

Kiss of Death

By Meryl Sawyer

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Adam Hunter needs Whitney's help to prove that his uncle—the estate's original owner—was murdered. But as the two begin begin to unearth the truth about Cal Hunter's shadowy past, it's Whitney's own life that is suddenly on the line.

Because someone someone nearby thinks she knows too much…

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Editorial Review

Review
"For romance, passion and thrills, read Meryl Sawyer." -- *New York Times bestselling author Susan Elizabeth Phillips*

"The name Meryl Sawyer is synonymous with exceptional romantic suspense." -- *Romantic Times BOOKclub*

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ADAM HUNTER, YOU'RE DEAD.

Adam knew he was at death's door and his gut cramped. In less than a split second he realized his life was over.

Finished.

The other guys hadn't sensed the danger, didn't know death was a heartbeat away. Adam watched—his breath suspended in his lungs—unable to utter a word.

His body didn't seem to belong to him. It was almost as if he were seeing a film, as if this must be happening to someone else—not him. He wasn't meant to die—not now, not here.

Some distant part of his mind still functioned, warning him. Blood coursed through his veins and reality arced through him like a jolt of electricity, spurring him to action. Move! Run! But there wasn't any time to run—nowhere to run—no place to hide.

A garbled sound clawed its way out of his throat. *Duck!* In an instant his world exploded in all-consuming pain and the bleak darkness of hell.

SHREDS OF BLOODY IMAGES dissolved into the present. His uncle's chauffeur was driving Adam to Calvin Hunter's Greek villa. Adam was still too engulfed in a tide of memories to notice much as the limousine sped along the narrow road. The panicky, trapped feeling returned and surged through his body with vivid reality, then subsided as he realized the danger had passed. By some strange miracle, Adam had survived.

He'd cheated death.

The others had not been so lucky. A half ton of steel surrounding them and seven pounds of reinforced Kevlar per man hadn't protected them.

Adam hadn't managed a good night's sleep since escaping death. He thought if he could go home, he would be able to finally get some rest. Adam longed to put his head down on his own pillow and stretch out on his own bed—safe at last.

Home.

What a concept. He didn't have a home. All his so-called worldly possessions were in a storage unit, gathering dust.

He was still alive and traipsing around in paradise. He was a long way from the hellhole in Iraq where he'd come within inches of dying. Thanks to an inexplicable twist of fate, Adam had now arrived at his uncle's villa in the Greek Isles. His uncle had sent his private jet to Turkey, where Adam was supposed to be recuperating at the U.S. Air Force base.

Calvin Hunter greeted him with a smile some might have mistaken for the real deal. "Adam, how was the flight?"

Adam shrugged dismissively. He realized it was a rhetorical question. Hell, Calvin knew the flight to Siros Island on his jet had been spectacular. His uncle would expect Adam to be impressed, but once you've looked death in the eye, it's hard to be impressed. Damn near impossible.

"How are you feeling? Are you okay now?" his uncle asked, touching his arm in a way that was meant to show concern. Adam doubted his uncle was worried about him. If anything, Calvin seemed a bit nervous. He kept looking around as if he was expecting someone.

"Never better." This was a bald-faced lie, but Adam didn't know his uncle well enough to discuss how he was feeling. Maybe if Tyler were here, Adam could tell his best friend how he really felt, but Tyler was halfway around the world in California. "Nice place," Adam said because he felt it was expected. *Nice* was an understatement—like saying Versailles was

"nice." The villa must contain as much loot as Versailles, too. Security guards manned the front gate and ringed the perimeter of the walled estate. The limo that had brought him here had been armor-plated and had bulletproof glass. The man riding up front with the driver had been armed.

His uncle gazed at him for a moment with shrewd eyes. Adam tried to gauge what the older man was thinking, but didn't really give a rat's ass.

"Let me show you—" Calvin gestured with a strong hand that sported a pinkie ring with a large canary-yellow diamond

"—your suite."

Adam looked down a hallway he could have driven a Hummer through with room to spare. The villa on Siros was over the top, just like the Citation jet. His uncle had always been larger than life and an enigma.

He trudged behind his uncle, still wondering why Calvin had sent for him now. His uncle had always distanced himself from their small family. Even though Calvin Hunter's primary residence was in San Diego, he hadn't bothered to return when his half brother had died four years earlier. Adam had handled his father's funeral arrangements alone. Of course his father's friends had offered to help, but there had been no other relatives at his side. He was still pissed with his uncle. Calvin had sent a floral arrangement and a condolence telegram. That was it.

He supposed that cheating death had somehow gotten his uncle's attention. That must be why he'd stepped back into Adam's life and sent the jet to pick him up.

Calvin Hunter was in his early fifties but looked a decade younger. He retained a military stride from his years in the navy as an arms specialist in naval intelligence. The hell of it was, Calvin Hunter was a dead ringer for Adam's father. Adam hadn't been able to feel much since "the incident" last month but now—seeing his uncle—memories of Adam's father resur-faced. And he hated Calvin for resurrecting the past with all its sadness.

"This is it," his uncle said as he gestured toward the open door of a suite with a sweeping view of the harbor.

Without a hint of enthusiasm, Adam muttered, "That's a killer view."

Calvin studied him with cool blue eyes, as if he were an egg about to crack. "Why don't you change into fresh clothes and join me on the terrace for a drink?" Without waiting for a response, Calvin pivoted in place, then walked away.

Adam sauntered through the room and tossed his well-worn duffel on the brocade bedspread. Fresh clothes? Yeah, right.

He crossed the marble-tiled room again and went out onto the balcony. The majestic sweep of ocean and rolling hills beyond captured his attention. The timelessness of Greece and its long history awed Adam. He was the center of his own world, but being here reminded him that the earth was bigger than one man.

Others had died needless, bloody deaths. And countless men had cheated violent ends to their lives. He wasn't unique. In the long history of this planet, Adam was merely another man who had been granted a second chance. He should be grateful, but somehow, the shock hadn't worn off yet.

Adam stood silently and gazed at the boats bobbing at anchor and the crescent-shaped stretch of cafés lining the quay until he lost track of time. The sharp, frantic barks of a dog sent him back into the suite, which consisted of a sitting area that opened through a vaulted archway into the huge bedroom where Adam had carelessly tossed his duffel.

He rummaged through his things and found a pair of jeans and a *Coldplay Rules* T-shirt. Neither were what his mother—God rest her soul—would have called clean, but he didn't possess anything better. One of the guys in his unit must have thrown a few things in a duffel as he was being Medvaced to one of the field hospitals set up in Iraq.

He scrounged around and came up with his dop kit. If his clothes weren't pristine, at least he could shave. He wandered into the bathroom and spotted the claw-foot bathtub with a handheld shower.

"When was the last time you showered?" he said out loud. His mind was playing tricks again. He couldn't remember, but he must have bathed in Turkey.

The words echoed in the high-ceilinged room. He shucked his jeans and shirt, then peeled off his shorts. They dropped to the floor beside the tub.

He turned on the taps but didn't wait for warm water before stepping into the tub. It had been over two years since his last real hot shower. The field units had cold showers, which the guys actually liked since the desert was hotter than hell. A fine spray misted over his still-bruised body. Unexpectedly, needles of scalding water pummeled his skin. He stared at the show-erhead for a moment before the thought—hot water—registered. He adjusted the taps.

Using the bar of soap from the wall-mounted wire rack and a washcloth, he scrubbed his entire body twice. The shampoo on the rack smelled like peaches, but he used it anyway. His fingers told him how long his hair had gotten without him quite realizing it. He'd been overdue for another military buzz cut when he'd almost died. After that, no one bothered with his hair.

He dried himself, then found his comb in the dop kit and slicked his hair back behind his ears. It hung down to the nape of his neck. He found a throwaway razor in his kit, but there wasn't any shaving cream. He used

the bar of soap to lather up.

Adam caught his reflection in the gold-rimmed mirror.

Beneath brown brows a shade darker than his hair, Calvin Hunter's emotionless blue eyes stared back at him. Well, shit, what did he expect? He and his father, as well as Calvin, had all inherited Grandpa Hunter's eyes. But his father's and grand-father's blue eyes had sparkled with life and good humor. He'd had those eyes once, too.

Dressed in the black T-shirt and jeans, he wandered down the hall in search of the terrace. The villa was obviously old but immaculately maintained. Potted palms with ivy cascading from their bases were dramatically placed among what had to be authentic antiques. He spotted armed men moving about—not quite out of sight. More guards?

"Thees way, meester," called a small man who must be one of the servants. He pointed to a double set of French doors that were opened onto a terrace overlooking the magnificent harbor. The setting sun bled into the night and washed the sea with a peaceful amber glow that reminded Adam of his childhood years in California.

His uncle, attired in white slacks and a navy sports jacket, rose from a round garden table. He looked over his shoulder at the house, and Adam saw the curtains move, then caught a man's profile. One of the guards must be watching to make certain Adam didn't harm his uncle or something. Weird. Friggin'weird.

In his uncle's arms was a small dog that had no fur on his body except for tufts of hair on his paws and tai...

Users Review

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