

[This chapter ended up being condensed into a single page to save wordcount and was joined to the current Chapter 34.]

Chapter 35

35 DAYS LEFT

Savannah says, “Oh, this is pretty. I love it already.”

“This” is a city-view executive suite on the sixteenth floor of the Four Seasons San Francisco. Lots of cool grays and taupes, contemporary furniture, an all-marble bathroom big enough for a party. Why not the Saint Francis? The Four Seasons has a spa; the Saint Francis doesn’t. I figured Savannah would appreciate that.

Savannah drops her black duffel next to the walnut-burl coffee table in the living room, then hurries to the windows to check out the view.

I loop my arms around her from behind. Downtown San Francisco’s laid out at our feet. It’s as bright as her halter sundress. “Sure you can be seen in public wearing canary yellow?”

“I’m not working.” She settles against me. “Besides, I don’t think I’ll be wearing it much. Or anything else.” She giggles. “Ooh, you like that idea, don’t you?”

I do, but that’s not why she’s here. “Okay, Savannah Abigail, it sounds like we need to review the rules. You get the run of the place, including the spa. But when you’re not busy being pampered, we have work to do.”

“I know, I know.” She reaches back to poke my ribs. “I feel like I should bill you.”

“To sleep with you?”

“No!” She shoulders me away. “For making me work.” She throws me a sly smile. “I sleep with you for free.”

Not exactly. Round-trip airfare from LAX, three nights here, whatever her bar and spa tabs will be, and eardrum repair from when she squealed into the phone after I told her I was coming up. I hope all that will satisfy her enough to keep her plugged into the project.

I take her hand in both of mine. “Didn’t you ever want to

follow a pirate treasure map when you were a little girl? Find the lost gold? Maybe be Lara Croft?"

"I wanted to be Indiana Jones. Mother said I couldn't. I had to be... oh, what's her name, the blonde in *The Last Crusade*?"

"Elsa."

"That's it. I thought Elsa was really boring, plus she fell in a big hole." She squeezes my hand. "I'll bet you wanted to be Indy."

"Every boy in the '80s did. Him or Han Solo." I let her go. "I'm not satisfied with the mystery. Maybe we won't find it, but it's worth spending a few hours to look. Wanna help?"

She sighs theatrically. "Of course. But let me unpack first."

We end up sitting side-by-side at the oval pedestal table by the windows with our laptops set up so we can see each other's screen.

I bring up Dr. Udomprecha's paper and the useless map. "We're looking for a Nam Ton river up here somewhere, but the only one I've found is over here." I circle the mouse pointer around the top of Laos. "Did he publish anything else?"

"She. Pensri's a woman's name. It means 'beauty of the moon.' She submitted a follow-up paper in 2012 that went into peer review, but I don't know what happened to it. You want it?"

"Sure, send it to me." It bounces into my inbox a few seconds later. I don't bother to ask how she got it. This is her job, after all.

Savannah rests her chin on her palm. "How do you want to do this?"

"I was going to ask you that. You know the country better than I do. Google Maps and Google Earth are pretty bad at finding rivers outside the First World. Any suggestions?"

"Hmm. Let's try this." She goes to a website called branah.com, brings up an on-screen Thai keyboard, types something in what looks like alternate names for Prince, then drops it into Google. It gives her back a lot of things written in Martian.

I ask, "What's that?"

"I searched for 'Nam Ton' in Thai. It's giving me a lot of hits for Ban Nam Ton, which isn't the same thing. It's a village."

"The one outside Chiang Mai?"

"Uh-huh. This is going to take a while. I'll need some white wine to get me through it." She bats her eyelashes at me.

"Be right back." A quick check of the minibar in the suite's hallway by the front door shows me two kinds of vodka and two of

scotch, but no wine. I call room service for a couple bottles. “It’ll be here soon. Anything else?”

“Uh-huh. Bring up Pensri’s report again... Okay, that box right here? See if you can find any maps for it. You know about the Perry-Castañeda Map Library?”

“No.”

“Oh. It’s at UT Austin. They’ve got maps you wouldn’t believe. A lot are online. Check what they’ve got.” She shrugs. “It’s worth a try.”

She’s right: PCL has tons of digitized paper maps—50,000-ish according to the website. It doesn’t take long to figure out that the library expects you to know how each country is laid out before you start selecting maps to download. I spend a lot of time trying to look up place names to see if I want the map it refers to. After a while, I realize I have an audience.

Savannah says, “That’s painful to watch. You know why you’re not finding some of those place names? There’s more than one way to transliterate Thai.”

Now she tells me. “Got any other ideas?”

“Uh-huh.” She stands and reaches for both goblets. “I’m going for a refill. Then we can swap computers and I’ll look for maps.”

“I don’t read Thai.”

“You don’t have to.” She fiddles with something on her browser. All the hits switch to Thai-glish. “It’s a good thing I like you.”

While she’s back at the coffee table where room service left the wine, I log out of my profile on the laptop and log into the “guest” one. She won’t be able to rummage around in my files without me noticing.

Two hours slip by. I find about two dozen ways to get the time and weather in Ban Nam Ton, which is useless. Savannah sighs a lot. Our first wine bottle is empty. I stretch, then slide my arm around her shoulders and kiss her cheek. “How’re you doing?”

Savannah gives me a sweet, lingering kiss. “I really like you a lot, but I’m pretty much over this project.” She stands, stretches, rolls out her shoulders, then unzips her dress. “New rules. You get to do something you want to do for two or three hours, then it’s my turn. Did you see the tub in there?” She points toward the bathroom.

“I did.” It’s a big, deep soaking bathtub.

She slips off the dress, then drapes it over the back of her chair. “I’m going to run a bubble bath.” Her thong joins her dress. “Then I’m going to soak in it, and so are you, and we’re going to do something more fun than *that*.” She jabs a finger toward the laptops. “C’mon.”



So it goes. Two hours or so of work, another couple of play. Dinner and wine stops work for Saturday. Not quite what I’d planned, though I should’ve known better.

After I finish waking up Savannah on Sunday morning, she heads off for her morning swim workout and her appointment at the spa. “I should be back by lunchtime.” She winks. “Order room service.”

I run the three-mile circuit I figured out my first time in the city. After I clean up and dress, I start organizing all the maps I downloaded from Perry-Castañeda. It’s nitpicky work, but I’m starting to get a feel for where things are. If we can zero in on an area, I’ll at least be able to find the detail maps for it.

Savannah returns to the room a little before noon, absolutely glowing. She insists I feel how soft and smooth her skin is after her full-body exfoliation, hydration therapy, and massage. She wants me to be thorough and make sure they didn’t miss any spots. They didn’t. It’s past one when I finally get her vertical, fed, and back to work.

I say, “Besides the places you rejected, where else have people been looking?”

Savannah shrugs. “All I know is what I’ve seen on the message boards. There are three main theories. One has it over here, in a mountain valley.” She points on my screen to the box’s lower-right corner. “I think it’s kind of weak, but there’s a few clues in the paper if you know how to read them. The other two start with the idea that the box is a diversion and the site’s in Phitsanulok or outside Chiang Mai. I already told you what I think of those.”

“Would she do that? Fake a map?”

She makes a face like she drank pickle juice. “If she did, I get why. The dig’s gone once the looters find it.”

I point to the chunk of Myanmar inside the upper-left corner. “What’s this area called?”

She peers at it. “I’m sure the Burmese have provincial names for it. Mostly, everybody calls it ‘Shan State.’ Why?”

That rings a bell. The Shan are one of the endless number of ethnic groups fighting the Myanmar government, or got bought off by it, or something. “We’ve been looking in Thailand all this time. What if the Nam Ton’s in Myanmar?”

Savannah slides off my lap and onto her chair. “Forget about Myanmar. The Burmese didn’t have nearly the skill to make Nam Ton wares in the thirteenth century. Let’s stick with Thailand for now. Here’s an idea—if we search for ‘Nam Ton’ and a province name, it might cut out a lot of the junk and narrow down where we need to look.”

So we do what she suggested for every Thai province inside the box on the good doctor’s map. Nothing. I get sucked down a rabbit hole chasing a reference to a Khun Nam Ton waterfall in Mae Hong Son Province, but it turns into nothing. Savannah does what I’m doing except in Thai, with the same result. Wine is consumed. A couple hours disappear.

She settles onto my lap after having refilled her wine glass. She lets me take a sip. “Have I mentioned lately how over this project I am?”

There’s a lot about this situation that’s completely right, but it’s hard to focus. “Um, no, but all the sighing over there gave me that idea.”

She kisses my cheek. “Good. You know the rules—it’s time we did something I want to do.” She arches an eyebrow. “Think carefully before you answer this: do you like chocolate?”

I smile. “Do dogs like tennis balls?”

“Good answer. If you’d said ‘no,’ I’d have to break up with you.”

We walk a couple blocks down Market to the Ghirardelli Ice Cream and Chocolate Shop. I grew up on Ghirardelli chocolate and I’m like Pavlov’s dog when I hear the name. We share what must be a 10,000-calorie ice-cream shake. Savannah hands me her phone to take a picture of her in front of curved shelves full of brightly-wrapped chocolate. When she gets distracted, I sneak a look at her call history; there’s a lot of numbers with an “86”

country code going back well over two weeks. Hmm.

Savannah beelines for the bathroom once we get back to the room. While she's busy, I look up country code "86." It's China. Her friends there? She was calling way before I got the wares for them to sell. Hmm.

"I feel lighter now." Savannah plunks onto the window seat. "I've got an idea. SFMOMA's literally right around the corner. They're open 'til five. Let's go look at the Pop Art exhibit."

"Maybe tomorrow. Let's get back to work."

"Really?" Savannah scowls at me. "This is silly. We ran out of places to look. You know we may not be able to find it just by looking at maps, right?"

Getting her involved seemed like such a good idea. Now I'm wondering. "Someone knows where it is. That means it's findable."

She rolls her eyes. "Yes, but not from here. I already told you we'll have *go there*. I'll be happy to go with you, but not this weekend—I have appointments on Tuesday. Okay?"

I know better than to push it. She'll ask why, and I won't be able to give her a good answer that isn't also true. "Okay, you win. What do we do for the rest of the weekend?"

She half-turns to point out the window, nearly blinding me with her grin. "My city's out there, and I'd love to show it to you. In here, we've got everything we need to have fun." She holds up a bag stuffed with Ghirardelli. "Chocolate..." she spreads her arms "...and sex. Are we missing anything?"

The things I do for the agency.