

IN HIS WAKE



CHAD
ZUNKER

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE WIFE YOU KNOW* AND *FAMILY MONEY*

PRAISE FOR CHAD ZUNKER

Family Money

“The action barrels along to a shocking conclusion . . . Zunker knows how to keep the reader hooked.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

An Equal Justice

Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction Finalist

“A deftly crafted legal thriller of a novel by an author with a genuine knack for a reader-engaging narrative storytelling style.”

—*Midwest Book Review*

“A gripping thriller with a heart, *An Equal Justice* hits the ground running . . . The chapters flew by, with surprises aplenty and taut writing. A highly recommended read that introduces a lawyer with legs.”

—*Crime Thriller Hound*

“In *An Equal Justice*, author Chad Zunker crafts a riveting legal thriller . . . *An Equal Justice* not only plunges readers into murder and conspiracy involving wealthy power players but also immerses us in the crisis of homelessness in our country.”

—*The Big Thrill*

“A thriller with a message. A pleasure to read. Twists I didn’t see coming. I read it in one sitting.”

—Robert Dugoni, #1 Amazon bestselling author of *My Sister’s Grave*

“Taut, suspenseful, and action packed with a hero you can root for, Zunker has hit it out of the park with this one.”

—Victor Methos, bestselling author of *The Neon Lawyer*

An Unequal Defense

“In Zunker’s solid sequel to 2019’s *An Equal Justice*, Zunker . . . sustains a disciplined focus on plot and character. John Grisham fans will appreciate this familiar but effective tale.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

Runaway Justice

“[In the] engrossing third mystery featuring attorney David Adams . . . Zunker gives heart and hope to his characters. There are no lulls in this satisfying story of a young runaway in trouble.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

**IN HIS
WAKE**

ALSO BY CHAD ZUNKER

Not Our Daughter

The Wife You Know

All He Has Left

Family Money

David Adams Series

An Equal Justice

An Unequal Defense

Runaway Justice

Sam Callahan Series

The Tracker

Shadow Shepherd

Hunt the Lion

IN HIS WAKE

**CHAD
ZUNKER**

 **THOMAS & MERCER**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, organizations, places, events, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Otherwise, any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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To Wade and Monty, the best brothers

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[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

ONE

They found him in Costa Rica.

They followed him in the shadows for three days. He'd lost some serious weight, probably more than fifty pounds, but gained a golden tan. Gone was the pale skin and girth they'd observed in the profile pictures. Gone were the puffy cheeks and bloodshot eyes, the look of a man who spent every day in a plush high-rise office working mind-numbing hours. The hair was nearly the same, though, peppered gray and trimmed up short to the scalp.

The hair was a mistake. He should have completely changed it.

Bryson Carter led the field operation. He was a twenty-year CIA man who'd run covert missions all over the globe before going private and joining the secretive security group in DC. He had a team of five working with him. All former agents like him who were ready to get paid well for their skill sets.

The man spent most days on the beach. Blue-jean cutoffs, no shirt, sandals, still a slight belly—probably from his clear affection for Imperial, Costa Ricans' favorite local beer. A gray beard now covered his chin. In his past life, he was clean-shaven and ready for court. The chin had been altered. They were sure of that. Rounded off at the edges. Maybe the cheekbones, too. The face was much tighter, and not just from the rapid weight loss. He looked ten years younger. He'd hired a skilled professional. That was smart. They were interviewing local plastic surgeons, but he could have had it done anywhere. They sent digital surveillance images back to the home office in DC on the first day. Their identification software gave them a 92 percent affirmative match.

He wore his sixty-two years well. Lean arms and strong shoulders. He lived alone on a thirty-two-foot sailboat that he worked on most days. A real beach bum. The only people he regularly interacted with were the locals in a dumpy bar called Jacko's Paradise. They asked around. Jacko didn't know much about him, said he'd been coming into the bar for about two months, called himself Red, and mostly kept to himself. Always paid in cash. The two men had talked about baseball and boats but not much else.

There was nothing inside the sailboat that identified him. No wallet with a driver's license, no credit cards, no passport, no used airline tickets, no prescription medicine, no old magazines with subscription labels, and no official boat records. He clearly didn't want to be known. In their three days of monitoring him, they had not seen one other person climb aboard his sailboat. They'd been inside already, on the first day. There were no hidden compartments on the boat. No safes under the bed or in the back of a tiny closet. No secret files. Nothing. They'd searched every corner without leaving a trace of their presence.

He paid for everything in cash. They found a thick envelope with about \$5,000 worth of colón, Costa Rican currency, tucked beneath the worn mattress. He had more money elsewhere. Millions more, if their client file was correct. An anonymous Cayman account? A safe-deposit box? A secret locker?

They were digging. They would find it.

He never used a cell phone. They'd yet to see him use any phone. He owned a weathered stack of old Louis L'Amour Westerns. There was no TV in the sailboat. No internet. There was an old iPod with a few albums on it. Merle Haggard. Johnny Cash. Hank Williams. Other country singers they didn't recognize. The music account was inactive. The iPod had, at one time, been registered to a college student out of Miami. They had people there who had spoken directly to the kid. The student said someone had paid him \$200 cash for the device at a bus stop four months ago and then had him download music. They felt the student was telling the truth.

They found him. But nothing else yet that connected him to his crime. The clock was ticking. They could not observe him forever.

Near the end of the third day, they followed him through the busy local market. It was hot, crowded, and noisy. They watched as he purchased bread and fruit and looked so at ease among the locals. They were surprised at his casual demeanor. He never looked nervous. He rarely checked over his shoulder, searching for eyes that might be watching him. They thought this was unusual for someone in his position. He was not one of them, a former spy or military specialist trained in evasion tactics. On the surface, he was not someone who could easily set up a new life in another country. He was only trained in the law. A paper pusher. A simple corporate attorney on the run. A former law partner who'd scammed millions from the wrong men. And who'd almost gotten away with it.

Hidden in the shadow of an alley, ten feet away, one of them said his name, just loud enough to be heard over the clatter of the busy outdoor marketplace. “Dawson!” They watched. He flinched, turned, just slightly but enough to reassure them. His eyes went back to the guava in his hand. He then swiftly paid for his items and left the market.

They would take him quickly. An unmarked van was waiting around the corner. They’d already secured a tiny cabin deep in the jungle. A place where a man could scream at the top of his lungs for countless hours and no one would hear him. They would get the answers they wanted. They always did. They were professionals who could be very persuasive. No one had lasted more than a week.

They followed him down the dirt road to the beach. They’d been ready for him to run. Instead, he walked at a steady pace, kept his eyes ahead, and looked calm. But he didn’t know his elaborate plan had slowly come unraveled. He didn’t know he’d been discovered back in the States. He was unaware they’d been searching for him for the past month. And now he’d been found.

The dead man had come back to life.

TWO

The familiar brown UPS truck was stolen three states away.

It was given new plates and untethered from company tracking devices.

His client's men had left it for him in a parking lot around the corner from his Austin hotel. The key was sitting in a crack in the tread on the back tire. He would leave the vehicle in a junkyard outside the city, where they were instructed to destroy it. There could be no traces. His name was Yusuf Demir. But most in his secretive world called him the Caracal. A name derived from a medium-size wildcat found in the Middle East and Africa, and known to be highly difficult to observe. It was an accurate description. He'd been trained in the Bordo Bereliler—considered the elite unit of the Turkish military—before becoming one of the most lethal assassins in the world.

He'd never worked in the United States. Until today.

He parked the truck in an alley behind the pristine thirty-three-story Frost Bank Tower in the heart of downtown and checked his watch. Ten fifteen in the evening. If everything was still on schedule, he had exactly twenty-two minutes to get in position. He got out of the truck and adjusted his custom-fit brown UPS uniform. No detail of this operation could be overlooked. He circled to the back of the truck, opened the door, and pulled out a heavy-duty dolly. He then loaded it up with several large UPS-marked boxes.

After shutting the truck door, he wheeled the dolly down the alley toward the underground delivery entrance to the high-rise office building. He could see the old security guard through a window just inside the check-in door. Demir plucked a key card from his front shirt pocket and held it up to the security scanner. The light on the scanner went from red to green, and the secured door clicked open. He grinned, relieved. He didn't want to have to unnecessarily kill a security guard. That would only complicate things. The guard placed a clipboard in front of him as he stepped up to the counter.

"How're you doing tonight?" Demir asked.

His English was perfect. He'd hired a private tutor more than a decade ago. It had to be perfect for him to operate all over the globe.

"Hanging in there," the guard said, barely looking up.

Demir glanced behind the guard and over to the corner of the booth. Security camera. Didn't matter. He wore a black knit cap, glasses, and a fake beard. He thought he could hear a football game coming from a cell phone hidden beneath the counter. Americans loved their football. He'd watched their beloved Super Bowl once. It had bored him. He preferred soccer (what the Americans called it). Demir filled out the appropriate information on the clipboard, grabbed the dolly, and hauled it around a corner to a pair of service elevators. He was inside a few seconds later and traveling alone up to the top floor of the building.

He checked his watch again. Right on time. When the elevator arrived, he quickly got off. A financial consulting firm called Atlantis leased the entire top floor. But Demir wasn't visiting the company. Instead, he found a janitor's closet in the hallway around the corner from the firm's glass doors and pushed the dolly inside. He then grabbed a slender box from the dolly that was long enough to hold a telescope lens. But that was not what was inside the container. He shut the closet, stepped around a corner, and approached a door leading to the stairwell. With the box tucked in his right arm, he swiftly ascended the stairs. Once he reached the next level—one that was only for maintenance and mechanical work—Demir located a steel ladder attached to a wall that led to the building's rooftop.

He climbed up with the box in tow, pushed through a metal door above, and was staring down at the Austin skyline a moment later. He walked a full circle to take in the view in each direction. To the north, the well-lit, massive pink granite of the Texas State Capitol building. To the south, the Colorado River, hugged on both sides by walking trails. He'd never been to the city. He'd heard the music scene was superb. Maybe he'd find out for himself on another trip. Demir maneuvered around the rooftop and made his way to the side facing southeast. He found a position between two jagged-glass panels, set the box down, and tore it open. Inside, he pulled out a hard black case. After popping it open, Demir stared down at the pieces of his impressive sniper rifle.

He checked his watch. He was three minutes ahead of schedule.

As he had a thousand times before, he went through his routine of meticulously putting the rifle together and checking all the calibrations.

Satisfied, he set the gun's bipod on top of the concrete wall and allowed the long rifle barrel to peek out over the ledge. Demir removed his fake glasses and placed his sharp eye to the custom-built scope. He adjusted the rifle through several skyscrapers and found his target. The front of the Four Seasons Hotel was 812 meters away. Through the powerful scope, it seemed more like five feet. He'd hit targets from four times the distance. He could see the wrinkles on the forehead of a black-haired bellman standing just outside the glass doors. It was a cool October evening. Thankfully, there was very little wind tonight. Three miles per hour out of the northeast. It was consistent and not swirling. Near-ideal conditions. The wind was critical for success and was part of his \$40 million contract. If there was too much wind, he could walk away and keep \$1 million just for showing up. But he refused to leave the other \$39 million on the table.

Demir felt the tiny disposable cell phone vibrate in his pocket. It was a phone left for him inside the glove box of the UPS truck, only for this mission. Like everything else, it would be destroyed shortly.

He reached down, pulled it out, read the text message.

Two minutes. All is set.

He repositioned himself, eye to scope, and took a few deep breaths. He began focusing on members of the intense security detail surrounding the luxury hotel. Over two dozen men in dark suits, out on sidewalks, steps, parking lots—undoubtedly a mix of FBI and Secret Service. Demir quickly counted at least another eight men with rifles paired with spotters with binoculars on top of surrounding buildings. Secret Service sniper teams. He was certain he was outside their protective bubble.

A string of black Suburbans suddenly turned off the street and entered the hotel's circular drive. Four of them in a row. His info told him vehicle number three held his target. The Suburbans began parking directly in front of the hotel. Men in dark suits jumped out on all sides, even more men scrambling into protective positions. A group of them huddled around the doors of the third vehicle, a wall of human bodies, men willing to lay down their lives for their country. Demir would only have a split second to engage. There was zero room for error.

He reached up and pressed a button on a tiny black box the size of a small battery that was connected to the powerful scope. The entire incident

would be recorded. Thanks to technology, the world would soon get to watch his achievement in high-definition detail. This was also part of his contract.

Two men exited the vehicle first.

His finger flinched ever so slightly on the trigger upon spotting the second man. But he stopped. Not yet. Not him.

Then a third man appeared. Stood straight. Glanced to his left. It was him.

Demir squeezed the trigger. The rifle engaged. The bullet cut perfectly through the air. The Caracal didn't blink. He didn't move. He barely breathed. Had he calculated precisely? He then saw the familiar spray of blood and tissue explode from his target's head. And the wonderful chaos that immediately followed.

A perfect \$40 million kill shot.