

C H A P T E R

1

“**N**OW, JUST RELAX.”
“Relax?” The accent seems heavier than usual. “How the hell am I supposed to relax when you have my life in your hands?”

The patient has a point. Dr. Sanjay Patel hovers above the three-hundred-pound billionaire Muscovite, about to insert a needle into the man’s penile shaft.

A sixty-three-year-old with severe coronary artery disease and gout, Yuri Petrov has—in an effort to please his fourth wife, a Hungarian model—taken a triple dose of Viagra.

“It was an emergency, Doctor!” Petrov had laughed when he called Sanjay an hour earlier.

It is now, thinks Sanjay. Every hour that Petrov’s penis is stuck in an erection, he risks losing it. They’re at the six-hour mark, and the chance of irreversible damage is 20 percent. At twenty-four hours, it’ll be 90 percent.

Sanjay had been only thirty minutes away by air. A short ride in a private car, then a final approach by Vespa to the cliffside villa, and he was at Petrov’s Ravello compound. He found Mrs. Petrov

sitting on the balcony outside the sprawling master suite, high above the Mediterranean, scrolling on her phone. Two bodyguards insisted on a pat-down. The routine was familiar, but given his patient's situation, Sanjay chafed at the delay.

The setting called for improvisation. The exam table is a massage bed. Reclined thirty degrees, it allows for a decent reverse Trendelenburg position. To complement the local anesthetic, Sanjay rolls up a Hermès tie and places it between Petrov's teeth—to keep him from biting off his tongue, though the silence is a welcome side effect.

Everything else Sanjay needs is in his high-tech medical bag, midnight black. Thanks to Cassie, his roving assistant, both the bag and its contents would be the envy of the Mayo brothers.

Holding Petrov's engorged penis with his gloved left hand, Sanjay uses his teeth to pop the top off the lidocaine syringe in his right hand. "A stick and a burn," he says.

Petrov bleats a Russian expletive into his four-hundred-euro tie.

"Okay. That was the numbing medicine."

Sanjay directs a second needle through the skin, careful to avoid any major blood vessels. "Hold still."

For the first time in years, Petrov follows his physician's instructions.

"All done." Sanjay stands back to observe Petrov's face. "Now just stay down for another ten minutes so I can monitor you."

"Monitor me? Doctor, I am a Petrov. We need no monitoring."

Petrov is already swinging his legs around when Sanjay pushes him back down. One guard barrels toward Sanjay; the other reaches for his holster.

"Okay, Doc. Okay," says Petrov, waving off his goons. "Is all right."

He lies back down. Out comes his phone. *From where?* Sanjay wonders. The man's stark naked.

Pulse is reasonable, pain and stress considered: 92 BPM. But Sanjay has a feeling. He digs into his medical bag for the blood pressure cuff.

“Boris, vodka. Chilled,” Petrov’s voice sounds different. Weaker. “And what’s with the fucking A/C?”

Beads of sweat appear on the big man’s forehead.

Uh-oh.

Sanjay drops the cuff and lunges forward as the patient’s eyes roll into the back of his head. He catches Petrov before he falls off the table, grabs his wrist, and puts two fingers on the radial artery, simultaneously lowering the table to get gravity on his side.

The guards are in a full-blown panic, one gripping a bottle of Beluga Gold while the other stands frozen, his mouth agape.

“Ambulance!” yells Sanjay. “Helicopter, if they’ve got one. Tell the operator he’s in cardiac distress.”

The guards look at each other.

“Now!”

Petrov still has a pulse, but it’s thready. Sanjay places his stethoscope on the man’s chest. In seconds, it delivers a three-dimensional ultrasound to Sanjay’s phone. Ejection fraction is 20 percent, down two-thirds from normal. Not enough forward blood flow.

The medicine Sanjay gave Petrov must have gotten into his general circulation, a rare and unavoidable complication.

“Dammit.” Sanjay looks to the remaining guard. “My bag!”

Petrov’s heart should be racing to compensate, but it’s not. Years of calcium and cholesterol buildup have weakened its rhythm. He’d ignored Sanjay’s recommendation to take a stress test.

But that’s the problem with being a concierge doctor to the uber rich. The patients aren’t the listening kind.

Sanjay jams a sixteen-gauge IV into Petrov’s left arm and pushes half a milligram of atropine. Then he grabs a bag of saline and hops up on the table, squeezing fluid out as fast as possible.

A few minutes later, Petrov comes to. Sanjay eyes his blood pressure cuff. BP 90/58. The man needs more fluid, but nothing the ambulance crew can't handle.

"What happened?" Petrov asks, rubbing his head.

"Your heart isn't as strong as it used to be. You need to slow down. And by the next time I see you, I want an exercise stress test done."

"Exercise? Doc, we Petrovs don't..." Petrov turns to his guards for approval. But their aghast expressions stop him cold. His eyes scan the medical equipment, open syringes, and medication bottles strewn across the floor.

"Okay, Doctor," he says, putting his hands up. "I'll take your advice." He turns to one of his guards and snaps, "Bruno, since the doctor is here, give him his retainer."

Bruno vanishes, returning seconds later with a Gucci tote, dark green. He unzips it and shows the contents to Sanjay—stacks of US hundred-dollar bills, packed to the brim.

"Half cash," says Petrov. "The rest we'll wire to—"

"The 703 account."

"Yes, yes. We know. Bruno will call your secretary to arrange the transfer."

Before Sanjay can take his leave, Petrov's wife comes into the room, her high heels clattering as she steps around the paraphernalia on the floor.

"Yurochka," she whines, "can we go? If we don't hurry, we won't even make the second half of the show."

"Of course, my sweet. Of course." Petrov starts to rise from the table, but Sanjay's scowl drops him back down. "Actually, kedvesem, you go. Take Gorevich. I need to stay here. Doctor's orders."

Her face flushes. "He works for us. My husband doesn't take orders from him!"

"He does now!" snaps Petrov. "And you take orders from me."

Tears form in her blue eyes. Petrov softens. "I'm . . . advising you to treat our doctor here with respect. He just saved your husband's life."

She turns to Sanjay. A cold expression on her face. “Thank you for saving my husband. But since you do work for us, I have a job for you. A friend of mine. A quick visit. You can do that, right?”

Sanjay ignores the malice in her voice. That, too, is part of the job.

“I’m afraid I have to pass. I have a full patient load.”

Her eyes cut to her husband.

Petrov sighs. “Please, Doctor. It’s just by the water. Lots of beautiful women, I promise.”

* * *

Twenty minutes later, Sanjay steps down from Petrov’s armored Mercedes onto the marina.

Rising from the sapphire waters ahead are the dramatic coastal cliffs that make the Amalfi Coast so breathtaking—and so treacherous to drive. Sanjay can just make out a yellow Lamborghini convertible winding around a curve, a bright red Ferrari not far behind.

“Dr. Sanjay,” calls a voice from behind him. “Please, if you’ll follow me.”

He turns to see a muscular young man in an Armani suit coming down the gangway. Stretching in front of him is a yacht a hundred feet long, stem to stern. A Heesen, by the look of it.

Sanjay follows the man to the portside deck. A steward waits with a tray bearing a cut-crystal tumbler and a tall, jet-black ceramic bottle with platinum and silver accents. Clase Azul Ultra. Nearly impossible to find. Cassie must have called ahead.

He swirls the caramel flavors on his tongue. Distilled from 100 percent blue agave at one of the highest altitudes in Mexico, this tequila is nothing like the ones college kids imbibe that give the drink a bad name. It’s pure taste, no hangover. The benefits of a liquor made from a green plant. He takes a couple sips and returns the glass. An unnecessary precaution, but better to wait until after his last patient of the day.

Ushered into the main salon, Sanjay feels transported to a club on South Beach. Scantly clad dancers gyrate in bird cages while beautiful women deliver bottles of Dom to businessmen and their runway-model girlfriends.

"Please, Doctor," the attendant shouts above the pounding bass. "Wait here. Ms. Jansen is finishing her swim."

Cassie had briefed him by phone on the ride down. Sophie Jansen is the twenty-four-year-old daughter and only child of a Dutch shipping magnate. College at NYU, part-time model, scattered tabloid stories. Apparently, she has an errant wrinkle and is due for Botox.

His phone rings. It's Cassie. "You have an urgent call."

He sighs. In concierge medicine, everything is urgent. "Which patient?"

"Not a patient—a Dr. Emma Carpenter-Flores. She says you know her?"

Emma—twelve years, and not a word. Now it's urgent? "Uh, yeah. Med school."

A memory of their first time listening to a patient's heartbeat together flashes through Sanjay's mind. The way Emma's eyes widened in wonder. Then those same eyes, sparkling, when their lips touched for the first time.

The line cuts over.

"Emma?"

"Hi." Just one syllable, but he'd know her voice anywhere. Full of warmth and surprisingly deep, only more tired now.

"Wow. It's . . . It's great to hear from you." Sanjay doesn't need to check his pulse to know it's racing.

"Where are you?" She sounds strained. "It's loud. Sorry. I didn't realize you were . . . out."

Sanjay needs to get away from this crowd and the pulsating beats from the DJ booth. Not the best impression, given the rumors Emma's likely heard about him. He puts a finger to his ear and steps outside, onto the main deck.

“Nowhere. It doesn’t matter. I’m glad you got in touch.”

“I didn’t, exactly. My father did.”

Sanjay masks his surprise. After the way they’d left things, he never expected to hear from Tom again. “Good old Tom Carpenter! How is he these days?”

“Dead.”