Slack Tide – Chapter One

# Scenes 1–2: “The Perimeter / The Gala (Intercut)”

Bogotá, Colombia – 01:17 hours  
  
The jungle pressed close against the fence line—wet, breathing, alive.  
  
Sara Lin crouched beneath the gnarled limbs of a strangler fig, her black suit soaked through with humidity. Her breath was steady. Silent. She didn’t blink as a guard passed just three meters away, boots crunching on damp gravel.  
  
“In position,” she whispered into the mic embedded in her collar.  
  
The voice in her ear was calm, familiar.  
  
“Satellite shows same guard pattern. You’re clear for forty-five more seconds.”  
  
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Vienna’s National Gallery had never looked more radiant.  
  
Under the soft glow of crystal chandeliers, the finest minds in philanthropy, policy, and innovation gathered for an evening that promised impact. Velvet-draped tables lined the marble atrium. Laughter floated on strings of chamber music.  
  
At the center of it all stood Adrien Hartman, polished but not pretentious, gliding from conversation to conversation like a seasoned diplomat.  
  
“You helped launch our satellite schools in Sudan,” he told a UN envoy.  
  
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Sara exhaled slowly through her nose. Every move mattered.  
  
She slung her pack tight across her back, pushed off the trunk, and sprinted in a low crouch across the slick grass toward the estate’s rear wall.  
  
The mansion rose out of the mist like a fortress in a painting.  
  
She reached the south wing door. Locked. A tool slid from her wrist sheath into the access panel.  
  
“Back entrance accessed,” she said.  
  
“Confirmed. Proceed to top floor. Last bedroom on the left. You have one minute.”  
  
She double-exhaled. Her signal.  
  
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“The water projects in La Guajira wouldn’t exist without you,” Adrien said to a telecom CEO.  
  
A projection wall near the stage cycled through curated stories of hope.  
  
An aide leaned in. “Ops Division confirmed the Bogotá site is moving ahead.”  
  
Adrien nodded without pause. “We’re building something incredible in Colombia.”  
  
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Inside the estate, the corridor was marble and silence.  
  
Sara padded up the staircase, bypassing the red-carpeted landing. Upstairs, she paused—photographs of children and vacations lining the walls.  
  
“Thirty seconds,” came the voice.  
  
She moved.  
  
At the final door, she paused. No need for showy weapons tonight. Her methods didn’t stain walls or leave bullet holes. Quiet solutions were cleaner—more her style.  
  
She turned the knob and stepped through.  
  
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A champagne flute clinked gently against a microphone.  
  
Lights dimmed.  
  
Adrien stepped onto the stage. “Good evening,” he began. “Tonight is not just about what we’ve done. It’s about what we can still do.”  
  
Applause rippled through the crowd.  
  
“We’re expanding our micro-loan program, launching clean energy corridors, opening our first youth medical hub in Bogotá.”  
  
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Sara entered the room.  
  
A child slept under a pale blue blanket. A nightlight glowed beside the bed, casting a soft hue across a solar system mobile, a scatter of books, and a plush bear held loosely in one arm.  
  
“Confirm target,” the voice came.  
  
She stared.  
  
Then—low, bitter, sharp—  
  
“They want me to kill a kid.”

# Scene 3: “Fallout”

The room was still. The kind of stillness that comes just before a storm.  
  
Sara stood over the sleeping child, unmoving, her pulse a drumbeat against the silence. The syringe in her gloved hand was no longer a tool—it was a decision. A line. A weight.  
  
She turned her head slightly, eyes scanning the quiet room: a bookshelf of dog-eared novels, glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling, a pair of sneakers with frayed laces by the dresser. Nothing here deserved to be part of this.  
  
Her breath came slow, controlled.  
  
With delicate precision, she stepped to the nightstand, set the syringe down gently beside a half-empty glass of water and a paperback left open on its spine. She positioned it just so—neither hidden nor flaunted. A message.  
  
She took one last look at the child.  
  
Then she moved.  
  
Down the stairs, across the hall. No alarms, no footsteps above. At the rear corridor, she paused just long enough to pull a black data tag from her waistband. She crushed it between her fingers, rendering her comms and location signal irretrievable.  
  
She was now officially off-mission.  
  
No GPS. No backup. No voice in her ear.  
  
Sara stepped into the garden shadows and vanished into the night.  
  
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Three hours later, a response team breached the estate’s perimeter in complete silence. They moved like a surgical tool—efficient, invisible.  
  
The handler, voice now transmitted through a hardened relay, surveyed the empty room through a body-cam feed.  
  
“Target unharmed,” came the report.  
  
A pause.  
  
Then the camera tilted down.  
  
There, on the nightstand, sat the syringe.  
  
A long silence followed.  
  
“Understood,” the voice replied coldly. “Initiate recovery protocol. And find her.”

# Scene 4: “Drift”

Open water. No horizon. No name.  
  
Sara sat cross-legged on the deck of Nymeria, a mug of coffee cooling in her hands, salt clinging to her sleeves. The autopilot hummed softly behind her. Sails full. Course steady. No one chasing—yet.  
  
She hadn’t slept since Bogotá.  
  
She told herself it didn’t matter. That running was still better than following through.  
  
The drawer beside her bunk was latched shut. Inside, the hard case that once held the syringe rolled gently with each tilt of the boat. It hadn’t been cleaned. She hadn’t even looked at it.  
  
Let it roll.  
  
She scanned the water ahead. Tomorrow she’d reach the chain of islets—a quiet bay, friendly cruisers, no questions. Somewhere to disappear for a while. Maybe longer.  
  
Out here, she didn’t have to explain. No one asked where you came from. Only where you found fresh water. And whether you had spare line.  
  
She sipped the bitter coffee.  
  
Tomorrow, she’d learn their names. Tell them hers. A name she hadn’t used in years.  
  
Tomorrow, she’d become no one.  
  
And for now, that was enough.