

Chapter 1

FBI Training Academy

Quantico, VA

The fall day felt unseasonably hot, given the time of year. Like blood pooling from an open wound, David Weiss felt a stain of sweat dampen his shirt. He squinted into the sun. The blazing yellow ball burned with the intensity of a jet engine flameout. The trees, festooned with colorful foliage, had begun to change into what would become the reds of autumn. David adjusted his electronic shooting earmuffs as he watched his roommate, Preston Lee Taylor, prepare to take his turn on the shooting range for his pistol qualification course.

David observed a herd of whitetail deer grazing within a few feet of the target range. He found it baffling that they were oblivious to the repetitive gunfire that echoed in deafening succession. Quantico's wildlife were off-limits to hunters. What he found inexplicable was how the deer knew they were safe.

A beep sounded, announcing the beginning of stage one. Preston heard "Shooter ready?" followed by a brief pause, and then, "Stand by." Another beep indicated Preston was free to fire.

David watched Preston go through all four stages of the marksmanship test. In a matter of minutes, he had emptied fifty rounds into the Q target at various distances. He scored ninety-eight percent, which was to be expected from a rural Georgia farm boy who had learned how to shoot before he was old enough to wear long pants.

The instructor gave Preston a thumbs-up. "nice job, Preston. Congratulations."

"Thank you, sir." Preston turned and faced David, winking. "You're up, buddy. Let's see you top that."

"Man, Press, you sure laid down the gauntlet. We'll have to see what we can do to wipe that smirk off your face."

David walked to the twenty-five-yard starting position and laid down in the dirt prone on his stomach with his arms extended, ready to begin. The beep sounded. David fired off six rounds, then repositioned himself kneeling behind the barricade. At the sound of the second beep, he fired three rounds one-handed from his strong side. Without hesitation, he stood and

fired six more then switched hands and shot three more, ejected the spent magazine, reloaded, then holstered his weapon. The entire exercise took less than a minute, fifteen seconds.

He waited, his mind already focused on his next phase. When he heard the command, he ran from the twenty-five-yard line to the fifteen, drew his weapon, and fired two rounds at the target with the six seconds allowed. He waited for the next command, and then fired four strings of two rounds in three seconds. The last stage prepared agents to return fire under stressful conditions up-close. David moved to the five yard line, fired five rounds with his strong hand, then quick as lightning, ejected the magazine and reloaded, firing off five rounds with his weak hand, unloaded the clip and holstered the empty Glock, his qualification complete.

David could see the hanging Q bottle at the end of the target range riddled with bullet holes, and that he hadn't missed his mark. He took a deep breath as he waited for his score. When he heard the instructor whistle and say, "One hundred percent, nice work," he had to fight the shit-eating grin that threatened to engulf his face. He turned and walked back to Preston.

Preston stood with his head cocked to one side, his lips curled with amusement. "Well, I'll be hog-tied. Damn, if the Yeshiva boy didn't do it again. You sure you didn't serve with the IDF before coming here?"

"Nope. Just lucky, I guess."

"Luck? Like hell, luck has nothing to do with it. Come on Robocop, let's go grab some grub, I'm starving."

David ate slowly, wondering if the unpalatable food held any nutrients while Preston pushed his plate away having polished off his burger in record time.

"So what are you going to do about that woman? What's her name, Dahlia?" Preston persisted in returning to the conversation that David had tried to avoid.

"Her name's Adlelia, and there's nothing for me to do."

"Man, you rescued her children from that nut case sister-in-law of hers. You risked your life saving those kidnapped kids. She owes you."

“Press she doesn’t owe me a thing. I’m the one that feel in love with a married woman. Those kids are more important than our relationship. Besides, if it wasn’t for the success of thhe rescue mission to Cuba I wouldn’t have been recruited by the FBI. The way I see it, it all worked out for the best”

“Even if you’re right, I hate to see you pining away for her. I know you invited her to graduation, so tell me again why she isn’t coming?”

“I told you she has to be in California to meet with her attorney. I’ll say it again, buddy, she begged me not to join the FBI. She knew that once I did it would be impossible for us to continue our relationship. She’s not the kind of woman who can be alone all of the time. She’s lost too much in her life, her marriage, her parents, and the godfather that she trusted. Loving me would mean facing the possibility of loss every day. I made the choice.”

“Was it worth it?”

David tried not to remember what loving Adelia felt like. “Yeah, I don’t regret a minute of what we shared. She’s something special. I don’t expect to ever feel that way again.” David’s gaze dropped to his hands that rested on the table. He felt the discomfort that comes from laying bare one’s soul.

“Man, you’ve got it bad . . .”

“I’m a big boy, I’ll get over it. Come one, let’s hit the gym. We should be celebrating.”