

Chapter One

Secrets Are Hell

While Tim cocooned his body in the blue leather chair behind his desk, his fingers flew over the keyboard. The words flowed from his fingertips onto the computer screen. After he completed the final chapter of his novel, *Secrets Are Hell*, he leaned back in the seat that was positioned to optimize the view of the Caribbean. As he rubbed his newly acquired goatee, he watched the turquoise waves lap against the pearly sand.

When Tim and his former partner, Brad, sold their company, Multipoint Protection Services, Tim moved to Grand Cayman to pursue his dream of becoming an author. He grinned. His vision was about to come true.

After the identity thefts from his former company, Tim lasered in on the connection between the stolen information used to purchase prescription drugs and the subsequent laundering of the black market proceeds. The thriller was a product of his experiences, research, and imagination.

He recalled the conversation with his informant at the bar. Once the man he only knew as Jax consumed three shots of tequila, he'd spilled secrets about the money laundering business on the island. The man dripped sweat as he spoke, and he warned Tim to be careful with the revelations. Although Tim had fictionalized the facts gathered during his research, he prayed that he'd sufficiently disguised the characters involved in the illicit events.

Satisfied that the first draft was complete, he saved the document onto the flash drive and locked the device in the desk drawer. He stood and stretched his arms overhead before hiding the key underneath a leather-bound edition of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, one of many in his collection of books in the wall-to-wall bookcase behind him.

Tim raised his eyes toward the planked pine ceiling and contemplated his next steps. When he returned from Brad's upcoming wedding, he would consult with developmental editors. In the meantime, he'd let the story marinate. His phone pinged, and he turned back to the desk to find a text from his girlfriend, Becky.

Why haven't you called or messaged me?

His six-month-old puppy, Snooper, barked. He stepped away from his cellphone to let the dog inside. A salty breeze drifted through the opening. As he inhaled the

scent, he wondered why he'd ever gotten involved with the former beauty pageant queen. He met her a few months ago when he'd volunteered at the rescue organization where he had adopted Snooper. While he massaged the black and white cocker spaniel mix's ears, he reflected on that day they'd both tended to the homeless pets.

As Tim handed Becky a bag of cat food, a jolt of adrenaline pulsed through his body. Becky measured the servings and filled the bowls they'd deliver to the felines. While she poured, he admired her flowing raven hair that framed a heart-shaped face. Her almond shaped hazel-colored eyes shimmered with intrigue. After he heard Becky's deep-throated laugh, he invited her to join him for a cup of coffee after their shift.

A month into the relationship, she began texting him incessantly. If he didn't reply within an hour, she'd get agitated. He regretted inviting her as his plus one to Brad and Liz's wedding in Charleston, South Carolina. A sigh escaped his lips. He longed for a soulmate like his friend had discovered in Liz.

Tim was delighted that the couple had chosen Grand Cayman as their honeymoon destination. He smiled in anticipation of the treasure hunt he'd planned as their wedding gift. Snooper wiggled away and bounded toward Tim's cat, Irish. The feline hissed and halted the puppy in his tracks. Tim chuckled, picked up his phone, and fingered a response.

Been working on the book. Meet up for drinks at five at The Deck? We can talk about travel plans.

Without waiting for a reply, he placed the device down and strode toward the kitchen to feed his pets.

Who knew that today would be the last time he would touch the manuscript?