

A

Jonathan

McGregor

Novel

THE FARM

By:
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The Farm
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Published by: Max M. Power at OBOOKO
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While this book is printed in 2013, it was written in 2003. Events that took place after the completion of this book have changed the world, we are better for it, but I did not want to totally change this story. I hope you enjoy.

Please send all questions or comments to:

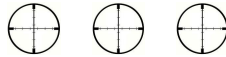
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*For Veronica and Gabrielle.
Thank you for believing I could become a writer.*



I would like to say a special thank you to all women in the world. You have a stronger influence in the world, more than you will ever know. Even if we do not show it at times, men would be lost without the women in our lives.

I have had the good fortune to have been influenced by very strong women. From my grandmother who taught me that a lack of funds did not mean I could not live a rich and fulfilling life, to my many aunts who would slap me around, reminding me how good I had it while their own children did not.

From my mother who always rode my ass, remaining tough and strict, despite her feelings of wanting to give in, making sure I walked a path of light instead of slipping into an abyss of darkness forever, to my sisters who would pick fights with me for no other reason than they could because they are my sisters and it's their job to torment me as such. To my dying day I know one of my sisters will still make me scream in frustration and smile, that's what siblings do.

From the many teachers who put up with the headache that was me as a student, desperately trying to teach me something to the one teacher who planted the seed that grew into my path that is writing. Thank you Mrs. Williams.

From my wife who gave me the greatest gift of all, our daughter, another strong woman that will drive me crazy because that is her role as a daughter. Everything I do I do for my family, to provide a better life than I have.

From my many friends who read what I write and demand I give them more, to those that threaten I would regret it if I ever stopped writing.

To Tyra Banks, whom I have never met, but with one single general question to the world, unlocked the flood gates that allows me to write so freely.

To the many future women I will meet in my life and in one way, shape, or form will inspire me to write something.

Even the bible acknowledges women as a great army. They certainly are the backbone of my life and for that I wish to say, "THANK YOU!!!"

I would like to thank the members of my fan club. For pushing me to be a better writer than I thought I could be. For always demanding more of me and never accepting NO for answer, this book is for you. As always:

"Submitted for your approval..."



Chapter 1

Langley

"Mr. Ramstead," the voice of the guard in the lobby said over the speakerphone, "there are two gentlemen in the lobby who say they are here for an appointment with you."

"I don't have any appointments today," Brian answered as he picked up the phone. "Do you have a name?"

"No Sir. They said they met you two weeks ago in New York and are here as promised."

"Alright, I'll be right down." Brian hung up the phone as he shook his head in disbelief. "That son of a bitch made it," he said to himself. "Sheila," Brian called out to his secretary in the other room, "I'm heading to the lobby. Hold all my calls."

"Yes Sir, Mr. Ramstead," Sheila answered.

Brian grabbed his coat and walked out the door. He still could not believe that Jonathan actually showed up. As he took the elevator down to the lobby Brian thought back two weeks. The day he met Jonathan face to face was a bad day for him.

Jonathan had ambushed Brian and took him by surprise. The fact that Jonathan was even able to ambush Brian proved that he belonged in the CIA, not many people can get the drop on a senior field agent like Brian. If Jonathan had been an enemy Brian would have been dead.

The elevator doors opened to reveal a busy lobby. Brian stepped out to find Jonathan and Johnson standing in front of the wall of fallen agents. A black star was mounted on the white marble wall whenever a field agent died in the line of duty. No names, no acknowledgement of any kind except a solid black star.

Brian had figured he would find them standing there at the wall since Jonathan had made reference to the wall when he had ambushed Brian.

“Mr. McGregor, Mr. Johnson, glad to see you made it,” Brian said sticking his hand out to shake hands.

“Merry Christmas Mr. Ramstead,” Jonathan said sarcastically, tossing a brown paper bag into Brian’s gut. “Forgive me if I don’t shake hands just yet.”

Brian opened the bag. Inside were all the things Jonathan took from Brian in the restroom, his wallet, his PDA, his cell phone, his money, and the two guns he was carrying that day.

“It’s all there,” Jonathan stated calmly. “Every last penny.”

“I seen you kept the cell phone and PDA off the entire time.”

“Didn’t want you tracking me before our appointment,” Jonathan answered smugly.

“Come on Johnny let’s get this over with,” Johnson said.

“Well, you heard the man,” Jonathan said with a smile at Brian. “We are here as promised Mr. Ramstead. Please let’s get started.”

“Okay. Follow me gentlemen.” Brian turned and headed toward the guards. They were going into the heart of Langley. Not a word was spoken until they got to Brian’s office.

“Gentlemen, please sit down.”

Jonathan and Johnson sat in the chairs in front of Brian’s desk. Brian closed the door then sat down at his desk.

“Here’s the deal gentlemen, Brian said as he opened the two files sitting on top of his keyboard. “You two do not have to take the psych test we require of all applicants due to your *unique* situation in New York.”

“You *do*, however, have to go through the same training all CTs have to go through. Yes I came to you but you still have to go through *our* training. Being Marines I’m sure you will do well.”

“If you pass CT training then all the charges against you will disappear but if you happen to wash out you will be arrested for those charges, are we clear so far?”

Neither man moved a muscle. They continued to stare at Brian.

“Okay. We have a bus that leaves at 18:00 tonight. You will be on that bus and spend the next four months on the Farm. No one there is to know who you really are or what you are there for. As far as they are concerned you are regular CTs. I will check in on you from time to time. I wish you both good luck. Any questions?”

“I need to get Hera,” Jonathan stated.

“Hera? Who’s Hera?”

“Hera is my rifle,” Jonathan answered with a slight grin, like a proud parent. “She’s the one who killed all those monsters in New York.”

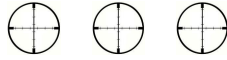
“Really,” Brian replied, his interest perked. “I want to see this. I’ll have Sheila draw up the paperwork so you can store it.”

“I’m not storing her Mr. Ramstead,” Jonathan snapped back quickly. “I take her with me or I don’t go.”

“Any *other* demands,” Brian asked, annoyed at Jonathan’s arrogance.

“No,” Jonathan answered sarcastically, “that’s it.”

“Okay. I’ll make it happen. Welcome to the CIA gentlemen.”



The doors to the bus closed. There was no turning back now so Jonathan closed his eyes to sleep. Everyone on the bus was chatting but that was not going to bother Jonathan, he was use to sleeping in all kinds of conditions. Jonathan had no idea where they were going or how long it would take to get there. Might as well get some sleep while he could.

“Just like going back to basic huh Johnny,” Johnson said, nudging Jonathan with his elbow. “Wonder if any DIs will be waiting to yell at us when we get there.”

“Just don’t piss your pants like the last time,” Jonathan said with a smirk, his eyes still closed.

“Fuck you bub,” Johnson answered.

“Shut up and get some shut eye,” Jonathan whispered as he tried to get comfortable in his seat. “That’s an order.”

“Hope you know what you’re getting us into,” Johnson said before closing his eyes.

Jonathan answered with slow breathing, he was already fast asleep. Sleep was his time to spend with Joni and Jillian, his wife and daughter.

Today they were out on a picnic. Joni was wearing a long sundress with no sleeves, her long hair flowing down, dancing on her shoulders.

Jillian was in a white dress with a huge sunflower across the front. She was barley learning how to walk but did not want to wear shoes so Jonathan carried Jillian on his shoulders.

Jillian pulled Jonathan’s hair to help stabilize her while she drooled on top of his head. Jonathan did not mind the pain of his hair being yanked. Anger had no place in his dreams, only joy.

The sky was blue. The grass was lush green. The sun was bright and shining. Jonathan could not be happier, he was with his girls.

All of a sudden Joni kissed Jonathan deep and long. That signaled the dream was over and it was time to wake up. Jonathan held on as long as he could until Joni and Jillian evaporated from his dream.

“Sorry to wake you Johnny but we’re here,” Johnson whispered as he pushed on Jonathan’s shoulder.

“It’s okay Johnson.”

The two men sat in silence as the bus came to a slow stop. Men outside were checking the bus over. Dogs were sniffing for bombs. Other men checked underneath the bus using mirrors. It took ten minutes for the bus to get the all clear. The gate to the Farm opened. The bus pulled forward slowly.

It was dark outside, not that there was anything to see anyway. Trees were the only thing visible for half a mile. The bus pulled to a stop again. This time the door opened. A tall slender man stepped onto the bus. Everyone quieted down when he stood on the top step.

“Ladies and gentlemen I am Ryan Star,” the man introduced himself in a loud calm booming voice. “I am the chief instructor here. Let me be the first to welcome you to the Farm.”

“I need everyone to step off the bus in an orderly fashion. We are all adults here so let’s act like it shall we. Here at the Farm we are all professionals. So if you were expecting Drill Instructors you can relax. There will be no yelling here.”

“Your bags will be waiting for you when you step off the bus. Please grab them and make your way into the dorm rooms. Ladies are to the East, men are to the West.”

Ryan stepped off the bus. Everyone stood up except Jonathan and Johnson. They were going to wait until everyone else passed them. No sense in rushing.

As the last person walked past their seat Johnson stood up and Jonathan followed. They stepped off the bus and grabbed their military duffel bags. As everyone was filing into the dorms Jonathan and Johnson were mentally sizing them up. They were creating their own stories in their heads about each person they saw, men and women both.

This was an exercise they had learned during Sniper training, trying to come up with someone’s life story before ever talking with them. Soon it becomes a game for them, an interesting game if nothing else.

The dorm rooms were set up like military barracks. Beds were lined up in a row along two walls, opposite of each other.

Jonathan took the one furthest from the entrance. Johnson took the bed opposite him. Jonathan had figured every little thing would be a test so why not keep the instructors guessing.

“Attention CTs. Attention CTs. You have fifteen minutes to report to the main hall.” The loud speaker on the wall went quiet again after the announcement.

Cliques were already forming. Everyone made their way to the Main Hall. Conversations were everywhere. No one had bothered to say a word to Jonathan or Johnson.

Jonathan decided to have a little fun with the group. On the way to the main Hall Jonathan started humming the song, Secret Agent Man. Johnson followed Jonathan’s lead and in no time they were getting looks. The more looks they got the louder they hummed. By the time they reached the Main Hall the humming had gotten so loud they started singing.

The only seats left were in the back row, right where they wanted to be. They sat down, still singing the chorus of the song.

“Thank you gentlemen for the entertainment,” Ryan said coldly as he walked in. They both stopped singing. “If you would please, stand up and introduce yourselves.”

Jonathan stood up first, “I’m Joe Friday.”

Johnson stood up next, “And I’m Frank Monday.”

“Role playing comes later,” Ryan snapped, annoyance creeping into his voice. “Your real names please.”

“No disrespect Sir,” Jonathan answered, “but we were informed by Mr. Ramstead that our real names are classified to the CTs here as well as our original code names. We were told we would receive new names here at the Farm, Sir.” Jonathan smiled large and proud at his smart ass remark.

Ryan took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“How many here have heard of the New York Sniper.” Everyone raised their hands. “Then you should recognize these two gentlemen from the television. The gentleman to my left is Jonathan McGregor, a.k.a., DEATH, the man who allegedly destroyed the mafia in New York City.”

“The man standing beside him is Ty Johnson. They are both Marine Snipers. Experts in hand to hand combat, explosives, and concealment. If you need help in these areas ask these two

gentlemen, I'm sure they'll be more than happy to answer your questions." Ryan returned Jonathan's smile just as largely. "You may be seated."

Jonathan and Johnson took a bow before sitting down. "So much for our names being classified," Johnson whispered. "Now everyone knows who we really are."

"Yea, well, did you really expect them not to know," Jonathan answered, not taking his ice cold gaze off of Ryan.

"Again, welcome to the farm," Ryan continued, silencing the room. "You people are here because of one reason; you are the best of the best. You are smart, athletic, agile, and most importantly, you believe in the well being of your country."

"For the next three months you will be tested to your limits. You will learn a variety of things we like to call the Black Arts. You will become experts in explosives, firearms, and hand to hand combat. You will be a force to be reckoned with."

"For those of you who want to be James Bond and save the world I'm here to tell you that this is not the place for you. Some of you will quit within the first two weeks. Others will be washed out. When this happens you can still work at Langley as clerks."

"I would suggest this for you 'cause you get to show off your cool CIA ID badge." Laughter filled the Main Hall. "Okay you are dismissed to your rooms. I suggest you get some sleep. Tomorrow's going to be a long day."



Chapter 2

Introductions

The dining area was quiet. Everyone seemed to be tired. Not much sleep was given on the first night. Ryan had dismissed the CTs to bed thirty minutes past midnight. The loud speaker woke them up at five a.m. At five thirty they went for a ten mile run. They were fed breakfast then taken to the yard to perform sit-ups, pushups, Tai-Chi, then they broke for lunch.

"Told you Johnny, just like boot camp."

"Relax Johnson. They're just trying to shake everyone up. At least we don't have any ugly D.I. in our faces."

"Amen to that brother."

Jonathan and Johnson were sitting alone. They got looks from the other CTs but no one had come to talk with them. Everyone seemed afraid. They ate lunch quickly, not sure of how much time they had.

Drill Instructor Leon use to yell at them during boot camp, "Eat! Eat! Eat! You can taste your food when you puke it up later." Another scare tactic used in basic training but one that stuck.

Jonathan looked up to see another CT leaving his table and walking over to theirs. He nodded his head toward Johnson to look over his shoulder. Johnson turned around as the CT got to the table.

"Hey guys, mind if I join you?"

Johnson looked at Jonathan. They both smiled.

"Sure buddy," Jonathan answered. "Knock yourself out."

"Name's Ronnie Bass," he said as he sat down. Jonathan and Johnson continued to eat in silence. "So are you really the guys that took on the mob," Ronnie asked eagerly.

"Pay up Johnson," Jonathan said with a smile. Johnson handed Jonathan his dessert.

"What's going on?"

"Just a little bet," Jonathan answered. "Did you come over here on your own Ronnie or did you lose a bet, be honest."

Ronnie sat there, opened mouthed, shocked, before recovering and answering slowly, "I lost a bet."

"I'll take a bottle of Scotch Johnson," Jonathan said, keeping his attention on Ronnie.

"Damn you Johnny," Johnson snapped, faking being angry.

"Sorry about that Ronnie," Jonathan explained. "We had a little bet going of our own. Now what can we do for you?"

"The guys want to know if you really killed all those men."

"Yes I did," Jonathan answered coldly.

"They say you killed over three hundred men in New York."

"Okay," Jonathan said nodding his head, trying not to laugh. "If you say so. I will go along with that."

"And that doesn't bother you," Ronnie asked surprised.

"Does it bother you Ronnie," Jonathan asked, looking him straight in the eyes, not showing any emotion.

"It scares me a little," Ronnie admitted.

"Then I think you shouldn't be here," Jonathan stated coldly. "Good men die every day. Our job is to protect the good and kill the bad. If that fact bothers you then you don't have what it takes to be here. Maybe you should quick."

"Fuck you man," Ronnie snapped back, very pissed off. His grandfather was one of the original founders of the CIA, before it was even a branch of the government back in WWII. His father was an overseas operative where he had met Ronnie's mother. That made Ronnie third generation CIA, if anyone belonged at the Farm it was him. "Who are you to tell me I don't belong here. You don't know me."

"You're right Ronnie, I don't know you," Jonathan snapped quickly. "But if it scares you that I killed so many *bad* guys, how are *you* going to be able to kill anyone?"

Ronnie sat there in silence with a blank stare on his face.

"That's what I thought Ronnie," Jonathan said smugly, killing the silence. "If you *can't* do it without thinking then you can't do it at all. Hesitating will get you killed because it's kill or be killed in this business. Make no mistake Ronnie Bass; I'll kill you in a heartbeat if I have to."

"But we'll see what happens during training," Jonathan continued, sitting forward, inches from Ronnie's face. "We'll see what you're made of on the field. Till that day, enjoy your lunch."

Jonathan and Johnson stood up and left the table. Ronnie sat there stunned. He could feel the other CTs looking at him. Ronnie turned red from embarrassment.

"Whoa Ronnie, what did he say," Simon White asked as he came over and sat down next to Ronnie. Simon had sent Ronnie over.

"He admitted to killing all those people," Ronnie answered, not looking at Simon.

"Guess we got a bad ass in our class," Walter Echo said as he sat down across from Ronnie.

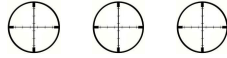
"Yea," Ronnie agreed; venom in his tone. "Even said he'd kill me if he was ordered to."

"Kind of harsh," Simon said, "the nerve of that guy."

“He also said I didn’t belong here,” Ronnie snapped.

“Come on Ronnie, we both belong here,” Walter chimed in, trying to lift Ronnie’s crashing spirits. “We’re both third generation spooks. It’s in our blood.”

“You’re right Walter. I’ll show that son of a bitch I belong here more than he does.”



Whispers filled the Main Hall. After lunch the CTs went for a five mile run through the woods. After the run CTs had two hours to themselves before reporting back to the Main Hall. There was no sign of the instructors anywhere.

Brian Ramstead and Ryan Star sat in silence watching the security monitors. One of the instructors walked into the Main Hall. He began passing out a small pocket book. CTs were trying to ask him questions but he passed the books out in silence. Once all the books were passed out he left without saying a word.

On the screen Brian was watching Jonathan and Johnson. They held onto their books but did not open them. Everyone else was flipping through their books pointing out different areas of the book to each other.

“I here you caused some trouble for my boys yesterday,” Brian said over his shoulder to Ryan.

“You shouldn’t have told them that their names were classified,” Ryan answered with a smile. “That’s bullshit and you know it.”

“That came from the Director not me,” Brian said smartly. “Still, seems like the other CTs are scared of them.”

“I don’t care about that. What concerns me is that they don’t care to be here. They’re not taking anything serious.”

“You mean that song last night,” Brian asked.

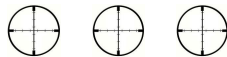
“That and their attitude during P.T.,” Ryan answered with a small sigh. “I’m sorry Brian but I honestly think they’re not CIA material.”

“Well I’ll bet you two bottles of Scotch they become the NOC.”

“Come on Brian, *BOTH* of them?”

“Okay, four bottles then. And none of that cheap shit either.”

“You’re on,” Ryan said smiling. “I’m going to enjoy making those two quit.”



Jonathan was lying on his bunk staring at the ceiling. He closed his eyes, longing for sleep to come. Johnson, however, was wide awake.

He was lying on his bunk, reading a comic book that he had brought with him. Johnson loved comic books, something he never outgrew from his childhood.

Ronnie, Simon, and Walter were sitting at the other end of the barracks. They were playing poker while trying to figure out a way to get even with Jonathan and Johnson.

“I think we should take out the geek first,” Simon suggested with a whisper. “I don’t think he’s anything without McGregor.”

“I agree with Simon,” Ronnie said, eyeing Johnson over Walter’s shoulder. “How tough could that little pussy be? And they said I don’t belong.”

“Do you think you can take him by yourself Ronnie,” Walter asked, “cause I’m sure Simon and me are going to be busy with McGregor.”

“Are you kidding,” Ronnie laughed under his breath. “I can beat that little pussy easy. When I’m done with him I will join you two on McGregor. I’m going to personally make sure he can’t continue on here.”

The three men stood up. They walked slowly, taking their time, to the back of the barracks where Jonathan and Johnson’s bunks were. Ronnie had a can of Coke in his hand. He took one last sip before pouring the rest onto Johnson’s comic book.

“Oops,” Ronnie said sarcastically. “I’m sorry. Did I do that? My bad.”

Johnson brushed the Coke off his comic book. He stood up, shaking the wet pages. “It was an honest mistake,” he answered back sarcastically. “No harm done as long as it stops now.”

“What did you say little man,” Ronnie snapped, getting nose to nose with Johnson. “You threatening me? It sounds like you’re threatening me.”

“Sounds that way to me too,” Simon taunted.

“What’s going on,” Jonathan asked. He was still lying in bed with his eyes closed.

“Just a little accident Johnny,” Johnson answered calmly with a smile. “Nothing I can’t handle.”

“Yea McGregor,” Walter chimed in. “It doesn’t concern you.”

“Do you need any help,” Jonathan asked, laying still, his eyes still closed.

“Can’t your friend fight his own battles,” Ronnie answered, trying to taunt Johnson.

“I wasn’t asking him jackass,” Jonathan replied. “That fine though. I’m trying to get some sleep here Johnson, try not to make too much noise okay.”

“No problem Johnny,” Johnson answered, never taking his eyes off of Ronnie.

“You got to be shitin’ me,” Ronnie said chuckling. “You’re not going to help your friend?”

“Why,” Jonathan asked, rolling over to his side, trying to get comfortable. “Johnson’s a big boy. He can take care of himself. Just make it quick okay. I’m really tired.”

“Three to one Johnny,” Johnson said, still smiling from ear to ear. “Doesn’t seem fair.”

“Well what the hell do you want me to do about it Johnson, the already said they don’t want my help,” Jonathan blurted out annoyed. “Just get it over with already, I’m going to sleep.”

Jonathan rolled over again, this time his back to Ronnie, Simon, and Walter. The three men stood there shocked that Jonathan was going to lay there and do nothing. Shock turned into humor. Beating Johnson was going to be fun.

“What are you going to do now *geek*,” Ronnie taunted with a smile of his own, pride pouring through every word.

“Ask you to leave me alone,” Johnson responded calmly.

“Not going to happen,” Ronnie answered.

“Then legally I have to tell you that what you want to do right now is a *very* bad idea,” Johnson said. “Now that I’ve done that let’s get it on.”

The three men laughed out loud. They took another look at Johnson and laughed again.

“You think you can take me little man,” Ronnie asked laughing.

“All three of you and not even break a sweat,” Johnson answered.

“I’ve got a triple black belt in Ta Kwon Do you asshole,” Ronnie snapped back.

“Good for you but I don’t care if you need three belts to hold your pants up. Now are you gonna talk all night or are you going to fight,” Johnson paused for a quick second before adding, “Faggot!”

That was the spark Johnson needed. Humor left Ronnie's face. It was replaced with anger. Ronnie threw a jab with his right arm without moving his feet. The punch came without warning but missed its target.

Johnson side-stepped the punch and countered with a left back fist to Ronnie's face. Johnson connected. Stepping back to get some distance between himself and the three other men Johnson was trying to decide if he should toy with them or end this fight quickly.

Everyone in the barracks was watching except for Jonathan. He had no need to watch. He already knew how it was going to turn out.

Walter and Simon spread out so Johnson couldn't run. Not that Johnson wanted to run anyway. Johnson decided to end this fight quickly and with minimal damage.

Walter tried to grab Johnson's arm. Johnson allowed him to do so while Simon grabbed his other arm. Ronnie thought he had Johnson where he wanted him.

Ronnie was wrong.

Johnson made a weak attempt to struggle away from his capturers. He could see from the smile on Ronnie's face that his plan was working. As Ronnie inched closer Johnson back flipped quickly, kicking Ronnie in the chin. Ronnie fell back to the floor.

Johnson pushed himself off the wall behind him with his legs, freeing the grasp of his attackers. He flew forward and landed on top of Ronnie. With one hard punch downward Johnson knocked Ronnie unconscious. He jumped forward, off of Ronnie, rolling across his back onto his feet.

Simon and Walter hesitated for a second before charging Johnson. Walter arrived a half second before Simon.

Johnson spun to the side, dodging Walter. As Walter's head past Johnson he punched the back of Walter's head hard. Walter fell to the floor. Now it was Simon and Johnson.

"Not bad for a *geek* huh," Jonathan said, sitting up in his bed facing Simon.

"Fuck you McGregor."

"Simon, what part of 'Expect in Hand to Hand Combat' did you *not* understand," Jonathan stood up and walked up behind Johnson. "I think you should help your friends to their bunks or you'll *all* be sleeping on the floor tonight."

Simon looked at Johnson who was ready to fight. He looked back to Jonathan who looked pissed off. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Jonathan was providing him a way out. Simon took it.

He dragged Ronnie back to his bunk. He came for Walter and did the same thing.

"Oh Simon," Jonathan called out as Simon reached his bunk.

"What," Simon snapped.

"You guys owe Johnson ten bucks for that comic book you ruined."



Chapter 3 The Crab Cake

"Excellent shot Team Two," Instructor Vans said into his radio. "Stand down for further instructions."

"Roger that," came the reply, "Team Two standing down."

Instructor Vans switched channels to be able to talk with the other team out in the field. “Round Two, Team One you’re up. Here come your targets.”

Out of the bushes rolled two Power Wheels toy jeeps that were outfitted to operate by remote control. The jeeps rolled out into the open with balloons tied to the seats inside. Each jeep had five yellow balloons surrounding one red balloon. The red balloon was tied a half inch higher than the yellow ones. This was an assassination exercise. The object of this exercise was to shoot only the red balloons. Each team has three shots per round, two rounds per exercise.

The jeeps were rolling faster this time around. Simon had wasted all three shots in the first round. Now it was Ronnie’s turn

“Okay Ronnie,” Simon said as he tracked the jeeps with his binoculars, “hopefully you can do better than I did. Targets are at two hundred yards moving away from our position, fast.”

“I got ‘em,” Ronnie answered, looking through his scope, tracking the lead jeep.

Ronnie lined up his sights carefully. He squeezed the trigger slowly. The bullet fell short of its target. He fired again and popped one red balloon. Ronnie fired the last round, hitting three yellow balloons before popping the red balloon.

“Good shooting Ronnie,” Simon said, confirming Ronnie’s kills.

“Thanks Simon,” Ronnie answered, proud of himself. “That has to put us at number one on the score board.”

“Team one your mission is complete,” Instructor Vans radioed. “You can R.T.B. (*Return To Base*) Team Two we are unable to repair your damage so you can R.T.B. also.”

“Team One Wilco,” Simon responded.

“Roger that,” Jonathan answered, “Team Two is R.T.B.”

The radio went silent. Ronnie and Simon began looking for the shell casings of the six rounds they had fired. They were not to leave any trace of their being there.

“Guess those fuckers really missed up if they couldn’t complete the mission,” Simon stated.

“And he’s suppose to be Mr. *Big Shot Sniper*,” Ronnie answered. “I don’t think he did everything they said he did in New York.”

“Yea, me neither,” Simon replied, laughing to himself. “Let’s find these casings and get out of here. I’m starving. That winner’s dinner is going to taste good.”

“What was the winning dinner suppose to be again?”

“A one hundred dollar gift card to The Crab Cake,” Simon answered, licking his lips, drooling a little. “I can almost taste the lobster tail and crab legs now. Damn it’s going to be good.” Simon paused before continuing, “better than those MRE’s the losers have to eat.”

Ronnie stood up and counted out six brass casings. “Let’s get out of here then. The sooner we get back the sooner we can eat.”



The small shack was dark, hot, and musky inside. There were no windows and no air-conditioning. The only relief, if it could be called relief, from the heat was a small rotating fan in the front left corner.

Christine Bishop and Sarah Ashley were sitting in the front row. Ronnie and Simon were sitting behind them. Jonathan was sitting in the back right hand corner while Johnson sat in the opposite corner. After six weeks at the Farm these six were the top in the class.

The back door to the shack opened, flooding the shack with light as Instructor Vans walked in, followed closely by Instructor Collins.

“Mr. McGregor please show me your weapon,” Vans said forcefully as he walked to the front of the shack.

“Yes Sir,” Jonathan answered with a snap as he stood up and walked to the front, holding Hera with pride.

Jonathan stood in front of Instructor Vans and opened the bolt. Pointing the barrel up, Jonathan inspected the chamber to make sure there was not a round inside of it then held it out to Instructor Vans. “The weapon is cleared and safe, Sir.”

Jonathan stood at attention when Instructor Vans took Hera from him. He knew he was being a smart ass but old habits die hard.

“This is not the .308 you were required to use for this exercise is it?”

“Sir,” Jonathan answered, as if he was back in boot camp, “No Sir, it is not Sir.”

“He’s going to get it now,” Ronnie whispered with a smile to Simon.

“You have something to add Mr. Bass!”

“Uh no Sir,” Ronnie answered, being caught off guard.

“I didn’t think so,” Vans snapped. He turned his attention back toward Jonathan. “Mr. McGregor, where did this rifle come from?”

“This Sir,” Jonathan answered with a smile. “This here is Hera and she was custom made for me. I’ve been using her in all my missions for the past nine years.”

Vans looked the rifle over as he flipped it over and over in his hands. He looked through the scope and ran his fingers slowly up and down the barrel.

“Excuse me Sir,” Jonathan interrupted politely, “but may I have her back now. Stroking another man’s rifle is like stroking his wife, not a good thing, Sir.”

Laughter erupted from the back of the shack. Johnson could not help himself. No one else may have found it funny but Johnson knew that is how Jonathan truly felt. Everyone turned to look at Johnson with surprise on their faces.

“Oh,” Johnson said as he noticed everyone looking at him. “My bad, please continue.”

Vans chuckled to himself, “You’re right McGregor. I’m sorry.” He handed Hera back to Jonathan. “It’s a fine rifle.”

“Thank you Sir,” Jonathan replied with pride. He took Hera and sat back down in his corner.

“Okay teams,” Vans continued, “time to tally up the scores. Three teams, two sessions per team, three rounds each session. The objective was to pop the red balloons only. Killing both sets of balloons gave you a score of one hundred. For every shot missed you lost fifteen points. For every yellow balloon you shot you lost ten points.”

“The scores were unbelievable. Before I declare a winner I want to show you something.”

Vans walked to the back of the shack. There was an object under a blanket that both instructors carried into the shack. They picked up the object and carried it to the front table. Collins walked over to the TV in the corner and popped in a video tape.

“I’ve held this little contest for the past fifteen years,” Vans said as he paused the tape before it started playing. “In all that time I’ve never seen a team perform like this.”

Vans unpaused the tape. Two toy jeeps came into frame. There was a timer in the bottom right corner. The counter showed three point fifteen seconds when the lead jeep stopped suddenly in its tracks. The second jeep swerved to miss hitting the lead jeep. It lost speed as it swerved. The red balloon in the second jeep popped at four point two seconds. The red balloon in the lead jeep popped at five seconds.

“This is the fastest time I’ve ever seen,” Vans boasted. “Each shot hitting its mark.”

“But Sir,” Simon interrupted, “the one jeep just stopped moving. That’s hardly fair to the rest of us Sir. It posed no challenge for the shooter.”

“Life’s unfair,” Vans snapped. “Are you going to complain on a real Op if things don’t go the way you wanted? Are you going to cry things were unfair when you fail a mission?”

Vans shot Simon a glance so fierce that Simon did not dare to answer the questions.

“It only looked that way,” Collins chimed in. “You were all given tracer rounds so we could track the shots on video. There were no tracer marks on this video.”

“Then what happened Sir,” Sarah asked.

“Mr. McGregor, would you care to explain this,” Vans asked as he pulled the blanket off of the object.

It was the lead toy jeep lying on its side, exposing the hood of the jeep to everyone. There was a hole on the middle of it.

“Certainly Sir,” Jonathan answered sarcastically. “I did not use the tracer rounds because they would have compromised my position. My orders were to terminate the red targets and *only* the red targets.”

“Hera is equipped with a silencer, a snipers best friend out in the field. Time was a factor and with multiple targets a diversion was needed.”

“I put one round into the engine block of the lead jeep to stop its forward motion. The rear jeep was taken by surprise, leaving a clear unexpected shot. The first target was not moving so I took out the moving target. The remaining target had nowhere to go. I fired the remaining shot and left my position.”

“And where were you located,” Van asked. “That first shot could not have been fired from the ground.”

“That is correct Sir,” Jonathan answered with a smirk on his face. “I took my perch in a tree.”

“Sir isn’t that against the rules,” Simon interjected angrily. “We were told where we had to position ourselves.”

“Sir if I may?”

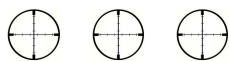
“Oh please Mr. McGregor, I would *love* to hear this.”

“Thank you Sir. The position I was given would have jeopardized my team and my mission. I couldn’t allow that. I had to compromise but I completed my mission.”

“That may be true Mr. McGregor but you didn’t follow orders. You should be disqualified. However, you thought outside the box. We never saw you out in the field.”

“A seen sniper is a dead sniper,” Johnson blurted out smugly.

“Yees,” Van responded, rolling his eyes. “Regardless, you now hold the record of this competition. You scored a 95. Congratulations, you win the night out at the Crab Cake. You leave in thirty minutes. I suggest you get ready.”



“I can’t remember the last time we ate this good.”

“Neither can I. Thanks for winning this Johnny.”

“No problem. I really wanted this dinner. We needed the break.”

“Well don’t relax too much,” Johnson said in a more serious tone but keeping a playful look on his face. “There’s someone watching us. At your five o’clock.”

Jonathan looked into the silver pitcher of water he had the waiter leave. He could see two men sitting at a table talking in hush tones and looking in their direction.”

“I’m guessing they’re from the Farm.”

“I’m guessing so too. What do you want to do?”

“What do I want to do,” Jonathan repeated with a smile. “Right now I want to get another lobster tail, that’s what I want to do. Where is our waiter?”

Johnson laughed as he sat back in his chair. Jonathan raised his hand to get the waiter’s attention.

“Yes Sir,” the waiter said as he walked over to Jonathan, “is everything okay?”

“Yes, everything is fine. Could you bring me another one of these tails? Also those two men behind us to my right, could you send them each a beer on me? Tell them we know who they are?”

“I’m sorry Sir. I don’t understand. You want me to tell them what?”

“Just give them the beers, tell them we know who they are, then walk away.”

“You got it.”

The waiter walked toward the kitchen to place Jonathan’s order. Two minutes later he was delivering the beers to the table behind Jonathan. Jonathan watched the reflection of everything going on. The waiter pointed toward Jonathan. The two men looked at each other surprised before getting up and leaving.

The waiter brought the beers over to Jonathan’s table.

“I’m sorry Sir but they refused the beers.”

“I knew they would. Thank you anyway, just bring the check with my meal.”

“Very good Sir. It should be out shortly.”

The waiter walked away back to the kitchen. Jonathan grabbed a beer and sat back in his chair.

“You buzzin’?”

“Nope,” Johnson said with a smile before taking a drink of the other beer. “You know it takes more than this to get my buzzed.”

“Good. You thinkin what I’m thinkin’?”

“Yup.”

“Well let’s enjoy the rest of this meal and get this over with.”



The streets seemed to be darker than normal. A cold front had blown in. The sky was covered with clouds. Jonathan and Johnson left the Crab Cake on foot.

They walked past the parking lot, leaving the vehicle they brought. This fight was going to happen on Jonathan’s terms. They made their way over to the shopping district.

The shopping district was filled with mom and pop shops. Little sandwich shops and bistros were everywhere. It was a very popular tourist attraction. Always busy.

About a half mile east of the shopping district was the trashy side of town, very dark, evil hiding in every corner. Strip clubs and Modeling Studios, hookers and crack heads.

This is where Jonathan was heading. The shopping district was too crowded. They would draw too much attention to themselves. Attention was something Jonathan did *not* want.

“I think we finally picked up a tail,” Johnson said, breaking the silence.

“It’s about time. We’ll turn down that alley two blocks away.”

As they approached the alley the cry of screaming tires rang out. An older black Dodge Ram van with no windows rolled in front of Jonathan and Johnson, cutting off their way to the alley.

Five men dressed in black, wearing hoods, jumped out of the van. Jonathan and Johnson were expecting this.

As the first two men jumped out of the van they were met with flying fist. The loud crack of their noses breaking filled the air. The other men came out swinging.

Each punch thrown was blocked and counter punched. Jonathan and Johnson were managing to keep their attackers at bay. Two minutes passed. This was taking too long.

One of the men stepped back and aimed a tasers gun at Jonathan. Another man pulled out his tasers, aiming it at Johnson. They fired both guns.

The electrical spokes shout out toward their targets. The spokes hit both men in the chest, one at the top and the other at the stomach. One hundred thousand volts flowed from the tasers to the spokes.

To everyone's surprise neither man fell.

Jonathan and Johnson used the surprise to knock over the two men in front of them and take their tasers. Removing the end caps and pushing the prongs into their targets, they shocked their attackers.

Johnson dropped his taser and jumped at one of the remaining men standing. He still had the element of surprise on his side. The man fell back against the van. Johnson kicked him hard on the side of his face, knocking the man out.

"And then there were two," Jonathan said, looking at the two men that had shot them.

Johnson backed away from the van. The driver pulled the trigger on his taser, hitting Johnson with two more spokes. Johnson just stood there, unfazed by the electrical shock.

When the driver let go of the trigger Johnson yanked the spokes from his chest, dropping them to the floor. The driver decided to cut his losses and abort the mission. He jumped into the van and threw it into drive.

One of the men with a broken nose stood up, ready to continue fighting.

"Who sent you," Jonathan asked as Johnson circled around behind him, cutting off any chance to run.

"Fuck you asshole!"

"We can do this the easy way or the hard way," Johnson said from behind, "but you won't like the hard way."

The man stood there in silence.

"Guess he wants it the hard way Johnny."

"Got anything to say before you join your friends," Jonathan asked. "Last chance."

"How did you withstand the tasers?"

"We're wearing bullet proof vest," Jonathan answered, tapping his chest, "with rubber plates. Rubber absorbs a lot better."

Before the man could say another word Johnson grabbed him from behind. He wrapped one arm around his neck and the other behind his neck. In thirty seconds all the men were lying in the alley unconscious.



Chapter 4

Under The Bridge Downtown

The blue convertible Ford Mustang pulled up to the security gate at the Farm. The guard at the gate was blocking the entrance, holding his M-4 low and ready to fire if he had to.

The car stopped in front of the guard. The driver turned off the headlights and killed the engine. The guard could hear laughter coming from the car.

“Can I help you gentlemen?”

“Nope,” Jonathan said, still laughing. He and Johnson stepped out of the car. “Here ya go.” Jonathan tossed the keys to the guard. “We’re CTs here and this car is hot,” Jonathan paused for dramatic effect before leaning in toward the guard and whispered, “If you know what I mean.”

“You brought a stolen car here?”

“Yup,” Jonathan answered with a huge smile. “If you would be so kind, get rid of it for us will ya. We gotta get back inside.”

Jonathan and Johnson walked past the guard. Charlie, the guard inside the security house was shaking his head no in disbelief. He couldn’t believe the balls on these two.

“McGregor, where is the van we let you guys take?”

“Should still be at the Crab Cake. We were being watched so we left on foot.”

“What do you mean being watched?”

“I mean,” Jonathan answered sarcastically, “we were being watched by two teams. They watched every move we made and then tried jumping us after we left. We got away and boosted the Mustang to get back here.”

“You have any idea what time it is?”

“Yea,” Johnson snapped, “four a.m. Now if you don’t mind I’d like to shower before the day starts. Let us in will ya?”

“I have to call Mr. Star. Wait here.”

Charlie stepped back inside toward where the phone was. He dialed the number for Ryan’s room. Ryan answered quickly.

“Is McGregor and Johnson back yet?”

“Yes Sir. They boosted a local’s car. I have them here with me now.”

“Bring them to the main hall immediately.”

“Yes Sir. I’ll bring them in personally.”

Ryan hung up the phone without saying another word.

“Alright ladies,” Charlie blurted out as he stepped back outside. “Back in the Mustang. Mr. Star wants to see you in the main hall.”

Jonathan and Johnson walked toward the Mustang. Without opening the door, Johnson jumped into the back seat while Jonathan hopped in the passenger seat.

“Easy with the stick,” Jonathan said in a girlish voice, “she’s a bit sensitive.”

The two men started laughing. Charlie shoved the keys into the ignition. He was angry and it showed.

“Fuck you McGregor.”

As the gates began to open, he shoved the stick into first gear, speeding off toward the main hall. Shift change was in an hour. The night had been quiet. Now, thanks to Jonathan, he was going to have to file a report. The report wasn’t as bad as having to deal with this car.

The Mustang was stolen. There was no way it could be returned to the police. They would ask too many questions. Ditching it somewhere was no good either. Someone could see the men ditching the car. It would have to be whipped clean of prints. That, in itself, would raise more serious questions. If hairs could be found they could be traced to Jonathan, which was another headache.

There was really only two ways to handle this problem. The first involved taking the car out into the middle of nowhere and blowing it up, making sure it burned down to the frame. As the guard looked the car over, he knew that was not a real option. The Mustang was a classic, to destroy it would be an outright sin, and he could not do that to a beauty like this, no matter how much he wanted to.

The car had to be taken in. New plates, new VIN tags, new paint job. Someone was about to receive a new vehicle for free. As they approached the main hall the car came to a screeching halt.

“Thanks Charlie,” Jonathan said as he opened the door. “Take good care of this baby.”

“Fuck you McGregor,” Charlie said as he killed the engine and opened his door. “I’m coming with you.”

“Suit yourself,” Johnson said. “Come on Johnny, I want to get this shit over with.”

Johnson walked past Jonathan into the main hall. Jonathan was on his heels, followed closely by Charlie. Johnson was fired up over what had happened tonight. He was prepared to dish out the ass chewing, not receive it.

He shoved the doors open as he walked in, looking around the room for Ryan. He found Ryan sitting in a chair at the front of the room.

“Gentlemen, we have a problem.”

“Fuck you Star, you sorry piece of shit,” Johnson said, storming up to Ryan. Without warning he swung at Ryan, hitting the senior agent across the jaw. “You set us up!”

Charlie drew his sidearm. Jonathan stepped into Charlie’s view, facing him. He shook his head no, silently telling Charlie that what he was thinking was not a good idea. Charlie studied his face, seeing the seriousness in Jonathan’s eyes. Slowly, he holstered his pistol.

“We busted our asses for this. We deserved the break. Then you fuckin’ set us up!”

Ryan felt his lip with his right hand. The taste of metal on the tip of his tongue and the warmness on his fingertips confirmed he was bleeding before he even seen the blood on his hand as he pulled it away. He thought Johnson was a loose cannon, this little display of anger just proved his point.

“Mr. Johnson, I could throw you out of the program for this. Striking a senior instructor is an automatic dismissal.”

“Go ahead,” Johnson dared, “as if you had the balls anymore. You’ve got much bigger things to worry about than me hitting you.”

“What are you talking about,” Ryan snapped. “Mr. McGregor?”

“Don’t look at me,” Jonathan answered with a large playful grin. “It was Johnson’s idea, and a damn good one at that. One I was happy to go along with by the way. Let’s just say, since *everything* is a test, this is to test how good your boys really are, *even* Instructor Reyes.”

Johnson turned to walk away. He didn’t want to see Ryan anymore today. He kept his eyes on Charlie as he walked toward the door, making sure he didn’t reach for his sidearm again.

Ryan stood up, watching Johnson walk away.

“And Star,” Johnson shouted over his shoulder as he continued to walk away, “if you ever set us up like that again I’ll kill you *and* the men you send.”

Jonathan smiled and waved goodbye to Ryan. He patted Charlie on the shoulder as he walked away. “You gentlemen have a great day.”



Manuel Reyes looked up at the ground below him. He was fighting the blackness of unconscious that was surrounding him. Blood was rushing to his head, making him light headed, and blurring his vision. He couldn't tell where he was, but he was sure he was hanging above water.

The sun began to rise. Slowly light began to fill the underpass. Rumbling could be heard above his feet as a car drove by.

Squeezing his eyes closed tightly then opening them wide helped to focus his eyes, only ten seconds at a time though. He started rocking his body forward and back, causing himself to turn slowly.

He could see the other men dangling from the bottom of the bridge, tied up the same way as him. Feet tied together at the ankles. Hands tied behind his back. A rag tied tightly around his head, covering his mouth. He hoped an agent would be coming for them soon. Darkness overcame Reyes as he passed out again.



“Stand up and face the wall,” Charlie shouted as he walked into the barracks. Two other guards followed him into the room. “Now!”

Jonathan was lying on his bunk, reading a field manual, ignoring Charlie's outburst. Johnson was under the sheets sound asleep. Charlie and the other two guards stopped short of the two men's bunks. Charlie looked at Johnson then to Jonathan.

“Get his ass up,” Charlie ordered, pointing at Johnson.

“That's not such a good idea guys,” Jonathan said, turning the page to his manual. “He's been up for twenty-two hours. He's tired. Waking him up after a night like we had would only piss him off. Let him sleep.”

“Mr. Star wants to know where his men are. I'm to arrest you until we find them.”

“Jesus,” Jonathan snapped back, putting the manual down and sitting up, “is that all. Guess they found the tracking devise from Reyes. Let me guess, no Reyes?”

“Where are they McGregor,” Charlie shouted, his anger boiling over.

“*Under the bridge downtown,*” Jonathan started to sing softly. “*That's where I drew some blood. Under the bridge downtown I could not get enough. Under the bridge downtown that should be enough.* Now you better hurry your search before the police find them. I'm sure someone will see them and call the cops. Now, if you don't mind we are trying to get the sleep we were cheated out of. Please tell Mr. Star we will be needing our rest.”

Jonathan lay back down and faced the wall. Charlie grew angrier by the second. His shift was suppose to have ended two hours ago. Because of Jonathan, he was still on duty. He wasn't about to let Jonathan treat him like a punk.

“McGregor, you are under arrest. Stand up or I *will* get you up.”

“If you think you can,” Jonathan said calmly, staring deep into Charlie's eyes, “go for it Charlie.”

Jonathan stayed sitting on his bunk, not moving. Charlie knew that Jonathan was an expert in hand to hand combat, but he still had a job to do. He was *not* about to let Jonathan embarrass him in front of his men. He drew his pistol from his hip, holding it low to the ground. He pulled back the slide until he could see that there was a round in the chamber. He let the slide drop back into place.

“I have my orders. Please don't make me do this the hard way.”

Charlie motioned his head from the lead guard toward Jonathan. The guard nodded in acknowledgement. He took a step toward the bunk. Jonathan still had not moved. The guard took his handcuffs out, ready to cuff Jonathan as quickly as possible. Slowly he reached out with his free hand to grab Jonathan's right wrist.

No one had noticed that he was sitting on the very edge of the bunk. The guard's fingertips were inches from his wrist. Jonathan reached up with his left hand, grabbing the guard's wrist and pulling down hard. The guard toppled over the edge of the bunk, Jonathan falling on top of him. As he fell his right fist connected with the guard's gut. The guard was stunned, giving Jonathan the chance to take his sidearm.

Jonathan's bunk flew upward on its side. Charlie and the other guard jumped back from the surprise attack. Neither man was watching Johnson, which was the plan.

Johnson jumped off his bunk toward the other guard. He tackled him to the ground, punching him once in the face before rolling off of him. He rolled to his feet, pointing the guard's sidearm at Charlie. Charlie spun around on his heels, now pointing his pistol at Johnson.

"Let's just say we're not going to be captured alive Charlie," Jonathan said as he stepped out from behind his bunk. He was pointing his pistol at Charlie. "You're a nice guy and I would hate to shoot you."

"That's enough," Brian said as he walked into the barracks. "Charlie, you and your men can leave. I *need* to speak to Mr. McGregor and Mr. Johnson, *alone!*"



Chapter 5

Blown Away

After a grueling morning of physical training the CTs were sitting quietly in the main hall. Everyone was exhausted and wanted to hit the showers but they weren't allowed back in the barracks. Rumor was something had happened overnight and that Jonathan and Johnson were the cause of all the chaos. A total of five CTs were missing during P.T., Ronnie, Elliot, Simon, Jonathan, and Johnson. With the tension between the five men, it was pretty easy to figure out something bad had happened.

Ryan walked into the main hall without saying a word until he reached the front of the room. Shock faces were on most of the CTs. Ryan had a huge black eye surrounding his left eye.

"Okay people," Ryan started, grabbing everyone's attention. "Elliot is no longer with us. He was dismissed this morning for medical reasons." Ryan looked directly at Jonathan in the front row when he said that. "Ronnie and Simon will be joining the group after lunch. There will *not* be any inquiries as to what went on this morning. This morning is in the past and we are moving on with the next phase."

"Today we are going to learn a variety of ways to blow shit up." Ryan paused as the mood lifted. Blowing things up was always a fun topic. "You will learn how to build a bomb from ordinary household items."

"You'll learn high grade and low grade explosives. You'll learn how to be precise or totally demolish a target. You'll learn how to judge when, where, and how to most effectively take down any target. You'll even learn how to blow *yourself* up in front of someone and walk away without a scratch."

That always brought a smile to his face. Ryan personally used that trick three times in his career. Each time he would watch the horror on the faces of those he was deceiving. It gave him a thrill, a natural high. That high was the reason he stayed in the CIA.

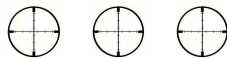
“We will need one volunteer when we demonstrate this. Mr. McGregor, since you are experienced in high explosives why don’t you be our volunteer?”

“I thought the point of being a volunteer was to ask of your own free will,” Jonathan responded, looking around the room sitting relaxed in his chair. “If you ask me then it’s not volunteering.”

“Okay then, let’s put it to a vote. Who here wants to see Mr. McGregor blow himself up?” Every hand in the room went up except for two, just what Ryan was expecting. “There you go Mr. McGregor. Thank you for being our victim.”

“Now here are the basic ingredients needed to make different types of bombs at home.” Ryan pushed a button on his remote control. The lights turned off and the slide machine hanging from the ceiling turned on. “Soap is always a good starter...”

Jonathan sat lower in his chair and rolled his eyes. He continued to suck on his tootsie pop as he figured out ways in his head how he was going to escape an exploding car.



“Fire in the hole,” Instructor Reyes shouted as Jonathan approached the blue Mustang he had stolen from town.

Reyes was smiling on the inside, wanting to get his revenge on Jonathan for what he did to him. His leg was swollen where Jonathan had cut out the transmitter all instructors had implanted in them in case of a kidnapping. Wither he wanted to admit it or not, Jonathan had gotten the better of him. Now it was payback time.

As Jonathan reached for the car handle he had flashbacks to five months ago in New York. He had just taken out a group of TriAds who were trying to gun him down. When he tried to leave in his car it exploded, throwing him into the air. A chunk of metal had gotten lodged into his thigh. It caused a large wound, one that began to throb now.

He opened the door, sliding behind the steering wheel. His fingertips were tingling as he ran them across the wheel. He closed the door. The top was up; Jonathan was now inside the bomb box.

He grabbed the stick and pushed in the clutch with his left foot. With his right foot he pressed hard on the brake. He shoved the stick into first gear. Slowly he shifted from one gear to the next. Everything seemed normal.

Typical cliché, the bomb will explode when he tried to start the car or by remote control. He tried to anticipate for each one.

“Start the damn car,” Reyes said under his breath. He was ready to push the remote detonator. He had personally set the bomb so it would destroy the car completely. If Jonathan didn’t make it then oh well, no loss for him or the Farm.

Jonathan took a deep breath and sighed, “Well Joni, looks like I’m coming home to you and Jillian.”

A whisper filled his spirit. “Not yet my love.”

Jonathan felt a slight kiss on his cheek. Rejuvenated, he started the car, gunning the gas. The car jumped forward as it took off quickly. Reyes smiled, pleased with the revenge he was about to receive, as he pushed the single button on the detonator.

Johnson, along with the rest of the class, watched as the Mustang turned into a fireball. The bomb exploded down the middle of the car, causing the front to separate from the back. Both halves flew up into the air, exploding again from secondary explosions.

The intense heat from the blast could be felt behind the safety wall. As the pieces fell back to the earth the class marveled at the sight of the fire. There was no part of the car that was not burning. Reyes had done a thorough job.

Everyone but Reyes was looking to see if they could spot Jonathan. He knew there was no way Jonathan could have survived. He used more C4 than what was needed. There was no metal plate under the seat to help absorb most of the explosion.

Johnson was starting to get nervous. He knew Jonathan liked to be dramatic and play games but it's been five minutes since the Mustang exploded, he should have shown himself by now. That could mean he was either, seriously hurt or worse, dead.

"That concludes our demo," Reyes said from behind the class. "Everyone is dismissed until the morning. I suggest you study the manuals you were given."



Charlie was walking through the woods just south of the demolition area. He was looking for Jonathan. His body was nowhere near where the Mustang blew up. Reyes had defiantly used too much C4; however, there should still be some traces of Jonathan. Parts of the Mustang had flown into this area of the woods so Charlie figured to look there.

He walked slowly, his pistol drawn, hanging low, ready to fire at anything that might charge at him. Even though the Farm was completely fenced in, animals lived in the woods, deer, squirrels, raccoons, wild pigs, and wolves. Then there was Jonathan, the most dangerous animal Charlie had ever met.

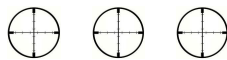
Ryan ordered Charlie to find and confirm that Jonathan was indeed dead. Charlie took the hint. After all the trouble he's caused this week Charlie was more than happy to see Jonathan dead.

One foot at a time he made his way forward. He was listening for movement, any movement. He knew how to hunt; his father taught him when he was a boy how to stalk your prey, looking for signs of its presence. Charlie was a very good hunter. That's what he was doing now, hunting.

He heard rustling to his left. A twig snapped. Charlie swirled around, dropping to one knee, ready to fire. He waited and listened. The sound was moving away from him. He stood up quickly and ran after his prey.

He sprinted a quarter of a mile, following closely behind his prey. He smiled when he finally stopped. This was better than expected.

A pack of hungry wolves were fighting over each other to get more meat. There was plenty to go around. They were ravishing the corps, tearing it to shreds. He turned to walk away. There would be nothing left of Jonathan now.



Chapter 6 Johnson is Gone

“Thank you Charlie. You did a good job. Take the rest of the week off for your troubles.”

Ryan hung up the phone. Jonathan was dead. He couldn't say he felt sorry for him. He never believed Jonathan belonged in the CIA. Brian had thought he could use Jonathan as an assassin overseas, a sleeper agent to carry out secret black operations, his personal attack dog.

Now Brian was left with nothing and he had another problem to deal with, Johnson. The only reason Johnson was even at the Farm was because Jonathan refused to come without him. But now that Jonathan was dead he could get rid of Johnson, the only question now was how?

Ryan turned on his computer. He logged onto the intranet, the internal network for the CIA. He was looking to see if Brian was logged on, he was. He clicked his name and began typing.

RStar: Have problem with McGregor.

BRam: You always have a problem. What is it now?

RStar: McGregor died in a training accident around 13:00 today.

BRam: How?

RStar: He did not escape a vehicle that was blown up. We found his body being eaten by wolves.

BRam: Did you recover the body?

RStar: No.

Ryan smiled to himself. He knew his single answer came across as coldly as if he said it in person. Since Brian had not responded he continued to type.

RStar: Have two problems. McGregor's rifle and his dog. What do you want done?

BRam: Wait one. Calling DCI.

Ryan leaned back in his chair. He forgot that the Director of Central Intelligence had taken an interest in Jonathan. He had been impressed with what Jonathan did in New York and Bosnia. He had caused problems the CIA was trying to control. They had agents in Bosnia who were compromised when Jonathan killed General Baza, another reason for Ryan to hate him.

They also had informants in the mafia that Jonathan had killed. Information is life in this business and he had severed those ties to vital information. He had fucked the CIA and the Director wanted to reward him for it.

Ryan didn't think that was fair. He had no remorse for Jonathan dying.

BRam: DCI is upset. Wants full report with explanation.

RStar: Explanation? Not CIA material, that's my explanation.

BRam: Was not your call. You exceeded your orders regarding McGregor. DCI agrees and wants answers in the morning.

RStar: Still have the two problems.

BRam: I will pick up the rifle. The DCI can decide what to do with it once he receives it. As far as Johnson is concerned he was never wanted. He is expendable. Have him turned into the local P.D. The agency will send someone to deal with him after that.

RStar: With pleasure.



Johnson was sitting in a lazy boy chair in the corner of the recreation room. Three CTs were playing pool while two others were at the foosball table.

Another was watching the Bachelorette on TV. Johnson watched each person closely. He knew with Jonathan gone something bad was going to happen to him. His nerves kept tingling. Chills were running up and down his spine.

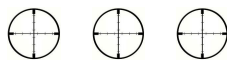
Johnson looked at the main door at the exact moment it opened. Four guards strolled in, all carrying tasers instead of guns. Two more walked in the back door, also carrying tasers.

Johnson jumped to his feet. He was ready to fight. The guards pointed their tasers at Johnson. He was trapped and he knew it. Without warning all six guards fired their tasers, shocking him unconscious.



Johnson woke up with a killer headache. His entire body was throbbing. He moaned softly as he opened his eyes. His blurry vision took a few seconds to focus. He knew he was in a moving vehicle from all the bouncing.

“Didn’t have a rubber vest on that time did ya? You fuckin’ asshole,” Simon said as he grabbed Johnson’s hair. He punched him hard in the side of the face, sending him back into darkness.



Johnson shook his head as he tried to focus on his surroundings. He knew he was no longer in the vehicle. He was hanging from a tree. His hands were tied behind his back. His feet were connected to his wrist, stretching his legs backwards.

His thigh muscles were flexing tight. They were beginning to go numb from being in the same position. Ronnie, Elliot, and Simon were standing in front of Johnson.

Elliot, happy that Johnson was finally awake, stood directly in front of him. A smile spread across his face. Elliot threw a punch with all his might to Johnson’s groin. Pain shot through his body like lightning, waking every nerve in his body.

His mind began racing, no longer slow and groggy. The fear that was slowly building turned into anger. Instinct took over and fire filled his eyes. He was not going to be someone’s piñata.

He was swinging forward and back from the impact of the punch. The three men were laughing, not noticing that he was also rocking side to side. Slowly he began to swing in a circle, gaining momentum.

The laughter stopped when Johnson’s knees connected with Simon’s jaw, knocking him to the floor. Johnson began spinning uncontrollably from the impact. He was counting on this. He would be harder to grab.

Ronnie and Elliot were watching closely, waiting for the perfect moment to grab Johnson. As his spinning slowed down Ronnie was able to grab his ankles. Elliot punched Johnson in the abdomen, receiving a stream of puke in return. Johnson knew the spinning would make him sick.

Elliot, horrified, stepped backward, wiping the vomit from his eyes and mouth. He couldn’t see anything, including the rock he tripped over. He fell hard to the ground with a loud thud. Ronnie decided to let go of Johnson and help his friends.

Johnson was busy playing with the rope. He was trying to get the heel of his left foot closer to his hands. He had to stretch his legs further back, sending more pain through his body. If he could get what he wanted the pain would be worth it.

He was watching Ronnie closely as he inched closer to his hands. Slowly he pulled the rope until his foot was finally in his hand. He was filled with relaxation. He started to laugh as a distraction.

Ronnie looked back at Johnson, his face filled with anger. He drew a knife out of his boot and stood up.

“Shut the fuck up you piece of shit,” he shouted as he walked toward Johnson. “I’m gonna make you bleed.”

Ronnie raised the knife above his head, blade pointing toward the ground. He jammed the knife into Johnson’s leg, twisting before pulling it out. Johnson wanted to scream but didn’t. He wasn’t going to give Ronnie that satisfaction. That only made Ronnie angrier.

Again and again he stabbed Johnson in the legs. “Not so tough now are ya, you sonovabitch.” On the sixth stab he left the knife in Johnson’s leg and stepped back. He smiled as he saw the blood on the ground below Johnson.

Simon and Elliot started laughing as they stood up.

“Good job Ronnie,” Elliot said.

“Let’s gut him now,” Simon chimed in.

“Not yet,” Elliot snapped back. “I’m gonna cut his balls off first. Payback for cutting my sack.”

The night Jonathan and Johnson were attacked Elliot was one of the attackers. Under the bridge before they were tied up, Elliot was deemed the weakest link and would crack quickest.

Elliot refused to give up any names when he was hit repeatedly. They knew since everyone was from the Farm they had been set up. Johnson had wanted confirmation on who ordered the attack and why. Johnson knew how to make Elliot talk and Jonathan wasn’t about to stop him.

Johnson had grabbed Elliot by his testicles and pulled hard. Elliot cried but didn’t give up any information so Johnson pulled out his pocket knife and started unbuckling Elliot’s pants.

“If you had really been captured by the enemy they wouldn’t hold back. They have no mercy.” He pulled Elliot’s pants down, rolling him on his stomach. He sat on his back and grabbed his testicles again. “See, that’s a little something they don’t tell you during training. They don’t want you to know otherwise you would quit.”

“I’m going to ask one last time, who ordered the hit. After that I’m gonna cut your balls open until you *do* tell me.”

“Fuck you,” Elliot yelled.

With Simon and Ronnie watching Johnson slide the blade of his knife into Elliot’s ball sack, cutting down the middle.

“Give me a name or I cut deeper.”

“Star!”

Johnson jumped off of Elliot and pulled his pants back up. Then they strung the men up and left them hanging. Elliot had gone so long without medical attention that he had major nerve damage in his right testicle. He lost his right testicle. Now it was payback.

“Hey asshole, you want my balls come and get them you fuckin’ faggot.”

“Fuck you asshole.”

Elliot reached up and yanked the knife out of Johnson’s leg. Johnson threw his head back from the pain. As his body went back his legs came flying forward, kicking Elliot in the jaw. He flew back.

Johnson lifted his feet all the way up till his toes touched his head. He reached his hands under his butt and slid his legs down. Now his hands were no longer behind his back. He quickly sawed at the rope with the knife he pulled out of his shoe.

Ronnie rushed him just as the rope snapped. He tackled Johnson to the ground, inches from the trunk of the tree. As he raised his fist he felt a sharp pain in his neck.

He reached for his throat with both hands. Blood was squirting out between his fingers. He tried to speak but no sound came out of his mouth.

Johnson started sawing at the ropes binding his feet together. Elliot got to his feet, still holding his knife. Simon reached down to his boot and pulled out another knife.

“What part about expect did you dumb fucks *not* understand,” Johnson said as he threw the ropes off of him. “You want me dead then come and get me.”

Johnson stayed on the ground. He wanted to get up but couldn’t. The wounds in his legs would not allow him to stand for long. He was going to have to fight from the ground.

Ronnie had stopped moving, his body now slumped low against the tree. Elliot and Simon approached Johnson slowly. They could tell he could not stand, which gave them the advantage. Simon walked behind Johnson while Elliot was going to attack from the front.

Johnson, however, was not going to be such an easy kill. Inch by inch the two men moved closer. He figured Elliot would fake attack first, distracting him so Simon could attack. After Simon attacked Elliot would pounce next.

Elliot was a foot away from Johnson when he mockingly threw his shoulders forward. Johnson heard Simon jump toward him from behind. Johnson threw his shoulders back and rolled to the right. Simon missed and was greeted with a knife in his back.

Johnson kept stabbing Simon across his back before Elliot lunged at him. He pulled the knife out of Simon’s back and thrust it forward into Elliot’s chest. The knife lodged into his rib cage. Elliot ignored the pain as he tried to stab Johnson in the chest.

Johnson was using both hands to hold Elliot’s knife up in the air. Elliot put his other hand on top of the knife and pushed down. Using his entire upper body as leverage he was pushing the knife lower and lower. The tip of the blade was poking into Johnson’s right shoulder. He had to do something fast.

Taking a gamble he let one hand go from Elliot’s grip. The blade penetrated his skin, causing him to scream out in pain. His free hand flew, with all the force he could muster, into Eliot’s windpipe, crushing in against his spine.

Elliot fell off of Johnson, gasping for air. His face was turning blue from a lack of oxygen. Johnson began coughing as he yanked the knife from his shoulder. He slashed hard at Elliot’s neck, splitting it open. Instantly Elliot fell backward, his body motionless.

Johnson fell back himself. He was no longer able to hold his body up. He was bleeding and lost a lot of blood already. He was coughing as he blacked out.



Chapter 7

Jonathan Strikes Back

Brian was stuck in traffic. He glanced over to the passenger side, looking at the briefcase on the seat. Inside was Hera, Jonathan's famous rifle. The stories it could tell if it could talk. He had to admit, he was very impressed with her performance.

Looking forward he could see the cause of the backup. There was a car on its side. It looked as if the driver was trapped inside. There were medics trying to get the driver out, the true heroes of this country.

He began thinking back to his own encounter with D.C. medics. It was six years ago on a cool spring night. Brian's wife, his real wife, Diane and their sixteen year old daughter Samantha were coming home from shopping at the mall.

On the way home a trucker was driving alongside her. He was going on thirty hours of driving with no sleep. His body decided to shut down. The truck drifted over, crushing Diane's car.

Brian was flying into Dulles from London. He was in the air, three hours out, when the accident happened. When the medic arrived he rushed to save Diane and Samantha.

"Tell my husband I love him," she groaned between breaths.

"You can tell him yourself," the medic said as he worked on her.

They died later that night but not before Brian had a chance to say his goodbyes. The doctor explained they were going to die no matter what he did. The medic knew that fact at the scene but acted quickly enough to prolong their deaths as long as possible. For that Brian was grateful.

A single tear ran down Brian's cheek as the memory of his family faded away into the back of his mind. He picked up his cell phone to call his office.

"Sally, tell the DCI I'm going to be late. No, there's an accident on the Beltway. Traffic is crawling toward the exit. Maybe thirty minutes if I'm lucky. Yea, it's pretty bad. Okay. Bye."

He closed his phone, dropping it next to the briefcase. He turned on the radio to the oldies station. The Beach Boys were singing "California Girls." He began singing along when the door behind him suddenly opened.

"What the..."

"Hands on the wheel Brian," Jonathan said as he pointed a .9mm Berretta with a silencer attached at Brian's neck. "There's no metal plate here that will stop this bullet. Now put the car in park and kill the engine."

Brian did as he was told.

"You know for a senior field agent you sure do get ambushed a lot."

"What do you want McGregor?"

"I want to know who ordered the hit on Johnson and me."

"No one ordered a hit on you," he answered calmly.

"Bullshit!" Jonathan pulled the hammer back with his thumb. "You recruited us, sent us to that fuckin' Farm, then set us up to die."

"I'm telling you, I never ordered you dead. I wanted you to succeed. You were going to be a sleeper agent. Used only for Black Ops. Even the Director wanted you."

"Then why did they try to kill us at the Farm? Why did they kill Johnson in the woods? Tell me you didn't order *his* death?"

Silence.

"That's what I thought. Well I don't take kindly to being killed. Guess you're going to get a new star on your wall."

"What are you going to do?"

“What else,” Jonathan answered with a slight smile, “a black op of course.” He threw a set of handcuffs onto the front seat. “Left had through the lower half of the steering wheel and your right hand through the top. Lock ‘em good and tight.”

Brian picked up the handcuffs. He slid his hands through the steering wheel, locking his wrist tight.

“Is that my rifle?”

“Yes.”

“Thanks for getting her for me.” He opened a backpack on the floor. He reached over and grabbed the briefcase. “You guys are some piece of work, you know that?”

Jonathan began to take Hera, piece by piece, and stuff it into the backpack. He threw the empty briefcase back upfront, breaking the radio as it bounced to the floorboard on the passenger side. “I think I’ll take the phone too. I’m not giving you an advantage.”

“Just like in New York.”

“Look on the bright side, at least this time you get to keep your clothes on. But you lost a hell of a lot more than that. Five CTs and one chief instructor. Tell me something, do dead CTs get a star too?”

“Who’s dead?”

“The three your dog Star sent after Johnson. They succeeded but not before he killed them. What do you have to say about that you sonovabitch?”

Silence again.

“I see, tongue tied. Well maybe this’ll make you talk,” he popped out a switch blade. “This is for Johnson.”

He jammed the blade deep into Brian’s right leg, twisting ninety degrees before pulling it out. His leg squirted out blood as the blade was pulled. Jonathan then shoved it into Brian’s side, causing him to scream out loudly.

“I bet you’ll never forget Johnson now. I’m going to complete my mission then leave the country. Don’t try to find me. Don’t send agents after me. I will not hesitate to kill them or you for that matter. Good-bye Mr. Ramstead.”

Jonathan hit Brian in the back of the head, causing him to black out. He opened the door and got out. Traffic was beginning to move and horns were honking. He pointed the gun toward the car directly behind him and all the honking seemed to stop.

He pointed to pistol back down, firing two shots, one into each tire. He walked around to the other side of car and fired two more shots. Thumbing the safety on he put the gun into the backpack. Strapping the pack on he mounted the sports bike he had stolen and drove away.



“You fucked up Ryan,” Brian yelled from behind his desk. “You fucked up royally. You far exceeded your orders. The old man wants heads to roll.”

“You’re getting carried away Brain. Don’t forget he’s a criminal, a murderer.”

“And you’re not,” Brian snapped back.

“Fuck you. I served my country, I did my duty. My job is to weed out the bad apples and get rid of them. That’s what I did.”

“Well the DCI doesn’t think so. He thinks you took the New York hits personally. You were out to get them from day one. I agree.”

“Ass kisser.”

“You underestimated these guys. They ambushed me twice. They were able to ID your set up at the Crab Cake. They extracted Intel from your men quickly. Jonathan managed to escape the Farm undetected.”

“What?”

“That’s right,” Brian paused to let that bit of information sink in. “He’s alive and took his dead friend with him. Here’s the kicker, he’s marked *you* as his next target.”

“So what,” Ryan said coldly, not reacting the way Brian had expected. “I’m not as lazy as you are. There’s nothing that pussy can do to me.”

“I’m glad you feel so strongly. Here,” Brian slid a piece of paper across his desk to Ryan. It was a direct order written out in the Director’s own handwriting. Ryan read the order. Furious, he slammed it down on Brian’s desk.

“Seems the old man doesn’t share your optimism. Sally has the papers in order. You need to complete them before you leave.” Brian leaned back in his chair, wincing at the pain that shot through his body from his stab wounds. “I’m sorry Ryan, this guy is damn good and he’s out for your blood. You fucked this bed up, now you have to sleep in it.”

Ryan stood up. He shot Brian a cold stare.

“I’ll take care of this asshole myself,” he growled through clenched teeth. “You will be sorry for this.”

“Good luck with that Ryan. Make sure you see Sally before you leave.”



A large thunderstorm rolled into the D.C. area. Thunder and lightning consumed the city. The clouds were a dark purple, full of rain ready to fall to the people below. It was barely five p.m. but already the sky looked like midnight.

Ryan was sitting in his home. He was drinking scotch and watching CNN in his living room. He hated being the bait but it was the only way he could flush out Jonathan. It had been three days since Jonathan attacked Brian and Ryan was getting impatient.

Thunder crashed and lightning flashed. The rain started to fall. It was coming down hard. Ryan listened as the rain played its melody on his rooftop. He took a deep breath letting it out slowly.

“Red Team, Blue Team, wrap it up.”

“Say again Galaxy,” Red leader answered to Ryan’s call.

“Bring it in. Go on home. This is going to be a bad storm. No need for you to be out there for nothing.”

“What about the hunter?”

“It was a bluff to buy him time to leave the country. If he was going to do something he would have done something by now. I thank you for your services. Galaxy out.”

Ryan turned the radio off and threw it across the room. The DCI did not want him anywhere near Langley or the Farm. If Ryan wanted to return to work he had to give him Jonathan. For now he was going to get drunk.

Jonathan was sitting in a tree a half mile away from Ryan’s house. He heard the order for the two teams to leave. Ryan was finally giving up, a mistake that will be fatal to Ryan.

Ryan had once again underestimated Jonathan. If he bothered to read his entire file Ryan would figure out what kind of man Jonathan really was. He never quit. He always completed his mission no matter how long it took.

On one mission Jonathan had laid in a pile of mud for six days without leaving. Rain poured down for four days and night. Bugs and snakes crawling all over him yet he stayed where he was. He was patient and finally completed his mission.

Looking through his binoculars he watched as each man left from around Ryan's house. They had a lot of hardware with them. They weren't going to take any chances where Jonathan was concerned. He smiled as he left his tree. It was time to finish his mission.

The rain continued to pour down hard. There was no sign of it letting up. This was the perfect setting for him to attack Ryan. What better irony than to complete a black op in the black of night.

He was a block away from Ryan's house. The storm was growing more intense with each passing moment. He drew his pistol from his hip, aiming at the transformer in the air. A loud crash of thunder and lightning shook and rattled the windows. It was followed shortly by another crash.

Jonathan fired a round into the transformer, blowing it up. Power went out on the entire street. Sparks flew from the transformer. Now it was totally dark.

He made his way to the back of Ryan's house. Silently he opened the sliding door to the kitchen, making his way into the house. He could see a figure sitting in a chair. His pistol was in front of him with a flashlight attached below the barrel. He turned the light on.

"I didn't think you would come," Ryan said in a normal tone before taking another sip of his drink. "Especially on a night like tonight."

"You don't know me very well then," Jonathan answered as he aimed the pistol at Ryan. "I know you have a gun near you. I could kill you now before you could reach it but that would be a waste, don't you think?"

Ryan sat in silence finishing his drink.

"What do you propose then?"

"Well, since you're a top agent with the CIA you must be highly trained. You don't think I belong. So let's see if you're right."

"We step outside and fight in the rain. No guns, no weapons, just skill. The winner walks away, the loser is dead." Without seeing, Jonathan knew Ryan had a smile on his face at the thought of seeing Jonathan dead. "A *legend* such as you deserves to die fighting."

"A chance to kill you with my own two hands," Ryan asked mockingly, "how could I refuse?"

Ryan stood up slowly, not giving Jonathan an excuse to shoot him. As he turned around to face him he could see the pistol still pointed at him. They calmly walked outside where the rain was coming down harder than before.

"Now we strip off everything," Jonathan said, "just to make sure there are no hidden weapons."

"Fair enough," Ryan said as he yanked off his shirt.

Both men stripped down to their birthday suits in silence, not taking their eyes off of each other.

"Well asshole, I'm ready, are you," Ryan asked.

Jonathan took two steps closer to Ryan, his feet splashing in the pools of water building in Ryan's backyard. Ryan was not going to waste any more time. He attacked Jonathan quickly and hard. His first punch connected but Jonathan countered with one of his own. He grabbed Ryan's shoulders and kneed him in the gut. As Ryan doubled over he reached down, grabbing Jonathan's foot. He pulled hard.

Jonathan was expecting it. He allowed his foot to go up easily. When Ryan pulled hard the foot kicked him in the face. He fell back onto the wet grass.

Jonathan swung around, kneeling on the ground; he wrapped his hand around Ryan's neck. He squeezed with all his might, draining the life out of Ryan.

Ryan's foot flew up and kicked Jonathan in the back of his neck. His grip loosened, allowing him a chance to push Jonathan off. His left hand was swinging toward the side of Jonathan's throat.

Jonathan had tightened the muscles in his throat, helping to absorb some of the impact. It didn't help much. His throat began to throb. He stood up and backed away, putting some distance between him and Ryan.

Coughing hard, desperately trying to gain control of his breathing, something inside him clicked. His mind shut down and instinct took over. He had a target that has to be killed. He looked around in the darkness of the rain to find his target.

Ryan got to his feet, ready to fight. He had underestimated Jonathan for the last time. He was no longer going to hold back. It was time to get his life back by taking Jonathan's.

"I am Death, your life is mine tonight," Jonathan started reciting his chant. He was going to kill Ryan. "I take it without remorse, when I have you in my sight."

"Fuck you," Ryan shouted, trying to distract Jonathan.

Both men walked toward each other. It was about to become a slug match. Jonathan kept reciting his chant as he fought. He punched Ryan in the jaw, then in the gut. Ryan countered with his own blows.

Two experts in hand to hand combat would not end easily. Both men wanted to kill the other, both men anticipating the other man's moves.

"In a split second, as you take your last breath, you know your life belongs to me, for I AM DEATH!"

As Jonathan called himself Death he thrust upward with the base of his palm at Ryan's nose. He connected, breaking Ryan's nose, jamming the bone into his brain. Ryan's body went limp, falling to the ground, his face burying itself deep in the soft mud.

Jonathan lifted his head back, facing the sky. Lightning flashed, covering the backyard in a soft blue glow. The battle was over. The victor stumbled away.



Chapter 8 Left Behind

Anthony was in the kitchen boiling a large pot of water. Next to that was a smaller pot of boiling water with two scalpels inside it. He was sterilizing them.

His patient was lying in his bed. He had a slight fever that Anthony was trying to keep under control. In all honesty the man needed a hospital not a home version of a clinic. He wasn't a doctor but he knew enough to know Johnson was near death.

He threw some pasta into the large pot, and then turned off the smaller pot. Using tongs, he took the scalpels out and laid them on a white towel. He folded the towel around the scalpels and took them to his bathroom. He had used the tub as an operating table twice this week. Now he had to use it once more.

He walked back into the bedroom. Checking Johnson's pulse he let out a heavy sigh.

"What's wrong Doc? How is he?"

Jonathan had been sitting by Johnson's side since he got back from D.C. New York would be the last place the CIA would be looking for him.

"He's dying Jonathan. He lost a lot of blood and has not woken up since you brought him here. He may never wake up." Anthony took a deep breath, letting it out slowly before continuing. "His pulse is weak. I have no more IVs to give him. If he doesn't wake up soon he'll starve to death."

"Speaking of food..."

"I'm not hungry," Jonathan snapped, cutting him off.

"I don't care if you're hungry or not," Anthony snapped back. "You have to eat. I don't need two people dying in my apartment."

"I have pasta boiling. If you want to stay here you *need* to eat. If you're ready I want to try for that last piece of shrapnel in your leg."

"Sure thing Doc," Jonathan said softly, "whatever you say."

He stood up and walked toward the bathroom. Grabbing the snorkel mask off the back of the toilet, he stepped into the tub. The water was warm as he lay down on his stomach, dropping his face under water. Anthony grabbed Jonathan's right leg. He picked up a scalpel and began cutting.



Jonathan, Johnson, and Steve were hanging from the ceiling by their hands. Their hands were stretched out above their heads. Neither one of them knew how long they had been hanging there.

The roof had holes where boards were broken and missing. Rain provided the only water they were able to drink. They had no food. No one had checked on them in days. The only other creatures they saw were rats. Rats that were not afraid of humans.

At night they would come out, climbing over the men, biting flesh and drawing blood. The men never screamed, ignoring the pain that reminded them they were still very much alive.

Jonathan was the team leader and he felt he had to keep their spirits up. If they were going to die, they were going to die fighting, after all they are Marines.

To help build their spirits they would hum the Marine Corps hymn. It would renew their strength every time.

Two of their captures walked into what Jonathan figured was a barn. Even though they were drained of energy, they weren't about to show it. Something didn't seem right to Jonathan. In fact, the entire mission seemed strange to him.

Senator Rodsteen, who was a close personal friend of the President, had a son who was kidnapped out of his room in Rio de Janeiro. His guards didn't remember a thing. Two weeks later the Senator receives the demands. Three million dollars to an off shore account in the Caymans and a political prisoner named Vicente Fernandez to be released.

The President was not about to negotiate with South American drug lords. Rodsteen was willing to pay the money but there was nothing he could do to release Vicente. He sent a negotiator to Rio to talk with the drug lords; he got a burnt finger with his son Brody's class ring on it. The price increased to five million.

The President was willing to send a SEAL team down to retrieve Brody. Rodsteen, however, wanted a small Marine Recon team to do the retrieval. Being a Marine in his youth he trusted them more. It was considered a suicide mission and assigned to the lowest ranking team. Jonathan's team was fresh out of training so it became their first real mission.

The two men were talking in Spanish, which told Jonathan they were no longer in Brazil. The men were pointing up at the team, trying to figure out what to do with them. Jonathan listened for any information he could translate. He hoped to God Steve was paying attention too. Steve was the one who spoke Spanish.

The men finished smoking then walked out. Steve was shouting, "Comida," as they left. They ignored him.

After a few minutes of silence Johnson blurted out, "What the fuck did they say?"

"I got that we've been here for three days," Jonathan answered.

"And that we're gonna die in the morning," Steve added. "Brody wants us dead."

"What do you mean Brody," Johnson asked. "We're here to rescue him."

"Wrong brother. Seems Brody is running the show."

"Fuck," Jonathan shouted as he stomped his legs. Since they were not near the ground his body jerked on the rope. Sounds of wood cracking filled the barn. "I fuckin' knew this was a bad mission."

Johnson and Steve heard the wood cracking as Jonathan thrashed. The wood was slowly breaking.

"Hey Johnny, stop that," Johnson said as he looked up at the ceiling. An idea was forming. Jonathan stopped thrashing. "Look at the ceiling Johnny, its breaking."

Jonathan looked up. If the wood broke then they would be free. "So why'd you stop me? Let's break it and get out of here."

"It's been raining off and on since we got here so we wait till it rains again. If we bust the roof now those assholes will hear it and kill us. When the rain comes we break it during the thunder. Then we get the hell out of here."

"I'm cool with that," Steve agreed.

The trio hung from the ceiling quietly. The sky started growing dark as the clouds rolled in, large and black, full of rain. The thunder roared, causing the beams in the barn to creek. It took a few minutes to get the timing down but with each crack of thunder all three threw their bodies downward.

With each thrust the rafter above cracked more and more. A soldier came running into the barn, trying to get some cover from the rain. He decided to toy with the prisoners.

He pulled a bottle of tequila out from inside his jacket. There wasn't much left so he finished it off.

"Pinche' gringos," he slurred as he stumbled over to them.

Jonathan could smell the alcohol on him. He hoped the soldier would just pass out. No such luck. He came up to Steven and punched him in the gut. Steven's body swung back then forward, pulling more on the broken rafter. The soldier drew his knife and jammed it into Steve's stomach.

Jonathan and Johnson screamed as they started thrashing. The soldier yanked his knife out of Steve and stabbed him again as Steve attempted to wrap his legs around the soldier's neck. In his weakened state the most he could do was lightly choke him with his thighs.

The soldier was able to grab a hold of his knife and yank the knife out, squirting stomach acid as he pulled it out. Steve's leg went limp and the soldier pulled down, trying to throw Steve off of him. That was all that was needed to finally snap the rafter.

The three men fell to the floor, knocking the soldier off of his feet. The knife fell onto the floor behind Johnson. He reached for it as Jonathan stepped in front of the soldier.

With all his might Jonathan threw his tied hands at the man's throat, crushing his windpipe. Now the soldier couldn't scream for help. He couldn't breathe anymore either.

Johnson quickly cut Jonathan's ropes. Jonathan cut Johnson's ropes then they fell to Steve. Steve was dead. He had no strength in him to fight so he died quickly.

In a fit of rage Jonathan squeezed the knife handle in his hand. He walked over to the soldier and stabbed him in the back. The man would have screamed if not for his crushed throat. Again and again Jonathan stabbed the man. He was not in control, the rage inside him was.

Johnson ran to their gear that was piled in the corner of the barn. He knocked off the rats crawling over it, checking what was left behind by the soldiers. Their boots were lying there as well. Finding his canteen he opened it, drinking the hot water inside quickly. It burned going down but after no water for three days he didn't care.

Grabbing Jonathan's canteen, he threw it at him. Jonathan stopped stabbing the soldier and picked up the canteen. His mind was working in overtime as he drank down the water. He knew how he going to get his team out of the hell hole they were in.

Johnson saw the look on Jonathan's face. He knew that look, Jonathan had a plan. He pulled his boots on, pain shooting up through his legs, thinking how good the down time for medical recovery would be.

Jonathan strapped on his gear before walking over to Steve. Lifting him onto his shoulder he walked to the entrance of the barn. Looking out to see that there was no one around; most of the soldiers were inside somewhere, trying to stay dry. Jonathan ran out of the barn and into the jungle. Johnson was right behind him.

Jonathan ran, not looking back, until he thought they were safe. Gently he set Steve down before collapsing on the ground. Johnson caught up to him and fell to the ground as well. They were both breathing heavy.

"Johnson, what we got left?"

"Everything but the MREs. Rats ate those. Dumb fuckers didn't check our gear."

"Good. Get on the horn and get us the fuck out of here. I have a package to retrieve."

"Roger that."

Jonathan drank the remainder of his canteen. He dropped his pack and ran back into the complex. Brody was coming home whither he wanted to or not.

The complex was very dark. It was still raining hard and the soldiers were still inside. Quietly Jonathan made his way into the camp. He could see men passed out everywhere. It was very late.

After thirty minutes of sneaking around he finally found Brody. Sneaking in was easy. He drew his knife and slit the throats of every man inside the hooch. Taking a rope from a soldier he tied Brody up and gagged his mouth. He picked up the package and carried him off into the jungle.

Brody woke up and began to struggle. Jonathan dropped him off his shoulder, letting him fall hard to the ground. Jonathan heard a crack as Brody's arm broke. He squatted down and punched Brody hard, knocking him unconscious.

Jonathan picked him up again and carried him back to where Johnson and Steve were.

“Status on the helo,” Jonathan asked as he flopped on the ground.

“One hour,” Johnson answered. “Fifteen clicks north of here.”

“Let’s hustle. Gonna have some angry soldiers on our ass.”

“Roger that.”

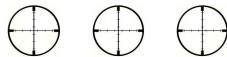
Brody started waking up. Drawing his knife Jonathan walked over to him. He grabbed Brody’s hair and lifted his head back.

“Look at him you little spoiled brat,” Jonathan said, pointing at Steve. “That was a good honorable man, not some pussy like you. He served his country because he believed in freedom. He had a family. You had him killed because you wanted daddy’s money. Well, a life for a life.”

Jonathan stabbed Brody in the stomach, twisting the knife as he pulled it back out. Brody would be dead in ten minutes, dying slow and painfully as he bled out.

Walking over to Steve, Jonathan picked him up and carried him to the landing zone. Johnson pulled Brody by a rope he tied around his waist.

As the helicopter lifted off the soldiers caught up to them. The crew chief began firing the . 30mm caliber machine gun mounted to the side of the chopper. Suddenly the chopper banked hard to the left. Johnson was at the door, not strapped in, and slid out over the edge. He screamed as he fell to the ground below.



“Ahhh,” Johnson yelled as he sat straight up in bed. He was soaked from a cold sweat.

“Easy brother,” Jonathan whispered, trying to calm him down. The room was dark and rain was beating the window softly. “It was just a bad dream.”

Johnson looked around, trying to assess his surroundings. “Where the hell am I?”

“In Anthony’s apartment,” he answered, putting down his cup of coffee. “How do ya feel?”

“Like shit,” Johnson sighed as he flopped back onto his pillow. “I was dreaming about Steve, except it was me that fell out of the chopper.”

“Come on brother. I wouldn’t leave you behind.”

“What the hell happened,” Johnson asked, not wanting to talk anymore about Steve.

“We’re flunked out of the CIA,” Jonathan answered with a chuckle. “They know I’m alive but I made sure they thought you were dead. I got rid of the bodies and brought you here.”

“How long,” he whispered, reaching for his throat.

“Here, let me,” Jonathan reached over to the side of the bed and poured a glass of water for Johnson. He lifted Johnson’s head and helped him drink the water. “Anyway, you’ve been out for two weeks. I’ve been by your side since I killed Star.”

Johnson spit out the water in his mouth, “You what? Jesus Johnny!”

“Calm down,” Jonathan answered. “It’s okay. The CIA gave him the boot after what happened to us. Ramstead knew I was going to kill him.”

Johnson drew in a deep breath, blowing it out loudly. His legs ached from a lack of use. Slowly he lifted each leg. Pain shot through his body, making him regret moving.

“Now what oh fearless leader?”

“I thought about that long and hard while you were out. I figure you need a vacation in Poon town.”

“Fuckin A,” Johnson interrupted, chuckling and moaning from the pain.

“How does Switzerland sound?”

“Rich in poontang, that’s how it sounds.”

They laughed. Jonathan was happy his best friend had finally come back.



Chapter 9 Lost Again

“This is your mess Ramstead. You came to me, remember! I told you, you better be able to control him. Now he’s vanished again.”

“But Sir, it wasn’t my fault. Star was the one who exceeded his orders.”

“I don’t want excuses,” the Director cut him off. “I want results. Do you have any idea where McGregor is?”

“No Sir. I have people looking in New York as well as here. If he tries to leave the country we’ll catch him.”

“You better be right. Now,” he sat down and picked up a file folder, “what are we doing about this?”

Brian reached for the folder. Looking inside he saw the pictures of the three men Ryan used to kill Johnson. They had been missing for two weeks. Jonathan had gotten rid of the bodies. Brian had to admit, he did a hell of a job too.

“Training accident,” Brian answered, closing the file. “I’ll send a letter to their families. Say there was nothing left to send home. Give a flag and thank them for their sacrifice to this country. They’ll eat that shit up.”

“See that it’s done. I want a final answer on McGregor by the end of the month.”

“Yes Sir,” Brian said as he stood up. He turned toward the door then paused. “He would have been a hell of an agent if he had survived.”

“Maybe.”

Brian walked out of the Director’s office, not saying a word to anyone on his way out.



Brian walked straight past Sally to his office and slammed the door. He picked up the phone and dialed a number. He let it ring five times before hanging up. He dialed another number and it went straight to voicemail.

He slammed down the receiver, frustrated. He had ten days to find Jonathan. Ten days and no leads. How the hell could this kid from the streets just disappear? He had no real training; his face was plastered all over the news for months as the New York Sniper.

“Sally, did you get me that list I asked for,” he shouted through the door. There was no response. “Sally!”

“Its right here, you big baby,” she answered as she walked into his office. “You don’t need to shout at me. I didn’t chew your ass today.”

He looked at her with a firm face. Like a child who just snapped at her father. She threw up her hands and stormed out, slamming the door behind her.

Brian chuckled as he thought about Sally's husband. He had to put up with her for over forty years. Poor man.

Laughing the thought away he opened the file he was just handed. Jonathan was wounded and he would need help. If he went to a hospital or clinic he would be caught. He would have to go to someone he could trust. That meant military men.

There were two lists. One was a list of every man who ever served with Jonathan. The other was of anyone who served in Special Forces as a medic. Brian had the list narrowed down to people in the New York/Jersey area and the D.C. area.

He looked both list over. Only three names jumped out at him. One he crossed off immediately. Ramos was the guy who turned Jonathan in for the reward money. The other two were very good marks.

Grabbing his keys he got up from his desk. He took a deep breath before opening the door. He already knew the look that would be on Sally's face. He had no time to waste on her being pouty. He was on a deadline.

"Sally I'm going to New York for a few days. I am to be unreachable. You know the drill."

"Uh huh," she responded as he walked out of the office.



Brian never served in the military. He had gone to private schools all his life. He went to Yale then straight into the CIA. He had wanted to be the American version of James Bond, women, fine foods, saving the world and being a hero. Boy was he wrong.

Training was rough. Tougher than anything he'd ever been through in his life. Upon graduation from the Farm he was a ruthless killing machine. He was given assignments in Western Europe working as a diplomatic spy.

He was good at his job. He got the details no one else could get. He knew how to identify a mark, work them, and turn them quickly. He was a good judge of people. How they would react in certain situations.

He hoped he was right on this hunch. Not being in the military, he couldn't completely get into Jonathan's mind. He had to use common sense. Sitting outside of Richard Lewis' apartment complex, he pushed a tape into his tape deck.

His voice came over the speakers, giving details about Richard. He was in Marine Recon the same time Jonathan was. He had been stationed in San Diego for two years. Six months of that time Jonathan was in Richard's unit. His job was a field medic.

Richard was discharged from the Corps one month after Jonathan. He moved to New York and became a medic. In Brian's book it all added up. Jonathan had to be here.

Brian checked his watch. It was now 7:25 p.m. Richard's shift ended in thirty five minutes. This was the part he hated the most, waiting. At least he was parked two blocks away.

He began to go over his plan again in his head. After Richard returned from work he was going to head to the complex. He would make a force entry. It should just be Richard and Jonathan inside, but Brian wasn't going to take any chances.

He glanced over at the passenger seat. An M-4 assault rifle was lying on the seat, with two thirty round magazines. Under his shirt was a bullet proof vest with two trauma plates in the front and back instead of just one. It was heavy but would keep him alive if he was shot by Hera.

Time passed quickly. Richard was walking up the street. He looked like the neighborhood, like shit. It was so run down you couldn't throw a rock without hitting a junkie or hooker, the perfect place for a killer to hide, to vanish.

As Richard went inside Brian got ready. He picked up the M-4 and shoved a magazine in, racking a round into the chamber. He put the other magazine in his pant pocket. Quickly he opened the door and got out.

Brian moved with speed and stealth, the rifle pointing down, ready to fire. He opened the door to the complex, moving slow, scanning the area, pointing his weapon up the stairs.

The smell of urine, piss, and liquor rushed him. He gagged, the smell was so bad. He almost threw up but suppressed it as he regained control of his body. He saw a homeless man sleeping on the floor to his right, a bottle of Jack Daniels was still in his hand.

Step by step he climbed the stairs, his back against the wall, finger hovering over the trigger. Apartment 306 was his target. Ten minutes passed since Richard walked into the complex. Time enough for the men inside to relax.

He counted to three before kicking the door open. Rushing in he aimed the rifle at the body standing behind the couch.

"Police! Don't move! Don't move!"

A muffled scream filled the air as Richard's hands flew up. He was naked behind a girl bent over the couch. Her hands were tied together behind her back and a black rubber ball in her mouth, tied around her head. She was terrified, with tears in her eyes.

Richard's hands may have been up but he didn't stop thrusting. He smiled, never taking his eyes off of Brian.

"Where's McGregor," Brian shouted as he moved closer to Richard.

"Who," Richard asked confused, still not stopping his thrusting.

"McGregor! Jonathan McGregor! Come out here now!"

"If you don't mind," Richard said as he lowered his hands to grab the girl's hips, holding her in place so she couldn't get away as he thrust harder. "I'm trying to fuck my girlfriend."

The girl, tears running down her cheeks, was trying to scream, shaking her head no as she cried.

"Shit up bitch," Richard shouted, slapping her ass so hard her skin turned red where his hand hit. "Take it like the whore you are!"

Brian could see she was being raped. He raised his rifle and pulled the trigger. Richard fell to the floor, two rounds hitting him in the right shoulder.

The girl screamed as loud as she could as she quickly fell to the floor, trying to crawl away. Brian stepped back, blocking her path to the door.

"You shot me," Richard shouted, rolling to his left side. "You fucking shot me you asshole!"

Brian squeezed the trigger once again, three rounds hitting the floor above Richard's head.

"Not another sound or the next one goes in your head. Now roll over onto your stomach."

Richard did as he was told. There was no way he could make a run for it. The girl was balled up in the corner, crying. She wasn't going anywhere either.

Brian took out a pair of flex cuffs from his back pocket. He knelt down and grabbed Richard's right hand, pulling hard, making Richard scream out in pain. He placed the cuffs on him loosely. When he cuffed his left hand, he squeezed down tight.

"Alright asshole," Brian said, grabbing Richard's neck, "let's check the rest of the apartment."

He pulled Richard up. He pointed the rifle at his back. He turned to the girl, "Come on sweetheart, you too." She shook her head no. He pointed the rifle at her, "NOW!"

He yanked her to her feet as she continued to cry. She walked behind Richard, her gag and handcuffs still in place. They walked toward one of the bedrooms. There was a bed with clothes thrown about. A medic's uniform was on the floor in a pile.

The girl motioned toward the other bedroom. She was shaking from fear. Brian grabbed the blanket off the bed and quickly wrapped her up in it.

"Let's see that other room."

Richard didn't move. Brian shoved him with the barrel. He stumbled forward toward the other door. He stood in front of the door. Brian reached over and opened the door. Brian couldn't believe his eyes. Inside were five other girls lying naked on the floor, looking the same as the other girl. All the girls were nearly dead.



Brian's cell phone rang. He looked down at the caller ID. "Shit," he yelled under his breath as he hit the send button. "Yes Sir."

"Ramstead, what the fuck is going on," the Director yelled. "I get a call that one of my senior agents is posing as a police officer. Do you have any idea what I had to pull to get you released?"

"I was following a lead. I thought I had McGregor cornered. Found something much worse instead."

"So you killed the guy. One of those girls is a Senator's daughter. She told her father that you busted in, shot the guy as he was behind her, then forced her to follow you throughout the apartment. What the hell were you thinking? If this thing blows up it's your ass in the chipper."

The line went dead. Brian closed the phone and put it back in his shirt pocket. He sat inside his car thinking about what he just witnessed. Those poor girls. He was glad he killed that monster.

His phone rang again, startling him. He reached into his pocket and answered it without looking at the caller ID.

"Mr. Ramstead, you're a hero."

"Jonathan. How the hell are you," he responded casually.

"Better than you. I take it you were looking for me."

"What gave me away?"

"You're in New York. You busted in alone. I have to tell you, I never got along with Richard. He always gave me the creeps."

"Okay, so I busted the wrong guy."

"No Mr. Ramstead, not at all. I think God sent you there to rescue those girls. Like I said, you're a hero."

"Cut the crap would ya? Where are you?"

"Far from you," Jonathan answered quickly. "You know I've always thought that Costa Rica was a nice place. Good food, good women. I could live like a king."

"So you're leaving the country then?"

"Yup. I have some unfinished business in South America then who knows where, maybe Costa Rica."

"With what money," he asked, ignoring Jonathan trying to distract him. "We froze all your accounts."

“That wasn’t very nice of you Mr. Ramstead.” Jonathan knew it irritated Brian every time he used his name. That’s why he kept doing it. “But you can’t freeze mercenary work.”

“You? A mercenary? No way.”

“Why? Cause that’s what you wanted me to be and I refused? Desperate times Mr. Ramstead. Desperate times.”

“You know I’ll still catch you?”

“Only if I let you. Good-bye Mr. Ramstead.”

The line went dead again. Brian tried dialing the last number back. It was a pay phone that didn’t except incoming calls. The area code was one he didn’t know. He decided to call the operator.

He gave the operator his ID authorization code and asked her to cut into the phone number that had just called him. It just rang and rang. The operator gave up after the sixth ring. The phone was in Atlanta, George, at the international airport. Jonathan really was leaving the country.



Chapter 10

Why God Made Mexico

Mexico border towns are great for someone on the run. Everyone is friendly and at the same time keep to themselves. There’s actually more security at the airport than on the boarder itself. You don’t even need a car to get across the border; you could just walk to the other side of the bridge right into Mexico.

Jonathan and Johnson were sitting inside the Golden Coral in McAllen, Texas, eating breakfast, waiting for the bank across the street to open. They were less than a mile away from the border.

After becoming a sniper Jonathan began to think like a covert operative. Since he had no one to spend his money on or send home to he saved it. In fifteen different states he kept a safety deposit box. Inside each box he kept two thousand dollars, a fake ID and passport, and a .40mm pistol with one magazine fully loaded. McAllen was the last box they needed to empty.

Dressed in a business suite Jonathan walked into the bank alone and spoke with the manager, providing the fake ID he used to open the account with. The man was the same man who opened the account for him. After a few exchanges of pleasantries they were in the safety deposit vault.

Jonathan handed the manager his key, allowing him to open the outer box. He drew the inner box and placed it on the table.

“Take all the time you need,” the manager said as he handed Jonathan his key. “When you are finished just leave the empty box and key here. I’m sorry to see you go. Good luck.”

He left the room. Jonathan opened the briefcase and pulled out a backpack. He then opened the box and started filling the bag with the money. Placing the gun in the small of his back, he put the bag back inside the briefcase and walked out of the bank.

“So now what,” Johnson asked, keeping pace with Jonathan as he walked passed. “You told Ramstead we were leaving the country.”

“We walk across the bridge into Mexico. There’s a Wal-Mart a few blocks ahead. I ditch this suit; we pick up a few supplies and disappear.”

“What supplies? How the hell are we going to get out of here?” Jonathan smiled. Johnson hated when he smiled like that. It made him nervous. He swallowed the last of his water. “Let’s get this over with. I know you; you don’t have a fuckin’ clue what to do next.”

“I’m hurt. Have I ever let...”

“Cut the crap Johnny.”

“Okay, but I’ll have one by the time we leave Wal-Mart.”



Reynosa, Mexico, was just as large a city as McAllen. Jonathan had chosen it because they would be able to get transportation to Mexico City easier than in a smaller town. He and Johnson had walked across the bridge with no problems. They were dressed as backpackers wanting to cross Mexico.

At Wal-Mart they had bought large mountain backpacks and filled them with clothes. At the bottom of each sack was their money. They each had a gun stuffed in the front of their jeans inside a Pager Pal. Instead of a pager, however, they attached the cell phones they just bought. Prepaid cell phones that will work anywhere in the world.

As they were about to leave the border area a soldier stopped them. No one else was around which told Jonathan this soldier was out for money.

“Hola amigo,” Jonathan said, “we are going to Mexico City. Can you point us toward the bus station?”

“Passports,” the soldier responded coldly.

Jonathan took Johnson’s and handed them both to the soldier. “Please, any help will do.”

The soldier opened the passports. Inside each passport was a hundred dollar bill, the true documentation needed in Mexico. The soldier would either take them where they wanted to go or he would try to bust them. Jonathan was prepared to take him down if he tried to bust them. The soldier took the money and smiled.

“Come with me, I’ll take you to a coyote.”

He walked toward his car. Jonathan let out a breath he had been holding. They hopped into the car and the soldier sped off.

“You come to Mexico to hide,” the soldier asked. “This is a good country to hide in. Coyotes will smuggle you in or out of the country. If you have money you can party good down here. You gringos like to party?”

“No,” Jonathan responded. “We just need to get to Mexico City. My friend might want a woman when we get there but not before.”

“Many beautiful women in Mexico City, nothing like the putas here. You can live like a king here though.”

“That’s why God made Mexico,” Jonathan interrupted, hoping to shut the soldier up. “We can have everything we want.”

The soldier did not like the way Jonathan talked about his country. Mexico was poor, but who was he to insult Mexico? The soldier shrugged it off. He just made two hundred dollars and would make another two when he dropped them off, his finder’s fee.

They drove on in silence. Mexico City was a four hour drive and Jonathan wanted to get there sooner than that. So far they spent two hundred and he was willing to spend another six hundred if they could fly to Mexico City.

He wanted to leave Mexico as soon as possible. They would be traveling for the next three days before being able to rest. Their final destination was Bern, the capital of Switzerland. Not too big and not too small, a city both modern and old, the perfect place to live a quiet life.

The soldier had driven south, going toward the edge of the city. The area looked poor. The houses were small, mostly just one large room. They were living in a box, anyway you looked at it, it was a box. Johnson just looked out the window like a kid watching the scenery go by. In the Marines he had seen enough poverty that it no longer fazed him. He wasn't there to help them, he couldn't help them, so he just did his job.

Jonathan, on the other hand, saw a life long since gone. He lived in those boxes, in those alleys. He lived day to day, not knowing where his next meal would come from. He had to fight for what little food he did find. America, land of the free, home of the brave, and he grew up in a war zone. But that was a long time ago, before now, before the Marines.

He took a deep breath, breathing out louder than he had expected. The car came to a stop in front of a warehouse. The soldier got out of the car and spoke quietly to the man in front of the car. Jonathan strained to hear what they were saying but they started whispering.

Jonathan didn't like the look on the soldier's face. His entire body tingled, something was wrong. Without wasting a second Jonathan slid over to the driver's side and threw the car in reverse. He gunned the gas and sped away.

The two men, stunned, began shouting at Jonathan as they ran down the alley after the car. The other man pulled out an automatic rifle and opened fire at the car. A few bullets hit the windshield but Jonathan ignored them as he approached the street.

The car flew out of the alley onto the main street. Jonathan spun the wheel and continued to drive in reverse, honking his horn as he went. Soon there would be a cross street wide enough for Jonathan to turn the car around. Johnson braced himself for a rollover as Jonathan spun the wheel sharply, thrusting the clutch in and ramming the shifter out of reverse into second gear. Without losing speed the car shot forward.

"Think they teach that at the Farm," Jonathan asked as he let out a breath he had been holding.

"Guess we'll never find out," Johnson replied. "Two hundred fuckin' dollars down the drain!"

"It bought us this car," Jonathan said laughing. "Let's see how fast we can get to Mexico City."

They drove on in silence. The wheels in Jonathan's head were turning, he was going to have to modify his plans, and it was best not to interrupt them.



The international terminal in Mexico City was very busy. Jonathan sat in his seat reading a book. Johnson was busy trying to talk some German girl into joining the mile high club with him. He had been in a dry spell and wanted to break it as soon as possible.

Jonathan couldn't concentrate on his book but he didn't put it down. The adrenalin was still pumping through his blood, keeping him on edge. He wouldn't relax until they were in Bern.

He watched closely as anyone walked too close to him. He sat in a corner, with his back against the wall, this way no one could sneak up on him. Both bags were on the seat next to him. Nothing seemed out of place. No one was looking for them.

His stomach began to growl. Looking at his watch, there was another hour before boarding would begin. He had not eaten since breakfast six hours ago. Closing the book, he grabbed Johnson's bag. They had bought four bags of beef jerky, a plastic jar of peanut butter, and a box of Ritz crackers. Jonathan didn't trust the food in Mexico.

He grabbed two large strips of jerky and closed the bag again. Gnawing on a fat piece, Jonathan laughed to himself over their escape in Reynosa. It was close but with the help of his friend Benjamin Franklin they got what they needed.

At the airport Jonathan had bought tickets from a travel agent, Reynosa to Mexico City on AeroMexico Express. Switch planes in Mexico City to Berlin, Germany. Once in Berlin they would switch to Lufthansa Airlines and fly straight into Bern.

They left the travel agency and went to the private terminal. There they found a fueler who would, for one hundred dollars, drive them back to the main terminal and put them outside the gate they would board the plane, bypassing security. Thirty minutes later the plane was airborne.

Jonathan looked over at Johnson, he was whispering into the German girl's ear. She was grinning from ear to ear, blushing and giggling. Johnson was laying his charm on thick and it was working.

Johnson had been a virgin for nineteen years. He was a nervous wreck around women. The Marines made him more confident and he used that confidence to get the tang he had been denied for so long. He always says he's making up for lost time. Seeing him now, Jonathan kind of felt sorry for the girl. Johnson had a lot of lost time to make up for.

Rubbing his thumb against his wedding ring, Jonathan's thoughts drifted to Joni. She was the only family he ever had. The brotherhood of the Corps was one thing but Joni was his real family. She knew all about his upbringing in the streets and she didn't care. She knew he had a tough life but she didn't belittle him by feeling sorry for him.

Joni loved Jonathan for who he was, not what he could become. She didn't like what he did in the Corps but she wouldn't dream of ever asking him to stop. That decision was Jonathan's alone.

Out of their love came Jillian. She was the reason he left the Corps. He didn't want his daughter growing up without a father, which is what could have happened if he stayed in. Now she was gone, along with Joni, taken by a monster, a monster named Marco Cronos, the mafia boss of New York.

Tears were building in his eyes. He was biting down hard, locking his jaw. His blood began to boil when he thought of Marco. He wished he could kill Marco a hundred times over.

Jonathan took a deep breath, coming back to the terminal in Mexico City. He wiped the tears from his eyes. An announcement came over the speakers that boarding would begin in ten minutes. It was time to leave this continent.



Chapter 11

Home Sweet Home

"Welcome back," the owner of a small tourist company said as Jonathan and Johnson walked through the door. "I have some great sights for you to look at. How do you like Bern so far?"

"It's wonderful," Jonathan answered. "Truly a beautiful city."

“Yea, the Matte district is great. And the Wasserwerk club was the best. Thank you for the tip,” Johnson added, smiling at the memory of the night before.

“Wonderful. Happy to be of service. Anything you wish to see today?”

Jonathan and Johnson sat down in front of the woman’s desk. They had been in Bern, Switzerland, now for a week. Pretending to see the sights of the city, Jonathan was actually mapping out escape routes, marking areas and landmarks. The best places to get lost in a crowd and the best time to do it. They had covered every inch of the city. Now he was ready for the next move, finding a house.

The Matte district seemed the most logical place. The city was full of history dating back to the twelfth century. Most of that history was in Old Town Bern. There were no cars, everyone walked. There were markets everywhere.

The Matte district has an Old Town look with a modern flavor. It is within walking distance of the market area, yet it has a life of its own. Unlike the rest of the city, modernized, the buildings themselves are old. There are houses for sale and apartments for rent. Plenty of internet and software companies. Old and modern.

A connection to the internet was a must. Then there was Johnson he had to consider. The Wasserwerk was heaven for Johnson. It was a techno club that attracted a lot of women. Loud music, hard liquor, and party women, it was perfect for him. He deserved the chance to let off steam.

“Has my package arrived yet,” Jonathan asked. He had paid her two hundred dollars cash to allow a package delivered to his office. Jonathan and Johnson had been taking turns sleeping on park benches, avoiding hotels. “It’s very important.”

“Yes, yes. It came yesterday.” She walked around her desk to a room full of boxes to his left. Opening the door, she picked up the box. “Here it is. Kind of heavy.”

Jonathan took the box and looked it over. It had no signs of being tampered with. Everything was exactly as he had packed it. He had Anthony send the package. Inside the box was Hera, waiting to be put back together.

“Thank you again,” Jonathan said. “I am in your debt. Perhaps my next request will pay that debt. You also deal with housing, do you not?”

“Yes,” she responded with a twinkle in her voice. “Oh yes.”

“Then please, sit. Let us discuss the details of purchasing a home in the Matte district. I have a place in mind.” Jonathan handed the woman a paper with an address on it. “I think it’s perfect.”

“Yes, yes. I know this place. Very old. Needs a lot of work. Perhaps I can show you something newer?”

“Thank you, no. I love history and that house has plenty of history. I have retired so my brother and me have time to fix it up. It would be an adventure.”

“Then let me start the paperwork.”

“Thank you. I would like to be in my new home tonight.”



Jonathan was standing outside the Tour Shop. Johnson went to the bank to get some cash. The first thing Jonathan did when arriving in Bern was to get another safety deposit box. They had thirty thousand dollars but by the time they were done today they would be down to eighteen.

Jonathan decided to let Johnson pick out the furniture, within reason. The most important thing was getting a good soft bed. The house had been bought, so Johnson could have the furniture delivered today. Jonathan was waiting for the final paperwork.

It was three in the afternoon. He grabbed his cell phone and dialed a number in New York.

“Hello,” a voice said after six rings.

“Anthony Serrato please.”

There were sounds of cloth rubbing the phone and a muffled yell of Anthony’s name. Thirty seconds later Anthony took the phone.

“Who’s this?”

“It’s me, you rude asshole. You turning into a New Yorker on me?”

“No,” Anthony answered. “This is the last time we’ll ever talk so be careful out there. I’m moving back home. Your CIA man came to see me. I lost my job.”

“Sorry about that,” Jonathan answered, sincerely sorrow for Anthony. “Tell momma hi for me.”

“Will do. Bye.”

The line went dead. The call was short but Anthony said a lot. Brian Ramstead had come to see him. He searched his apartment and harassed him at work. He had quit his job and was leaving New York.

He was going to visit his brother in New Orleans. Anthony’s mother had died when he was twenty, causing him to volunteer for the SEALs. By visiting her, he would stay in New Orleans for two weeks before going “home.”

Home for Anthony was San Diego, training grounds for the SEALs. It was the only place he ever felt he belonged. Anthony really was saying goodbye but he was letting Jonathan know he would be okay. He hoped Anthony would have a safe life.

“Mr. Smith,” the woman inside said, sticking her head out the door. “If I’m not disturbing you, the paperwork is complete.”

“No disturbance. You have been most kind. Thank you.”

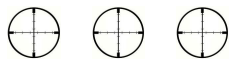
Jonathan walked back into the office and sat down at the desk. The contracts were laid out with a post it note every place Jonathan needed to sign. John Smith, the name on his passport. The name he would be using from now on.

The last “i” was dotted and the last “t” crossed. He was now the owner of his very first house. He never imagined he would own a house but he had to live somewhere.

“Thank you. You have been most kind to me and my brother Jack.”

“It has been my pleasure,” the woman said, shaking Jonathan’s hand. “If you need anything just ask.”

Jonathan stood, taking the suitcase that was inside the box he received, and walked out of the office. He didn’t need to worry about keys because the door had no lock. Another wonderful thing about Bern, the people were trusting. There was a cab outside and Jonathan got in.



Jonathan was sitting quietly at a café on Marktgasse, the heart of Bern’s shopping district. The air was cool and crisp as a breeze blew off the river not far to the east. He was sipping Swiss coffee and enjoying the view.

The sun was setting but the area was still busy. For the first time in a long time Jonathan felt relaxed. His mind was running a mile a minute. His senses were not tingling, which always caused him to be alert and on edge. Jonathan felt like a normal person.

Normal. He snickered at the thought. There was nothing normal about his life. Nothing normal about what he did. True, it felt good to unwind for the time being but how long would it last. He knew he couldn't run from the CIA forever but he knew he couldn't go back to the United States either. His only hope was that Ramstead would give up looking for him.

He took another sip of coffee and pulled out the tourist map he picked up when they first arrived in Bern. He unfolded it and found the café where he was.

"Have you been to Einstein's home yet," a soft sweet Swedish voice asked.

Jonathan looked up to see a waitress picking up dirty dishes from the next table.

"Not yet."

"It's very popular with you Americans. You are American yes?"

"What gave me away," Jonathan asked softly with a smile.

"You have friend named Jack Smith, yes," the waitress asked, standing in front of Jonathan now. "He hit on me two nights ago at Wasserwerk. Has same tan as you do."

"Yea," he responded, looking at his fading tan. "We got a little carried away in Mexico. It'll be gone soon."

"Well, if you like science you'll like Einstein's home."

"I'll be sure to put it on my list."

"Can I bring you something to eat," she asked with a beautiful smile, "or another cup?"

"No, thank you. I'm fine."

She picked up her tray and went back inside. Jonathan watched her leave. He would have to ask Johnson about her later.

He looked back to the map, looking for the place he was suppose to meet Johnson. It was one of the oldest bridges in Switzerland, built in 1468. From there they would go to their new house.

Standing up he pulled out some local currency. Leaving a tip, he picked up his messenger bag and left. The waitress was walking back outside.

"Do you know where you're going Sir," she called out.

Jonathan stopped and turned to face her. "I do, thank you. I have to meet my brother on Unter... Untertor," he stuttered.

"Untertorbrücke," she corrected him. "It's not far from Wasserwerk. Will you and your brother be there tonight?"

"Sadly no. We just bought a home in Matte and have to move in tonight. See you around."

Jonathan turned and walked away. He did not want to be late and this waitress was starting to get a little too friendly.



"That's the last of it. Home sweet home."

"Just don't start singing Johnny. Your voice sucks."

"Fuck you," Jonathan said, taking a bow. "Fuck you very much. Toss me a beer will ya."

Johnson walked over to a cooler he bought, filled with ice and beer. The beer was stronger than anything they had back in the states. Still, it was better than Asian beer. Asian beer was the worst either of them ever tasted.

Grabbing four bottles he walked back to the parlor of the house. The furniture was covered in plastic but Jonathan was sitting on the floor, back against the wall. Johnson joined him, without saying a word. Taking his bottle from Johnson, he took a huge swig. The cold liquid felt good as it went down quick and smooth.

“Aaaah, that’s good,” he said after draining the bottle. “To our new life.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Johnson said, finishing his bottle just as quickly. They both grabbed another beer, taking a small sip, drinking this one slower. “I’ve been thinking.”

“Damn it,” Jonathan cut him off in a startled voice. “Don’t scare me like that.”

“I’m serious Johnny.”

“Okay,” he took another sip, “I’m sorry. What have you been thinking?”

“What are we going to do for money? I mean we have to keep a low profile but do we actually have to work?”

“Afraid of a little elbow grease Marine,” Jonathan asked mockingly.

“Hell no. But after all we’ve been through, you think you can just work in some pissy mom and pop store?”

Jonathan shot him a look so cold it burned to the core. “Sorry Johnny, but you know what I mean.”

Taking a deep breath, he blew it out quickly. “Yea I know.” He took another swig of beer. “Well, who needs killing?”

They looked at each other, waiting for the other to laugh first. The look of shock, horror, and humor made them both laugh out loud at the same time.

“Do you have any ideas,” Jonathan asked.

“Mercenary work sounds pretty good.”

Jonathan was taking a sip of beer when Johnson had given his answer. He spit out his beer in a spray, trying not to choke.

“Jesus Johnson, I was only kidding.”

“Why? It makes sense.”

“Cause we’re not killers Johnson.” He saw the look on Johnson’s face, asking who was he trying to kid. “Well, not cold blooded killers. We’re Marines.”

“Not anymore.”

“Bullshit! Once a Marine always a Marine! We have never killed anyone who didn’t deserve it. Not just because someone wanted them dead.”

“Okay then, we only kill those that need to be killed. How hard could it be?”

“Well I don’t know,” Johnson continued. “I mean, that is what we were going to do for the CIA. Why not do it for ourselves?”

Johnson looked over at his partner. He could see Jonathan’s mind working. It made sense to do it. Killing is what they were good at. They were the best.

“Here’s what I want you to do,” Jonathan finally said. “Tomorrow I want you to take five grand and do some investing. You got the brains so pick good ones. We’ll build our money up. When we have enough we can open one of those Swiss bank accounts that are untouchable.”

“I’ll go to the internet café and see what I can find out about mercenary work. See how we can find contracts. Of course, to get the big bucks we have to prove ourselves. Take out someone who deserves it and who’s big. Someone off the sniper list.”

“Okay,” Johnson answered. “Sounds like that could work.”

Both men sat in silence. They finished their beers and got a couple more. It was four a.m. before either man fell asleep.



Chapter 12

Old Friends

Jonathan was surprised when he saw his statement. He knew the stock market game was risky and sometimes slow but Johnson was a genius. Inside of two weeks he took five thousand dollars and turned it into twenty-two. If Johnson kept up his luck, they wouldn't have to do mercenary work.

In spite of that Jonathan had been doing his job. He had been cruising the internet, doing research on possible marks. Dictators, drug lords, war lords, crooked military men who would sell to anyone that would start a war. The list was starting to get longer and longer with each new search. He decided to only mark people that would affect the entire world.

It may seem like a naive notion; killing one man would change the world. It wasn't possible. Then again, neither was destroying the mafia in New York.

There was one name that many people wanted dead. A lot of lives would be changed for the better if he was taken out. Last night he proposed the name to Johnson, the name that would give them fame in the underground world. He was a tyrant that has ruled for too long. Many have tried killing him before but none were successful. Killing him would prove them the best in the world.

Johnson was onboard immediately, asking if it could be done. Jonathan said he needed three months to prepare but yes it could be done. He wanted to give the honor of the kill to Hera but he wasn't a hundred percent she could do the job. Hera is the best at what she does so she would get first crack at it.

Jonathan folded the statement Johnson left and put it in his pocket. He decided to take a break today, skipping the internet café he walked to Old Town Bern. Selina, the waitress he met at the café two weeks ago, was working the morning shift today.

The two had talked briefly every night as he stopped for a single cup of coffee. He hadn't missed a day of conversation yet and wasn't about to start because she traded shifts for a day.

There was something familiar about her. She reminded Jonathan of his wife Joni. Sweet, caring, bubbly, fiery, full of life, smart, funny, and beautiful. Maybe there was the connection of them both being waitresses. Selina was the same age as Joni, a year younger than Jonathan.

During their conversations they did not talk about Jonathan at all. He wouldn't allow the conversation to drift toward him, always deflecting any personal question she might try to slip by him. They talked about her instead or about the city, art, science, and places one should visit in their lifetime.

Johnson had no problem with Jonathan talking to Selina. He may have spotted her first but she shot him down. Johnson figured it would be good for Jonathan to start dating again if he could. Besides, he goes back to Wasserwerk three times a week and comes home with someone different each time.

Marktgasse Street was alive with people. Shops and markets were filled and Jonathan smiled. Friendly faces greeted him with every step. So far his stay in Bern has been great.

Two blocks away from the café a chill ran down Jonathan's spine. His reflexes jumped up as he began to scan the area. Nothing looked out of place. No one was watching him. He stood there looking at flowers for two minutes before turning his attention toward the café.

There, sitting at a table outside, facing Einstein's home was Brian Ramstead. He was sitting there casually. Jonathan's mind began racing. If this was an ambush there was only one way to get out. He continued to the café.

He walked over to the table and sat down. Neither man looked at each other. They both stared down the street.

"Mr. Smith, good to see you this morning."

"Good morning Selina," Jonathan said without looking up. "Can I have two of my usual, to go please? My friend and I are going to No.49 Marktgasse. As quickly as you can please."

He handed her twice the price of the coffee. Selina took the money and went to get the coffees.

"Mr. Smith?"

"Not here," Jonathan snapped with a whisper. "Not a word until we walk away from this café. We're going to tour Einstein's Home. There we will talk."

Both men sat in silence. Tension filled the air. Both men were on high alert, scanning the area for anything out of the ordinary. Jonathan found it ironic, spooks being spooked. Selina came with the coffee. Jonathan stood up and walked away without a word, Brian followed.

"I can see you're alone. How did you find me?"

"Purely by chance, you actually found me." Jonathan glanced over at Brian, asking him to explain without actually asking. "I'm here on business, both personal and company related."

"Someone stole some files from the embassy and I was requested to come investigate. The consultant knows me from Yale, he trust me. The Director is pissed at me, that is your fault by the way, so he sent me here."

"I have an account at the Swiss-Geneva Bank, retirement money. There is a branch here in Bern so I went to check on my account. The manager recommended that café."

"I was about to order when you walked up. So you found me."

"Well, here we are, Einstein's home," Jonathan said as he stopped walking. "I'm told it's very popular with Americans, though I don't see the appeal."

"Are we going in?"

"Yup," Jonathan answered with a sarcastic smile. "Very public. It's for your protection really."

Jonathan stepped up the stairs and paid for two tickets. He motioned for Brian to follow him. Brian walked up the stairs and entered the building with Jonathan. The tour was starting.

"Now that you found me, what is your plan," Jonathan whispered softly as the guide started talking. They were at the back of the group.

"Well, you *are* a wanted man," Brian whispered back.

"Not in this country," Jonathan corrected.

"We can ask the Swiss for help in capturing you."

"We both know the Swiss don't honor their extradition treaty. They like to remain neutral no matter what. It's one of the reasons I picked this place."

"I could capture you myself. I would be a hero back home."

"If you tried I would kill you."

"You think you can?"

Jonathan looked Brian in the eyes with a burning gaze.

“Don’t tempt me. I’m not in your C.I.A. We’re not at the Farm or in D.C. You are in my town. I’ll kill you and make it look like an accident.”

“Then what do you propose we do?”

“You leave and forget you ever saw me.”

“You know I can’t do that.”

“Then I suggest we be quiet and finish this tour. The tickets, after all, are non refundable.”

The tour lasted another fifteen minutes. When it was over Jonathan bought a post card and handed it to Brian as they stepped back onto the street.

“A souvenir,” Jonathan said as they started walking away from the house.

“Thanks,” Brian said, stuffing it inside his coat pocket. “I looked up your entire record after you called me from Atlanta.”

“I figured you would have done that when you recruited me.”

“I did but this time I actually read it.”

“Gee thanks.”

“I sent a team to Rio looking for you. I figured your unfinished business involving Stephen on your first mission,” Brian paused, hoping to strike a deep nerve. “I mean, you left a man behind. You couldn’t go back for him. That’s a sacrilegious sin in the eyes of the Marines. That must have killed you.”

“What do you know about it?”

“I know the chopper pilot wouldn’t turn around, even though it was his fault Stephen fell out of the chopper. You filed complaints but were denied permission to retrieve the body.”

“That was Johnson’s problem, not mine.”

“Bullshit,” Brian snapped, annoyed at how calm Jonathan remained. “You were the team leader; you were the one that screamed the loudest on the issue.”

“I did but it was clear to me the entire mission was a shit job and the higher ups didn’t want to eat shit for dinner so they were going to ignore it. But *never* accuse me of leaving a man behind, Mr. Ramstead. You don’t know the kind of honor I have.”

“But his body was never recovered, that’s leaving a man behind in my book.”

“Wasn’t it,” Jonathan asked, enjoying the look of surprise on his nemesis’ face. “I was able to retrieve the body a year later on my own time. Johnson and I took his body to his father where we had a warrior’s funeral. Right now Stephen’s ashes sit in his father’s study.”

“Impressive.”

“But we still have a problem.”

“I still have to bring you in.”

“How about I give you a bigger fish than me? Something the C.I.A. has been wanting for decades.”

“What,” Brian asked with caution.

“Fidel Castro,” Jonathan answered coolly. “Dead!” Brian was silent for a moment and then laughed. “I’m serious about this. I need three months to prepare.”

“You,” Brian laughed again, louder this time. “You’re going to kill Fidel?”

“Fine smart ass. I was going to do it as a freebie to the world but fuck it,” Jonathan said, angry at being laughed at. “You want Fidel dead it’s going to cost you. If you say no I’ll kill you here and now.”

“The government won’t pay for Fidel dying,” Brian answered, trying to control his laughter.

“Not the government. You personally are going to pay me.”

“What,” that got his attention.

“Yea. I got to make a living somehow. Killing is what I do best and after this job I’ll prove I’m the best ever.”

“Okay hotshot. How do you plan to do it?”

“Can’t tell you that but here are my terms. I want half of whatever you got in this Swiss account. Once I complete this mission you remove me from any wanted list.”

“And if you fail I’ll personally make you the most wanted man in the world, next to Osama.”

“If I fail I’ll be dead, so don’t worry.”

Jonathan had led Brian to Untertorbrücke Bridge. He loved the view from this bridge.

“This is where we part ways. Mention the idea to your supervisors. You’ll be a hero Mr. Ramstead. Make no mistake; I’m going to complete this mission.”

“Here,” he handed Brian his phone. “I’ll call you on this phone in a week. You can tell me the key players to take out or leave alone. This will be the U.S.’s chance to redeem itself over Cuba. You have one week.”

Jonathan turned and walked away. Brian watched him go. The man had real guts. As far as Brian was concerned Jonathan had graduated from the Farm.



“Ramstead is here in Bern,” Jonathan said as he walked into the house. He had walked around for two hours, making sure he wasn’t followed. “I told him about Castro.”

“What,” Johnson came out from the parlor. “Why did you do that for?”

Jonathan walked pass him to the refrigerator and grabbed a beer. He opened it and took a long swig.

“Cause it was either that or kill him. If I killed him the C.I.A. would be crawling all over this city. Besides, now we’re going to get paid for the job.”

“You’re shitting me?”

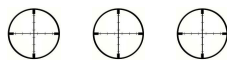
“Nope. By the way, get rid of your phone. Toss it in the river. Lay low. He has no idea you’re still alive.” He flopped down on the couch. “I had to give him my phone.”

“No problem. I hate this phone anyway. No one wants to call me here.”

“Yea, I’ll look into getting us new phones.”

“They have to be good ones,” Johnson said with a smirk. “There’s no Wal-Mart here.”

They both laughed. Jonathan took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The wheels in his mind began to turn. Johnson walked away, back to his room, as he heard a female, his latest conquest, moaning. Jonathan ignored them. He was about to be a busy man.



Epilogue

“Hello.”

“Ramstead?”

“No, this is the Director,” he said, cutting off Jonathan. “How are you?”

“Fine, but don’t waste any time. I hang up in three minutes.”

Damn it, the Director thought, he knows we’re tracing the call.

“I’m here Jonathan,” Brian blurted out, hoping to keep him talking.

“As is my top five advisors,” the Director added.

“I figured this would turn into a conference call,” Jonathan said, frustration clear in his tone. “So what have you decided Director?”

“Killing Castro is impossible,” the Director huffed.

“So was killing General Bazda,” Jonathan snapped, “But he’s dead now isn’t he? This *is* going to happen. You can help pick who will replace Castro or you can stand around with your dicks in your hand as the world watches a small country burn from the aftermath of the assassination.”

“You are very naive Mr. McGregor.”

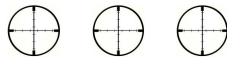
“And you have sixty seconds *Mr. Director*,” Jonathan snapped. “Do you have a list for me or not?”

There was silence for a long drawn out two seconds as the Director looked around the room. He was receiving thumbs down from everyone in the room. They didn’t believe he could do it.

“No we do not.”

“That’s too bad,” Jonathan answered with a sigh. “See you on CNN.”

“Jonathan wait,” Ramstead called out. A dial tone filled the air. Jonathan was gone.



Jonathan hung up the phone and walked out of the travel agents office. He thanked the lady behind the counter for allowing him to use the phone.

The international airport in Paris was very busy. He had landed in Paris twenty minutes before making the phone call to Ramstead and was about to board another plane leaving in ten minutes.

He was flying to Rome. From Rome he would head home to Bern. All this fuss just to make a two minute phone call, it was necessary though.

Jonathan knew Brian didn’t say anything about Bern otherwise the C.I.A. would flood the city looking for him. The Director had sanctioned the order for his death and as far as Jonathan knew he had not rescinded it. Standard procedure would be for them to trace the call.

It would take three minutes for them to get his exact location. At two minutes they would get Paris. Since he used a calling card the exact phone number would not show up, making it harder to trace.

The last call for his flight came across the loud speaker. He jogged down the terminal to his gate. The doors to the catwalk closed after he passed through.

This was going to be a quiet flight. The last flight of the night usually was. While most passengers would be sleeping he would be working. He had one more phone call to make before going home.



“That was stupid,” Brian stated to the room as he hung up the speaker phone. “He’s going to kill Castro.”

“Let him try,” Kirk Mitchell, one of the advisors, said. “They’ll capture him, torture him slowly before killing him.”

“And if he succeeds?”

The question hung in the air. The Director looked at the other men in the room, opening the floor for discussion.

“It’ll be the Bay of Pigs all over again Mr. Ramstead,” Roy Mayor stated, a senior field agent and close personal friend to the Director. They had been partners once and the Director listened to him closely. “We were all around when it happened. We all shared in the humiliation this country faced when we failed. Nothing will redeem that little fact.”

“Many have tried to assassinate Castro, including us, and we failed. Now, some punk with a huge ego thinks he can take out Castro by himself when more experienced men could not.”

“No, Mr. Ramstead. All he is going to do is get himself killed.”

“Besides,” the Director added, “this agency can not endorse the killing of a political leader.”

“Castro gone would be a dream come true,” Adam Morgan said, but after all this time he would be a martyr if he was killed.”

“He’s going to be a martyr if he dies of natural causes,” Brian protested. “History has already labeled him the man who defied the United States and won. Policy can change when he’s gone, so why not back him up?”

“Because,” Roy shouted, slamming his open palm down on the table top hard, “this asshole will not succeed. He cannot succeed. I helped plan the Bay of Pigs. We planned it for months. Highly intelligent men came up with that plan and it blew up in our faces.”

“He has given this agency too much trouble,” the Director said with a firm tone. “He will die sooner or later. There are sanctions out on him or the Cuban government will do the job for us. Either way he’s dead!”

Brian stood up. He knew he was defeated. These men could not see the potential Jonathan had. They were blinded by their pride. They failed, and took the heat for that failure. If they could not succeed then no one could. He walked out of the room without another word.



Brian was sitting at the bar of a Red Lobster. He was waiting for a table. The bartender brought him another whisky sour, his forth.

His blood was boiling when he left Langley, now he needed to cool down. To save time he already ordered his dinner, a large fat lobster, the biggest one in the tank. He swallowed his drink and ordered another as the liquor burned his throat.

His jacket began to vibrate, telling him his table was ready. He left a twenty under his glass and walked over to the hostess waiting for him. She walked him to his table and left. His food arrived one minute later. He was going to enjoy this lobster.

His cell phone rang as he picked up the claw cracker. With a moan he yanked his phone out of his pocket and slammed it down on the table. He was going to ignore it.

The ringing stopped as the voice mail picked up. A few seconds later it began ringing again. He let it ring. The caller repeated this two more times before anger got the best of him.

“What!”

“Bout fuckin’ time you answer,” Jonathan said annoyed.

“Fuck off,” he said as he hung up the phone. The phone rang again. He answered it but before he could speak Jonathan cut him off.

“Sorry to disturb your dinner but this is important.”

“They’re not going to back you up so forget it. The old farts had planned the Bay of Pigs and don’t want you fucking around where they failed.”

“Then prepare for the aftermath but Castro will die.”

“Fine,” Brian snapped, his blood pressure rising with his anger, “but I’m not paying you a fuckin’ dime.”

“You already did,” Jonathan answered smugly. “I only took half so don’t worry. But if I *ever* see you or any of your agents near me again I *will* leave a trail of bodies. DO NOT LOOK FOR ME!”

“Gladly. Admitting you to the Farm was the biggest mistake of my life.”

“But I did graduate the Farm Mr. Ramstead. I did it my way though. Stay out of my way and you live. Good bye and good luck.”



Jonathan made one more call after he hung up with Brian. This call was on his personal cell phone. The line rang twice before picking up.

“I’m heading to Havana.”

“Good luck. See you in three months brother.”

Jonathan closed the phone and walked to the ticket counter.

“Hello. Welcome to KLM. How may I help you?”

“Hello. I need to book a flight to Cuba please.”

The End



Max was born in 1977 in Stockton, California. There Max stayed until he was five, when his family moved to Houston, Texas. Max still lives in Houston where he works full time and writes in his spare time.