

A preview of

THE LIE DETECTOR

By Bill Raetz

It felt like it had taken a week to get to Bratislava. We went from Vegas to D.C. and then to Frankfurt, had a grueling layover at each stop. It was the cheapest way over on such short notice, and I'd asked Pete to set it up that way since I was paying for it and not WEB. From Frankfurt, we took a train to Bratislava. I spent a little more than I would've traveling alone, splurged for a private cabin. I wanted Lexis to have some peace and quiet if she wanted to sleep. As it turned out, both of us were too wired to sleep, so I ordered us some sandwiches and a couple of beers. We had turkey on rye with Swiss and some icy pilsners.

"If you're on the list, I doubt that they just bugged your house," Lexis said. "If they don't hear activity, they'll start looking for you...if you're not already being followed."

"The thought has crossed my mind, trust me. I recorded myself going to the bathroom, taking a shower, making dinner...it's all on my computer, and I have it set to play the sound clips at programmed intervals."

Lexis was about to bite into her sandwich when she said, "Good God, you've thought of everything."

"Not everything." I cracked open my beer. "I never thought I'd be running away from my own people."

"You're not running, Bryce. You haven't done anything wrong."

"No, I just failed to do something I was supposed to, which is enough."

"You could have told Sinclair about it. Granted, he's the most eccentric director we've had, but he's fair. He would have backed you."

"Maybe," I said. "There was also a chance it would go the other way...you know, a known liar coming in and pointing his finger at the top polygrapher and saying he's questionable. That puts me even more on the radar, and then Craig just gets away with whatever he's doing."

"What do you think he's doing?"

"Dunno. You don't ring up someone like Cleary just to shoot the shit, though." I took a sip of beer, let my sandwich just sit there. "Just the fact that Craig knew how to contact him in the first place is troubling."

As we went along the countryside, I wondered if Cleary was still in Bratislava. He had to stay in places like that if he wanted to lay low, though. Boris said he was still there, had showed me where he was. Still, that intel was a week old. A week is like a second in my line of work.



We got off the train at Bratislava, put our bags down by one of the schedule signs so that we could get our bearings and have a smoke. The plan was to go to the hotel, check in, and wait to hear from Boris' people. We sure as hell weren't going to take a cab, though. They're still too dangerous in Eastern Europe, too many robberies and muggings. If I got rolled and lost my cash, the game would be over before it started.

"I think we should take a bus," I told Lexis. Even then, you had to watch out for pickpockets. Lexis was European and she looked it. I'd spent enough time overseas that I knew how not to stick out, so we were probably fine. As long as we weren't being followed.

I was about done with my cigar when the commotion started with footsteps barreling out of the train.

"That's him!" I heard someone yelling. I didn't turn around because I just knew that he was pointing a finger at me. I heard more footsteps, and they were getting quicker.

"You! You in the black jacket!"

I picked up my bag, tried to walk away. I knew it was a rail officer when I heard him blowing a whistle.

"You! Stop!"

I had to. He had me. I turned around slowly and saw this monster in a gray uniform who looked like he could do curls with a keg. I wasn't about to fight him right there in the open and draw even more attention to myself.

He came over, got right in my face and pushed his hand against my chest.

"You forgot this."

I looked down and saw an iPod pressed against me.

"You left it in your compartment."

I reached up and took it.

"Thanks." I watched him walk off, watched everyone turn around and go back to their business. The show ended as quickly as it had started.

"I didn't know you brought your iPod," Lexis said.

"I didn't." I put in the ear buds and switched it on. I dialed up Playlists and hit the one labeled *Play Me*, listened to a baritone voice speaking to me in Slovakian.

There's a silver Volvo parked outside the station. Get in it. Four people are watching you right now. You have three minutes.

"What is it?" Lexis asked, up on her toes and peeking over my shoulder.

"Got a knife on you?" I switched off the iPod and put it in my pocket. I just knew we'd been set up.

"No, but I have a nail file that TSA missed. Why?"

"Give it to me." My hand came out. "Give it to me." She finally dug it out of her purse and handed it over. "Go to the hotel and wait for me." I pushed my bag to her with my leg, grabbed her arms, and gave her a kiss for show. I ran my fingers through her short hair and brought my mouth to her ear, pressed our bodies together. "We're being watched. Go to the hotel. Watch your back all the way there."

I went into the station, through a crowd of people moving at the speed of zombies, and finally saw the front door. I opened up my cell phone and hit a speed dial number. The call went right to voice mail.

"Boris, it's Bryce. I'm on the ground, and I've already got trouble. Ring me." I hung up and marched out the door.

The Volvo was sitting by the curb. It was newer and more polished than the other wrecks circling around, had tinted windows I couldn't see through. I went right up to it, thought about tapping the rear window, but the door opened before I could make a fist. I got in, my hand balled up and holding the file, and closed the door. When the car pulled away, I saw a man with a shaved head sitting next to me. He looked like a professional wrestler, stared at me like he wanted to club me in the head, boil me in a kettle of soup, and have me for dinner.

"You have a name?" I asked.

"Kungor." It was the voice from the iPod. "I have your merchandise. I am friend of Boris." He had kerosene breath and a lame smile that I didn't like or trust.

My hackles came down a little, but I still had a grip on that file. I thought I would bend it in half when I looked over and saw another bruiser in the passenger seat staring at me like I was a *Hors d'oeuvre*.

"What do you have for me?" I asked.

"Two .40 caliber handguns, an assault rifle, plastique, and an array of knives. I also have sound sensors and one motion detector." And that's what was ordered. "We go to warehouse. You see, you pay, you leave with items. You say you never met me, okay?"

"I don't even know your name," I said. The car made a hard turn that nearly spilled me over.

"You are correct to say such, because Kungor is not real name for me." I said, "I figured."



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