

ROSEBLOOD

Friday evening

Kronberg Concert Hall

New York City, New York

VIEWED THROUGH THE CRYSTAL-CLEAR MAGNIFICATION of the illuminated rifle scope, the young woman playing the piano was a mesmerizing sight.

She was not playing the piano so much as she was making love to it. During quiet passages, her body swayed gently from side to side on the piano bench. As the tempo increased and the intensity built, she rocked back and forth in a passionate embrace of the music, her long blonde hair falling off her bare white shoulders.

Absorbed in an intense *presto* passage, the girl leaned in, her face almost touching the keys. The fingers of her right hand were a blur up and down the keyboard while her left hand anchored the movement with a pounding rhythm. The plangent notes of the solitary piano filled the high-ceilinged concert hall with as much power and fury as that generated by a full orchestra.

From his sniper's nest in the cramped electrical room, high above and in front of the stage, Michael Quinn peered through the rifle scope, scanning the stage around the girl.

Who would want to harm her?

At the thought his lips turned down at the edges.

The electrical room, which was really more the size of a large closet, was unventilated and becoming uncomfortably warm. Quinn's shirt collar was sticking to the back of his neck, and clammy pools

Kevin Scott Olson

itched under his arms. The small of his back ached from sitting on the stepladder that served as his makeshift perch. Still watching the stage, he removed a bandana from his back pocket and wiped away the beads of sweat that had gathered at the top of his forehead.

He glanced down at the damp, faded blue cotton in his hand. No, it didn't go with the rest of his attire for an evening at a concert hall. But he was loyal to that bandana. It had served him in barren deserts, on bitterly cold mountains, and in countless other places. It would serve him here. With a dry section of the fabric, he carefully wiped off the ring of perspiration on the rubber eyepiece and then put the bandana back in his pocket.

Sliding the small rectangular window open another couple of inches, he slowly moved the rifle barrel from side to side, making sure that the entire concert hall was within range. Then he leaned forward and resumed peering through the scope.