

**DOUBLECROSS**

**MISSION TITANIC**



**JUDE WATSON**

SCHOLASTIC INC.

For all the clue hunters on the message  
boards— we couldn't do this without you!

— J.W.



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# CHAPTER 1

*Attleboro, Massachusetts*

*Revenge is sweet, but humiliation is sweeter.*

*And world domination is a definite plus.*

He stood on the knoll overlooking the mansion. It had burned and it had been rebuilt—stronger, better. Just like him.

The children were inside, the ones who thought they knew what they were doing.

The undeserving.

His plan was in place. He would defeat them, own them. What they'd done to the Cahill family was unforgivable. Made the Cahills soft and stupid, vulnerable, open, a loose confederation of “family” instead of the dense, glittering network of brilliance and strength it should be. Exchanging ideas about how to *share* rather than *control* and *dominate*.

*Grace, you would weep if you saw this. You were never*

*soft. You had that ruthless streak. Until the end, when your fear overcame your reason.*

*You gave it all away.*

It had taken years of planning, but it was together now.

*Rest easy, children. Your world is about to implode.*

## CHAPTER 2

First, there was Napoleon Bonaparte.

He set out to conquer the world and succeeded. Became a general at twenty-four. Crowned himself Emperor of France about ten years later. He did spectacularly well until that disaster at Waterloo, when the Brits beat the pants off him.

*What happens when you surpass your role model?*

Ian Kabra smiled as he climbed onto a step stool and faced the mirror. So much handsome stared back. It was almost too much. He smoothed back the lock of dark hair that kept falling in his eyes. Imperfection was just annoying.

At seventeen, he was head of the most powerful family in the world.

Plus, he was taller.

*Take that, Cousin Napoleon!*

Ian didn't think that genetics was destiny, but it was a definite plus having Napoleon in his family tree, as well as Catherine the Great, Benjamin

Franklin, and Winston Churchill. The greatest strategic minds in the history of civilization were all related in the twisting branches and tendrils of the Cahill family line. Even today, the real titans—giants of industry, technology, finance, art, music, athletics, endurance—were all related to him, from Nobel Prize-winning scientists to Edith Laverne Oh-Flurrie of Norman, Oklahoma, who patented a new sewing machine bobbin at the age of ninety-two and treated herself to a new armchair recliner on the proceeds. Which were somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty million dollars.

Edith was an Ekat, the branch of the Cahills that was studded with science and technology geniuses. The Tomas were exceptional physical specimens. The Janus, the creatives, were the artists and dreamers who set the world on fire. Ian's own branch, the Lucians, were, like Cousin Napoleon, brilliant strategists and thinkers. And then there were the Madrigals, the under-the-radar branch that had come out of hiding only recently. Ian had been born a Lucian (thank goodness—Ian still felt a deep loyalty to them), but was a Madrigal as well. The Madrigals were now the leaders of the Cahills because they were the only branch the others agreed to trust.

Yes, the Cahills were exceptional, but they needed someone to lead them. Enter Ian Kabra.

From a control panel by his bed he could activate screens that would put him in touch with Cahill

family leaders all over the world. He could put the entire mansion on lockdown, order people to do what *he* planned and strategized, and request his morning tea.

“You sure you want another quarter inch, bud? Seems kinda short.” The tailor stood in the master closet, squinting at Ian’s trouser legs.

From his position on the step stool, Ian frowned down at the tailor. “Mr. Funicello, I gave you precise measurements from my London tailor. And you delivered trousers that were an inch and one half too long. There is no mistake whatsoever.” He gestured at his suit. “This must be done right. I have an important meeting in a week.”

“So you said already. Three times.” The tailor set out his box of materials and, sighing heavily, bent over to fold Ian’s trouser hem.

What Americans didn’t know about tailoring! Trousers should be a precise length. What was hard about that? A graceful curve on the shoe, not cascading like a waterfall around your ankles. His cousin Jonah Wizard’s pants? *Painful* to look upon.

Living in the United States after London . . . well, it had its challenges. You had to put up with the horrors of tea bags, for one thing. And he was constantly having to *explain* things. How when he told the driver to put his suitcase in the boot, the driver just stared at him. As if *trunk* made any more sense than *boot*? And when at the cinema (twenty films in one theater!

Now there's a concept!) he suggested to his cousin Hamilton Holt that they try the lift instead of the crowded escalator, Hamilton had lifted him in his arms and carried him up the stairs. Humiliating! As a Tomas, his cousin had an impressive physique, but surely even Hamilton's brain could grasp the British term for "elevator."

He was homesick for London, for fog, real marmalade, and people who understood hand-tailoring and the class system. People who knew how important his family was, even though he had disowned them. Only his father was left, and Ian was perfectly happy never to see him again.

Raised by vicious snobs, it was true. But snobs with money and style.

Ian admired his suit, appreciating the mirrors that gave him a total view of his appearance. He'd had to install them when he'd moved into the master bedroom. He'd created a secret safe room and taken the opportunity to expand the closet. As the former head of the family, his cousin Amy Cahill had supervised the renovation of the half-destroyed mansion, but a girl who lived in gray T-shirts and blue jeans did not understand the importance of walk-in closets.

A week from now, Ian would lead his first annual Cahill Family Summit meeting. Branch leaders from all over the world would attend on videoconference, and notable Cahills would stream into Grace Cahill's mansion. Every detail had to be right, from the scones

and clotted cream of the elaborate English tea to the technical challenges of screens and cables and the smooth operation of the *Gideon*, the Cahill family's own satellite.

Not just right, Ian amended, his gaze unfocused as the tailor measured his inseam. *Lockstep perfect.*

Because lately, just in the past few weeks, things had seemed a bit . . . wobbly.

From the very beginning, the squabbling Cahills had been hard to manage. He hadn't given Amy enough credit. She'd been a powerhouse in an ill-fitting T-shirt, and everyone had looked up to her. They'd known that she and her brother had defeated Cahill enemies and fashioned the family into an organized unit. It had been her vision that had rebuilt the mansion, had pushed the technology for the satellite, had brought everyone together for conferences and retreats, had tightened the digital network. How she'd gotten them to agree, and to agree to disagree, he still didn't know.

He thought it would be *fun* to give orders. He didn't expect people to question his decisions! The truth was, he thought he'd be a far superior leader to Amy. And he *was*, in many ways, of course . . . but why did the family seem to be slipping from his grasp? Branch leaders not checking in, prominent Cahills not taking his calls . . . the *egos* he had to deal with . . .

The tailor had finished marking the hem. He laid out a row of pins.

"Be sure it's straight."

“Sure, bud.”

“I am not your *bud*, Mr. Funicello. Are you aware of who pays your bill?”

Cara Pierce burst into the room, breathless. “Ian!”

Ian grabbed at his trousers. He wasn’t wearing a belt, and he wasn’t entirely sure all his seams were sewn. “Cara! Did you ever hear of a quaint custom called knocking?”

“Oh, please, I knew your tailor was here.”

“Precisely!”

“Listen, Your Highfalutingness, we’ve got a problem.”

Cara strode toward him, impossibly beautiful and incredibly annoying. As a matter of fact, *impossible* and *incredible* basically defined his second-in-command. Cara made fun of him constantly, wore a baseball cap in the house, ate potato chips from a can, and could probably beat him up. She was also most likely smarter than he was. She was definitely, absolutely, completely not his type.

Except . . . she was his soul mate. She was his one true pairing. She was the sugar in his cup of tea, the butter on his crumpets, the tinsel on his tree. His destiny.

She just didn’t know it yet.

She raked a hand through her chin-length blond hair and held up her smartphone. “I’m having problems logging in to *Gideon*.”

“Atmospheric disturbance?”

“Could be. But why is the Cahill Summit on my calendar for today?”

He turned back to the mirror. “Don’t fret, it’s next week.”

“If you can tear yourself away from yourself, take a look at your phone.”

“Can’t you see I’m in the middle of something important? OW!”

“Sorry, bud.”

“You stuck me!”

“Ian, *look at your phone!*”

He gave in and fished his phone out of his jacket pocket. He frowned. “It does say today. Must be a software glitch. Isn’t that your area? You’re the master hacker.”

“It’s not a glitch; it was *moved*,” Cara said. “Just a few minutes ago. The meeting is now scheduled to take place in five minutes!”

“Well, maybe on our phones, but not in actuality.”

“Well, *in actuality*, I can no longer log on to *Gideon* to check the network. This feels hinky.”

“*Hinky*? What sort of word is that? If you keep using slang, I’m going to have to start watching American television, and nobody wants that. I can’t make a decision based on emotion. Tell me an observable fact, and —”

Maybe he’d gone too far. Because suddenly Cara’s beautiful clear green eyes had turned icy and she was coming at him hard. Feet first.

## CHAPTER 3

The kick missed him by a millimeter and connected with Mr. Funicello's chin. The skinny tailor went flying. His head slammed back against the wall and he went limp.

"Cara! I admit the fellow couldn't sew a straight seam, but—"

Cara bent down and picked up a vial that had rolled across the carpet. "The pins." She gestured at the mirror. "I saw him dip them into this liquid."



"So he wasn't just clumsy," Ian said. He put out a hand to steady himself.

“How many times did he stick you?”

“Just once.”

“How do you feel?”

“Uh. Surprised? Irritated? Gobsmailed?”

“Any numbness?” she asked urgently. “Pain?”

“I feel absolutely topped, except for the part where you’re making me extremely nervous.”

Cara squinted at the label and then typed it into her phone. “Okay,” she said after a few seconds that felt like hours. “It’s not poison.”

“Excellent news.” Ian tried not to look relieved. It was important to keep his cool in front of Cara. He had a feeling she didn’t appreciate his manly qualities.

“It’s a mild sedative. The cumulative effect wouldn’t even have knocked you out. Just slowed you down. He had a handful of pins, so he was planning to scratch you plenty of times.” Cara tossed the bottle into the bag and stood, her hands on her hips. “Do me a favor. The next time I tell you something’s wrong, try believing it.”

“You hardly conveyed a sense of great urgency,” Ian said.

“What do I have to do, kick you?”

“You almost did!”

“Sorry I missed,” Cara muttered.

Ian bent down to rifle through the tailor’s pockets. “No ID. Just in case he got caught, he’d want to be untraceable. Mr. Berman did the background check. We can get information from him. But why would

someone want to sedate me?” Ian’s mind clicked over possibilities. “A kidnapping? Not again!”

“Well, that’s straight from the Cahill playbook, but I don’t think so. What was that?”

The sound of tires on the brick-paved courtyard came to them. They heard the slam of a car door. Cara hurried to the double-height windows and peered outside into the gray winter morning.

“There are fifteen limousines in our courtyard and a line of cars stretching back to the gate,” she said. “Is that enough *actuality* for you? This wasn’t a glitch in our calendars. Somebody rescheduled this meeting! They didn’t want to kidnap you —”

“—they just wanted to slow me down,” Ian said. “The question is who. And why.”

“You could cancel the meeting.”

Ian shook his head. “Impossible. They’re here! They’d never stand for that.”

“You could be walking into a trap.”

“It’s not a trap if I see what’s coming.”

They dragged Mr. Funicello—or whoever he really was—into the safe room and locked the door. As they hurried down the wide, carpeted stairs, Ian and Cara could hear the murmur of voices growing louder. At the landing overlooking the grand entrance hall, they bumped into a frazzled Mr. Berman running upstairs toward them.

“Mr. Kabra, Ms. Pierce— why didn’t you tell me the

meeting was today? There are cars arriving! The Cahill family leaders! Governors! Ambassadors! Astronauts! Nobel Prize winners! Olympic athletes! Somebody parachuted into the meadow! There's a Buddhist monk down there! And they'll all need coffee, and tea, and whatever the Russian ambassador drinks. I shall have to prepare a *lunch*! I can't just make crab soufflé out of thin air, you know!"

"Relax, Mr. Berman," Cara said. "Just do the best you can."

Mr. Berman looked at Ian. "Are you all right, sir? You look . . . pale."

"I'm fine. But Mr. Funicello is enjoying a short stay in our safe room," Ian said, trying to tuck his shirt more securely in his pants.

"Should I . . ."

"He'll be all right. Let's stay focused. We need to greet our guests."

Mr. Berman straightened. "Yes, sir. I won't fail you." He turned and hurried down the stairs.

Good old Berman. Ian surveyed the hall below. It was packed with his relatives, close and distant.

And at least one enemy.

Cahills could be ruthless when it came to personal agendas. Someone had a vested interest in Ian not being on top of his game.

"Hamilton and Nellie aren't here," Cara said. "All our allies must still think the meeting is next week!"



"It's all right." Ian focused on the faces in the crowd, planning his strategy. "Just make sure all the remote feeds are working."

"I'm not worried about the *feeds*. I'm worried about whoever targeted you being in the house right now. I'm hitting the emergency signal."

Ian shook his head. "Not necessary. I've got this." If he couldn't handle a little sabotage, what kind of a leader was he?

"It was an attack on home ground. It's protocol."

"Don't alert anyone. That's an order."

Something cool and distant arose in Cara's gaze. Ian had seen it before. She didn't like orders, and she didn't like being reminded that technically, he was the boss. He'd put his foot in it again, had blundered when he'd meant to be strong. But there was no time to fix it. Ian continued down the stairs.

He looked over the sea of heads and cleared his throat. Gradually, the buzz died down.

"Welcome to the Cahill mansion," he said. "I am delighted to see all of you."

A gray streak crashed into his vision. The cat leaped through the air and landed on Ian's shoulder, a move the demented, *evil* creature enjoyed. Ian had always hated Saladin. He'd never imagined that with Amy and Dan's departure he'd end up inheriting the catmonster.

He swatted Saladin off just as Cara lunged to grab



him. Saladin evaded Cara's reaching hands and slid down Ian's trouser leg, using his claws.

Ian heard the sound of seams ripping. He grabbed for his waistband, but it was too late.

He stood before the assembled mass of the most important Cahills in the world in his boxer shorts.

## CHAPTER 4

*Television studio, Glorious Kitchen cable network,  
New York City*

The smiling host faced the camera while the audience cheered.

“Welcome back to the finals of the home cooking contest! The winner will receive a profile in *Glorious Kitchen* magazine, plus a chance to be the host of his or her own cooking show! The judges have tasted some phenomenal food. Now, let’s move on to our last finalist. Welcome, NELLIE GOMEZ!”

Wild cheers erupted. Nellie Gomez felt the waves of love pulsating from the audience. These were her people. Food people. She had introduced herself a week ago by saying “I love to eat. I love to cook. I once ate a fried grasshopper. My parents are totally pissed off I’m not at college right now.” From that moment, she’d been their favorite.

This was her big break. Her own cooking show! She knew she could do it. She had saved her best recipe for

last: her spicy crab cake soft tacos with lime yogurt sauce and mango salsa. Nobody had ever put crab cakes in a taco before, and it was genius. Her boyfriend, Sammy Mourad, had flipped over them. Her secret ingredient? Toasted pumpkin seeds.

And charm. Loads and loads of charm.

Nellie set to work chopping and mixing, keeping up a steady chatter that had the audience laughing and clapping. She handed her plate of pure, fresh deliciousness to the judges.

She could tell by their faces that the tacos were a hit. One judge's eyes closed and he almost fell off his chair.

The judges leaned over to confer. Nellie's nerves were now at a screaming point.

She felt her cell phone buzz in her apron pocket. Three quick bursts. The Cahill emergency alert. She drifted back behind the counter and gave it a quick look. Her face flushed.

"And now for the winner of our *Glorious Kitchen Home Cook Competition!* The judges have reached a verdict!"

The spotlight ranged over the hopeful faces of the contenders.

"NELLIE GOMEZ!"

Pandemonium reigned as the audience stamped and howled.

The spotlight roamed, hitting the losing contenders, searching, wavering . . .

Nellie Gomez was gone.