a quart of Brut after-shave and was dressed in a pin-striped suit with wide lapels and a purple shirt open at the neck.

“Will he sign my bubblegum card?” I said.

“You’re trying to be funny,” Rosen said, making a sour face. “But Boston is a sports-crazy town and everyone is up in Kinjo’s business. If it gets out he’s hired a private investigator, this thing will become even more of a pain in the ass.”

“Mum’s the word.”

“And this all may turn out to be nothing.”

“Of course.”

“And we’re straight on the fee offered?”

“No.”

“No?”

I told him my standard rate.

“Seriously?”

I nodded modestly. “As you know, a fee separates the pro from the amateur.”

“Okay, okay.”

The Town Car slowed and we dipped down off the road past a stone fence and toward a very large stone house with two identical white Cadillac Escalades parked outside. Before the driver got out, I opened my door and waited for Rosen to follow.

The air smelled of a good fire burning and crisp autumn sunshine. A brisk wind warned of cold days to follow.

The front door opened. Rosen ushered us toward the brick

walkway. He seemed less than enthused with having to clean up the latest mess for his client.

An old woman with copper-colored skin and dressed in a gray maid's uniform led me into the foyer. The foyer led into a great room, where a very large black man was watching an old samurai movie on a very large television. A skinny white woman with enormous breasts and blond hair sat across from him, drinking a red drink in a martini glass. The furniture was all leather and glass and too modern for such an old house.

"What's up, Kinjo?" Rosen said. "My main man."

Kinjo pressed pause on the DVD player. He looked up, surprised that he had guests, and stood up as if he'd been dozing. The woman with the large breasts continued to sip her drink. She wore a white tank top with gold embroidery, gold hoop earrings, and blue jeans so tight they might have been applied by Earl Scheib.

Kinjo was much larger than me. I wasn't used to meeting anyone larger than me except for Hawk. And Hawk stood only a half-inch taller. Kinjo was made of muscle the way a jaguar is all muscle. He moved with a strong confidence, eyes shifting from me to Rosen to his wife with just a flick. He had a mustache and a goatee and kept his hair in long cornrows. He wore a light blue Adidas tracksuit and no shoes. I'd read that he was twenty-seven, a Pro Bowl selection for the last two years, and faster than a cheetah.

"You the detective?" Kinjo said.

"Yep."

"You look like a detective. Or a cop."

"A cop would have worn socks." I pulled up my pant leg.

Kinjo nodded. A frame of the film remained on the large television screen. *Yojimbo*. I nodded toward it.

"Toshiro Mifune."

"I've seen every movie he's made."

"I've always been partial to *Seven Samurai*."

"My mother named me after the emperor of Japan," he said. "She found it in an encyclopedia, because she wanted me to stand out. That's how I got into these movies and the way of the warrior. Not a lot of black kids in Georgia digging Kurosawa."

"But you played college in Alabama."

"Auburn," Kinjo said. "Don't ever say I played for the Tide."

I smiled. He nodded over his shoulder at the woman with the red drink.

"That's Cristal," he said. "Say hello, Cristal."

She said hello. She was slightly tipsy but did not seem drunk. Her eyes took me in with some humor. "Do you carry a gun?" she said.

I opened my blue blazer and showed the .38 on my hip.

She said, "Wow." I tilted my head modestly.

Rosen seemed impatient with all the small talk. He stood by the housekeeper and pulled an iPhone from his pocket and studied the screen. The maid whispered in his ear. Without looking away from his phone, he said, "Teresa wants to know if anyone would like anything to drink."

I said coffee would be nice. Kinjo turned off the film and we sat in the little grouping. Cristal finished the red drink.

It was one in the afternoon.

"You gonna catch these guys?" Kinjo said.

"Sure."

"And find out why the hell they following me?"

"Why not."

Kinjo looked to super-agent Steve Rosen and Rosen nodded in affirmation. *Goody*.

"So how much do you know?" Kinjo said.

"I know you and your wife were having dinner at Capital Grille

by the Chestnut Hill mall and that someone followed you home. And when you tried to take another route, they kept on following you, and you decided to take matters into your own hands by discharging your weapon on Route 9.”

Rosen looked up from his iPhone and swallowed.

“Goddamn cowards wouldn’t get out of their car, so I tried to get their damn attention.”

“That’s one way to do it.”

“His actions were ill advised,” Rosen said. “A cop with the Boston police suggested we talk to you.”

“Instead of Mr. Heywood continuing to pursue the matter himself?”

“Stevie said if I shoot one of them, it might mess up my new contract.”

“Ah,” I said. “And the weapons violation?”

“Mr. Heywood has an attorney to make that disappear if it doesn’t happen again.”

“Have you seen the same car again?”

Kinjo leaned forward, elbows on knees, and nodded. “Yesterday. Different car. First time was a new black 4Runner, but it was a green Tahoe yesterday.”

“Same men?”

“Couldn’t tell,” he said. “But when I left Gillette, they rode up real close, I took some turns and they didn’t back off until I got home.”

“And then what did you do?”

“Got my damn gun, jumped out of my car, and they took off.”

Rosen held up his hand and smiled at me. “And the reason we called you, Mr. Spenser. You came highly recommended.”

“By whom, may I ask?”

“A detective named Belson.”

Rosen nodded. Heywood watched him nod and then nodded,

too. I nodded. We looked like a collection of bobbleheads. Cristal stood and went to the kitchen.

“Could this have been just some fans?” I said. “Your face is on several billboards, and often on television.”

“These people didn’t want no autograph,” he said. “This was all business.”

“How so?”

Kinjo rubbed his goatee in thought. He tilted his head and met my eye. “They were real aggressive about it.”

“You want protection for you and your wife?” I said.

“I don’t need protection,” Kinjo said. “They need protection from me. I just want to know who they are and what they want. And I don’t want to have to shoot no one. That might make me look bad.”

“Always the trouble with shooting people.”

He looked to Rosen again. Rosen was too busy texting someone to notice.

“Any enemies? Anyone who would want to do you harm? People you owe money?”

Kinjo shook his head. “I got lots of both. Plenty of enemies and money.”

“Mr. Heywood just signed a contract extension worth ten million,” Rosen said.

“Makes you a good target.”

“Yeah.” Kinjo looked down at his hands and then back up at me. “But I think this shit is personal.”

“Why would anyone want to hurt you?”

No one said anything. Rosen unfolded his arms and made way for Teresa, who brought in two coffee mugs on a serving tray. Somewhere in the kitchen, I heard a martini shaker. Rosen shifted in his seat. “I’m sure you read up a little on Mr. Heywood before coming over.”

CHEAP SHOT

I nodded.

“I pissed a few folks off over the years,” he said.

“Okay,” I said. “Who would most likely want to get back at you?”

Kinjo leaned back into the couch. It was a big white sectional in a U shape. He stared right at me. “How much time you got?”

I shrugged. “I’m paid by the hour,” I said. “Take as long as you’d like.”