

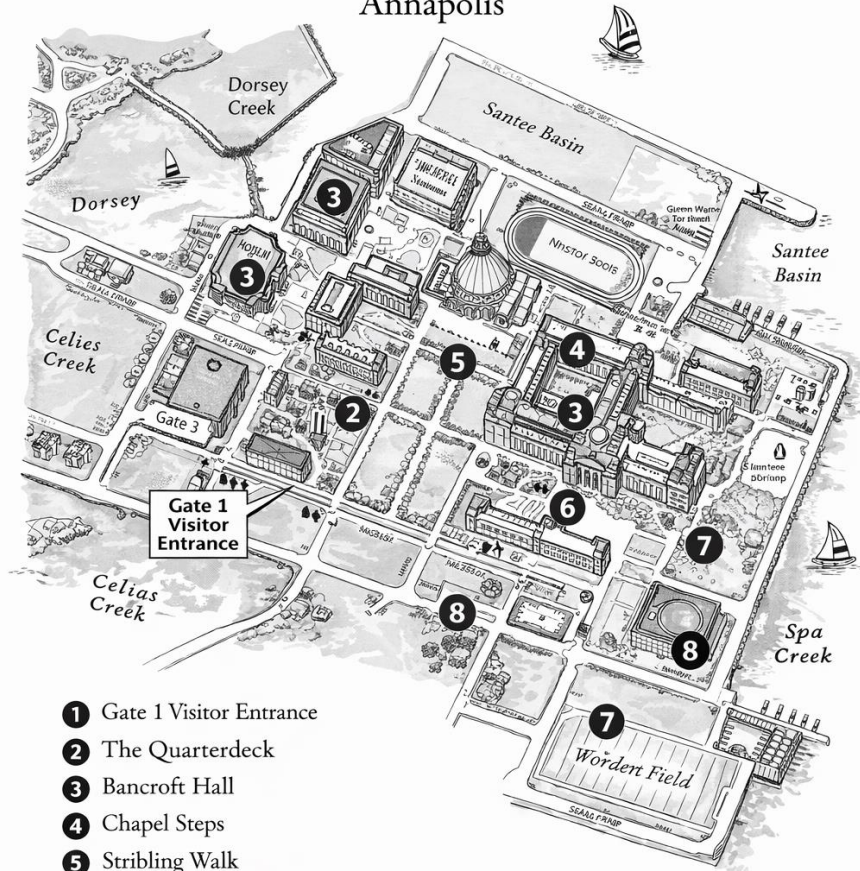
The Girl with Two Names

The Blue Door Protocol

Book II:

The YARD

United States Naval Academy
Annapolis



- 1 Gate 1 Visitor Entrance
- 2 The Quarterdeck
- 3 Bancroft Hall
- 4 Chapel Steps
- 5 Stribling Walk
- 6 Dahlgren Hall
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PROLOGUE

THE LIST

The name returns the way ghosts do - quiet, impossible, and already inside the house.

Khalid al-Tikriti sits in a clean apartment in Istanbul with the windows shut and the lights low. The city beyond the glass is bright with tourist noise, but his room is silent except for the hum of a laptop and the soft scrape of prayer beads sliding through his fingers.

His screen is not Arabic news.

It is not a target photo.

It is a list.

A spreadsheet is copied and recopied until it no longer has a source. Names, dates, routing codes. The kind of data that looks harmless to anyone who doesn't know how blood travels through systems.

A message pings in the corner - encrypted, brief.

NEW HIT. USA. ANNAPOLIS LANE.

Khalid doesn't smile.

Smiling is for men who believe they control outcomes.

Khalid controls patience.

He clicks the file open and scrolls until he finds the entry flagged in red.

A Kurdish name appears among American formatting - diacritics stripped, letters bent into shapes an English keyboard can tolerate.

HEVI DILVIN.

For a long moment, Khalid holds the beads still, as if the room itself must stay quiet while he listens to what the name means.

It means the girl lived.

It means the locket is still in the world.

It means Karim's lie still walks upright and breathes.

Khalid reads the metadata attached to the entry.

A location tag, not precise enough to be dangerous to amateurs, but precise enough for professionals:

MD - ANNAPOLIS.

A second line follows - an organizational code makes Khalid's eyes narrow.

USNA.

The United States Naval Academy.

He sits back slowly, beads sliding again.

"The Americans keep trophies," he murmurs in Arabic. "They put them in uniforms and call them honor."

Across the room, a man in a gray shirt watches Khalid without moving. Omar. Younger, hungry, the kind of operator who believes violence is the only language worth learning.

Omar speaks quietly. "She is there?"

Khalid keeps his gaze on the screen.

"She is near their heart," Khalid says. "They are protecting her with ceremony."

Omar's jaw tightens. "We can reach her."

Khalid lifts one finger - one small motion silences Omar like a dog.

"We do not rush for the girl," Khalid says softly. "We rush for what she anchors."

Omar waits. He has learned Khalid's patience is not weakness. It is a method.

Khalid scrolls again.

The entry has a field called **CONTACT PATHWAY.**

It is not a phone number. Not an address.

It is a lane.

A domestic name appears beneath the field American, heavy, familiar.

DANIELS, THUNDER.

Khalid's thumb pauses on the trackpad.

He remembers Thunder Daniels. Not personally, but as a shape in the story - one of the men who moved through Iraq like weather, unstoppable and temporary. A man who took something belonging to Kurdish soil and carried it home.

Khalid's voice stays quiet.

"He made her a weapon," Khalid says. "He thought he made her safe."

Omar leans forward. "Then we take the guardian."

Khalid shakes his head once.

"No," he says. "We take the lane."

He clicks into the file's history - breadcrumbs of who touched the entry and when. The list is unofficial, but it draws from official wells. It collects what leaks. It follows the paper.

A chain appears - clean enough to be believable, messy enough to be real:

- a charity intake form
- a sponsorship vetting packet
- a "support services" questionnaire
- a liaison check-in request

Khalid studies the first item longer than the others.

CHARITY INTAKE FORM.

A blurred logo in the corner. Not a government seal. Not a military crest.

A simple symbol designed to look harmless.

A door shape.

Painted blue in the scanned copy, as if someone had chosen the color deliberately.

Khalid's eyes remain calm.

Omar watches him. "What is it?"

Khalid's fingers slide the beads faster, a rhythm like a heartbeat you don't notice until it stops.

"There is someone in their house," Khalid says.

Omar frowns. "Inside the Academy?"

Khalid does not answer the question directly.

He points at the lane list on the screen.

"This is how Americans kill," Khalid says. "They do it with forms. With 'help.' With signatures. They make the victim sign the knife."

Omar's mouth locks up. "And our part?"

Khalid's gaze sharpens.

"Our part is to choose the moment the system believes it is acting in mercy," he says. "So the girl walks into the room by herself."

Omar nods once. "And if she refuses?"

Khalid's voice drops softer.

"Then we move to the family," he says.

Omar's eyes harden. "Her grandmother."

Khalid's mouth does not change.

"In the village," he says. "They taught the girl names are sacred."

Khalid taps the screen where **HEVI DILVIN** sits like a wound in a spreadsheet.

"In the world," he adds, "names are currency."

He closes the laptop gently, as if ending a prayer.

Then he looks at Omar.

"Do not touch her yet," Khalid says. "Do not frighten her in the street. Do not make noise."

Omar waits, hungry for permission.

Khalid continues, voice quiet but absolute.

"You will watch," he says. "You will learn her patterns. You will learn the names of those who stand near her. And you will find the one who opened the door for this list."

Omar nods.

Khalid picks up his phone and opens a blank message window. He types a single line in English and shows it to Omar.

THE DOOR WAS MARKED.

Omar's eyes flicker with satisfaction.

Khalid deletes the message without sending it.

"Not yet," Khalid says.

He stands and walks to the window. He opens it a fraction, letting a thin slice of Istanbul air spill into the room - salt, diesel, distant call to prayer.

He looks down at the street, at ordinary people living ordinary lives, and he imagines Annapolis in the same way - bright, orderly, full of ceremonies meant to keep chaos outside.

Khalid whispers, almost kindly:

"Open it."

Then he closes the window again.

Because the hunt has already started.

And the girl doesn't know she's on the list.

CHAPTER 1

PLEBE WHITE NOISE

Bancroft Hall is a machine that runs on noise.

Boots in stairwells. Doors slamming. Voices clipped down to syllables. A thousand small rules grinding fresh bodies into shape.

For most plebes, the noise is the hardest part.

For Sam Williams, the hardest part is learning which sounds don't belong.

She wakes before reveille because her body refuses to sleep past the point of safety. She lies still for a moment, listening - pipes, distant footsteps, someone coughing down the hall - then swings her feet to the deck and moves.

Fold. Square. Align.

Her rack looks identical to everyone else's. That's the point. Identical means invisible. Invisible means safe.

Across the room, Maya Holbrook stirs and sits up with hair going the wrong direction and eyes already tired.

"You're up again," Maya whispers, rubbing her face.

Sam doesn't look at her. Not because she's cold - because she's trained.

"Reveille's in five," Sam murmurs.

Maya groans softly. "I know. You just... always look like you slept."

Sam keeps folding. "I didn't."

Maya watches her a beat. "You okay?"

Sam's answer is the only one a plebe is allowed to give in the morning.

"I'm fine," she says.

It's not a lie.

It's a cover.

They move with the platoon river toward the passageway, shoulders squared, eyes forward. Sam can feel the building vibrating with speed - everyone rushing, everyone late, everyone trying not to get noticed.

A Firstie barks at a plebe for a crooked collar.

A door opens and slams.

Someone laughs too loudly and gets silenced by a glare.

Normal Academy chaos.

The kind that makes people careless because it feels constant.

Sam doesn't get careless.

At breakfast, she eats quickly, taking small bites; nothing slows her. She tracks the room without moving her head - who's watching which table, who's walking against the flow, who's standing still when everyone else is moving.

Maya leans close. "Do you ever just... relax?" she whispers.

Sam's mouth doesn't change. "No."

Maya huffs a breath that might be a laugh if she weren't exhausted. "You're going to outlast all of us."

Sam doesn't answer.

Outlasting is not the goal.

Surviving is.

After her meal, Sam's schedule hits like a slap: classes, briefings, formation, a chain of obligations stapled to the day. She moves through it with precision, the way she moves through everything - fast, quiet, uninteresting.

By 1030, she's back in her company area, pushing through the corridor with Maya beside her.

Maya is talking - about a quiz, about a Firstie who seems like a psychopath, about how she'd sell her soul for an hour of sleep - and Sam is half-listening, half-scanning.

They reach their door.

And Sam feels it before she sees it.

A change in the air.

Not fear.

Not sound.

A thin, clean scent - like fresh paper and toner and something sharp beneath it.

Maya doesn't notice. Maya is normal.

Sam's hand pauses on the knob.

Inside, the room looks exactly the same as it did when they left.

Except for one thing.

A thick manila envelope sits on Sam's desk.

Centered. Neat. Deliberate.

Maya steps in behind her. "What's that?"

Sam closes the door gently, then crosses to the desk without hurrying.

Hurrying is a tell.

She picks up the envelope and reads the front.

MIDSHIPMAN SAM WILLIAMS

COMPANY ____

BANCROFT HALL

Below that, in smaller type, printed like a label from an office machine:

SECURITY QUESTIONNAIRE - FOLLOW-UP

GUARDIAN: DANIELS, THUNDER (RET.)

Sam's swallows once - hard.

Maya leans in. "Daniels... is that your - "

"Not here," Sam says quietly.

Maya stops mid-sentence, confusion on her face.

Sam flips the envelope over. No return address. No signature line. Just a seal tab pressed down hard enough to leave a thumbprint in the glue.

Maya whispers, "How did that get in here?"

Sam doesn't answer.

She opens it carefully, as if paper can cut.

Inside is a single sheet - clean, official formatting, the kind people obey without thinking.

SUBJECT: ROUTINE SECURITY LIAISON CHECK-IN

TIME: 1300 TODAY

LOCATION: SECURITY LIAISON OFFICE - ADMIN SUITE

ATTIRE: SERVICE DRESS

NOTE: ATTEND ALONE. DO NOT DISCUSS WITH PEERS.

A second page sits beneath it - more clinical. A checklist. Boxes. Blank lines. A form that turns a person into a file.

SECURITY QUESTIONNAIRE (SUPPLEMENTAL)

Have you used any other names or nicknames? ____

List all foreign travel and foreign contacts (past 10 years): ____

Do you possess any items of foreign origin significant to identity or lineage? ____

Sam's throat goes dry.

Items of foreign origin.

The locket presses warm against her chest under fabric, as if it knows it's being summoned.

Maya reads it over Sam's shoulder and goes pale.

"Alone?" she whispers. "Is that... normal?"

Sam lets the moment linger.

No.

Nothing about "alone" is normal anymore once you've learned what it can mean.

Sam studies the paper again. There's a line at the bottom - small, almost hidden - like an internal routing note never meant to be visible to a plebe.

IF MIDSHIPMAN QUESTIONS REQUEST, REMIND HER: GUARDIAN DANIELS HAS BEEN NOTIFIED.

Sam feels heat rise behind her ribs.

Notified.

As if Thunder Daniels is a lever they can pull.

Maya's voice shakes. "Sam, who is Thunder Daniels?"

She wants to tell Maya everything - because Maya is staring at her like a person who suddenly sees the edge of a cliff.

But telling Maya turns Maya into a target.

Sam keeps her voice low and flat.

"He's my guardian," she says.

Maya frowns. "Like... family?"

Sam doesn't correct her.

Family is safer than truth.

"Like that," Sam says.

Maya swallows. "Why would they put his name on a questionnaire?"

Sam stares at the boxes.

Because they want her to write the wrong thing in ink.

Because a checkbox lives longer than a conversation.

Because if she writes the Kurdish name, she gives them permission to build the story they want.

Sam doesn't say any of it.

She does the only thing she can do that isn't emotional.

She documents.

Sam pulls her notebook from the top drawer and writes quickly, without flourish:

TIME: 1034

EVENT: Envelope delivered inside secured room.

LABEL: "Security Questionnaire - Follow-up" / "Guardian: Daniels, Thunder (Ret)."

DIRECTIVE: Security Liaison check-in 1300; "Attend alone"; "Do not discuss with peers."

QUESTIONNAIRE: "Other names" / "Foreign contacts" / "Items of foreign origin significant to identity or lineage."

ROUTING NOTE: "Guardian Daniels has been notified."

WITNESS: Maya Holbrook (present upon discovery)

Maya watches, eyes wide. "You're... writing it down."

Sam caps the pen.

"Always," she says.

Maya's voice drops. "Sam, this feels... wrong."

Sam meets Maya's eyes for the first time in the conversation.

"It is," Sam says quietly. "So we do it the right way."

Maya's eyebrows knit. "The right way is... going alone?"

Sam's voice stays calm.

"The right way is staying boring," she says. "Staying on schedule. Staying visible. And not giving them a scene."

Maya looks like she wants to argue.

Sam doesn't let her.

She folds the papers once - slow, precise - and slips them back into the envelope.

Then she sets the envelope exactly where it was, centered on the desk.

Because the person who placed it wants her to move it like she's startled.

Sam refuses.

Maya's hands tremble. "Should you tell someone?"

Sam's mind flashes through lanes - who helps, who hurts, who reports to whom, who can isolate her with a smile.

"I'm not telling the wrong person," Sam says.

Maya swallows. "Who's the right person?"

"I don't know yet," she answers honestly. "But I know the wrong move."

Maya's face tenses with fear. "Sam - "

A knock interrupts her.

Three sharp hits.

Not a casual knock.

Not friendly.

Official.

Maya looks at her like she's about to drown.

Sam steps to the door and opens it.

A first-class midshipman stands in the corridor, expression blank like he's reading from an internal script.

"Midshipman Williams?" he asks.

"Yes," Sam replies.

"Escort Midshipman Williams to Admin at 1250," the Firstie says. Then, without lowering his voice much - like it's meant to be heard - he adds:

"And keep her close."

Sam's stomach drops.

Keep her close.

Not keep her safe.

Keep her close like she's property.

The Firstie's gaze cuts to the manila envelope on Sam's desk - just a quick glance - and then back to Sam's face.

He knows.

Or he was told to pretend he doesn't.

Maya's voice is small. "Why are you - "

The Firstie cuts her off without looking at her.

"This doesn't involve you, Holbrook."

Maya flinches.

There it is again.

Isolation by language.

Sam nods once, controlled.

"Yes, sir," she says - not because she respects him, but because she refuses to give the building the reaction it wants.

The Firstie turns to leave.

Sam closes the door gently and leans her forehead against it for one slow breath.

Then she straightens.

Maya's eyes are wet. "Sam, what is happening?"

Sam picks up her notebook and writes one more line, the line turns noise into meaning:

THE HUNT JUST ANNOUNCED ITSELF.

She caps the pen and looks at Maya.

“From now on,” Sam says quietly, “if anyone tells you not to talk to me - tell me anyway.”

Maya nods hard, swallowing a sob.

“And Sam?” Maya whispers.

Sam remains silent.

Maya’s voice shakes. “What’s your other name?”

For a beat, the room goes very still.

Sam’s pulse spikes.

This is how it starts - questions that feel like curiosity until you realize they are extraction tools.

Sam keeps her expression neutral.

“You don’t ask that,” she says softly.

Maya flinches, hurt flashing.

Sam’s voice stays low but firm.

“Not because I don’t trust you,” she says. “Because I don’t trust whoever wants you to ask.”

Maya’s breath catches.

Sam slides the envelope into her drawer, locks it, and stands.

She smooths her uniform like nothing is happening.

Like she’s just another plebe walking into another appointment.

That’s the trick.

She looks normal.

So nobody will notice when the danger finally stops being paper.