

DEEPLY ROOTED DREAMS

by Alexander Mukte

EXCERPT

Zach stood at the end of the bar and glanced down at his watch. His contact was late. Just as he took his first step back toward the stairs, he heard a voice from behind the bar.

“Leaving so soon?”

Zach turned around to find a cleanly shaven man wearing a nice dress shirt and a blazer.

“It looks like it,” Zach said warily. “I was waiting for someone, but he is late.”

“Better late than never, don’t you think, Zach?” the man asked.

“Carlos?”

The man gave a single patient nod and made the type of calm, direct eye contact that led Zach to believe him.

Zach checked his immediate surroundings and then reached under his shirt and pulled out a small waist pack. “As agreed, there are a hundred SIM cards in here, all programmed to be untraceable.”

Carlos opened the pack and examined its contents.

Zach pulled out a cell phone. “We can test a chip if you’d like.”

“We trust you, Zach,” Carlos said before handing him a thick manila envelope. “And we appreciate it.”

Zach stared at the envelope.

“Do you want to take a quick look?” Carlos asked. “All the information you requested is inside.”

Movement in the periphery pulled Zach’s attention to the dance floor. The group of local men was now standing around the edge of the floor. The men were squared up, ready for action. Simultaneously, the drunken outsiders remained oblivious to their offenses and the inevitable consequences.

“Now would be the time, Zach.” Carlos’s voice brought him back to the moment.

Zach opened the envelope and pressed the thick stack of papers against the edge. He could see a small bag of memory chips at the bottom. He read a few lines of the document. He nodded his head.

“Does this meet your expectations?” Carlos asked.

“You know, I don’t typically do things like this,” Zach said, looking back up.

“That’s great to hear.” Carlos smiled. “And who’s to say that you did this at all?” Carlos paused. “You are playing a perilous game here though.”

Zach’s brows knitted together in an earnest expression. “I’m not playing a game. I’m doing what’s right.”

The two men stood in silence until the sound of a bottle crashing on the floor broke the moment. “I appreciate this,” Zach said as he patted the envelope.

Carlos leaned forward. “So that you may rest easy, this is not a game for us either. The right thing in this situation is where our interests lie as well.”

Zach gave a nod of understanding.

“It’s time for you to go,” Carlos said.