

# An Eye For An Eye

L.D. Beyer



OLD STONE MILL  
Publishing

This is a work of fiction. The events that unfold within these pages as well as the characters depicted are products of the author's imagination. Any connection to specific people, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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**OLD STONE MILL**  
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For Kaitlyn, Kyle and Matthew

*DO NOT TAKE REVENGE, MY  
DEAR FRIENDS, BUT LEAVE  
ROOM FOR GOD'S WRATH, FOR  
IT IS WRITTEN: "IT IS MINE TO  
AVENGE; I WILL REPAY," SAYS  
THE LORD.*

*Romans 12:19*

## PROLOGUE

As he made his way through the cantina, Pablo Guerrero could hear the cries of the crowd, calling for blood. He tugged at the cap, pulling it low over his face. Dressed as he was in a laborer's clothes, and not the designer fashions he'd grown accustomed to, he wasn't recognized.

Stepping out the back door, he threaded his way through the crowd to the side of the ring. He caught the eye of the boy standing in the middle. The boy, no more than thirteen, nodded briefly then held the black rooster up for the judge to inspect. After checking for injuries, the judge held out his hand and the boy handed him the one-inch curved blade. The judge inspected this, first looking then sniffing for the tell-tale signs of poison. Although he didn't detect any, he wiped the blade with a lemon—a long-standing practice to guard against cheating. Satisfied, the judge tied the blade onto the rooster's leg then stepped back.

The boy moved to the center of the ring, thrusting the bird in front of him, letting him see his opponent. Across from him, an old man holding a white rooster did the same. Guerrero watched as his rooster twisted and writhed in the boy's hands, clucking and hissing, anxious to fight. A slight grin crossed his face then disappeared. The judge signaled; the boy and the old man retreated to opposite sides of the pit.

The judge eyed the crowd and called out once more, "Apuestas!" *Bets.*

Guerrero signaled and handed the judge one hundred pesos, nodding in the boy's direction.

"El negro." *The black one.*

The judge nodded, held the hundred pesos in the air and called out to the crowd again. When all bets were placed, he signaled to the boy and the old man. They stepped forward again, thrusting their roosters at each other several times as the noise grew. The spectators, those wagering and those just watching, began to shout and chant, excited by the imminent battle. The judge called out again, and the roosters were placed on the ground. Like prize fighters, they danced around each other for a second or two before the black rooster charged. Wings flapping, the birds pecked at each other, clawing and fighting as they'd been trained.

The black rooster jumped, fluttered a foot above the ground for a moment, and then dove at his opponent. The white rooster turned, swung his right claw out. As the chants and calls rose to a din, the black rooster crumpled to the ground.

For a second, Guerrero didn't move. Then he glanced at the old man holding the white rooster aloft, smiling, triumphant. He looked at his own bird lying in the dirt, the dark stains of blood appearing almost as black as the feathers. Guerrero stared at the old man again; his eyes dark. As he turned to leave, he caught the boy's eyes once more and nodded.

The old man would be found three days later, the dismembered white rooster sitting on top of his brutally beaten body.

## CHAPTER ONE

Matthew Richter adjusted his radio wand and headset then glanced back at his team: eight heavily armed men, all wearing helmets and Kevlar vests and dressed in black tactical gear. He held up a thumb and nodded, receiving eight thumbs-up in reply. Opening the back door of the armored truck, he jumped to the ground and ran across the dark alley and then down the steep steps to the basement. When the last agent's head disappeared, a tenth agent, dressed in the uniform of an armored delivery guard, closed the cellar hatch in the sidewalk then climbed back in the rear of the truck. Seconds later, the truck pulled out of the alley. The insertion had taken less than twenty seconds.

Richter switched on his flashlight and made his way through the maze of pipes, past the furnace and up the stairway, his rubber-soled boots silent on the metal steps. At the top, he stopped and glanced back at his men, counting heads. Satisfied, he tapped his knuckles on the door once and it was opened immediately by another agent, dressed in the overalls of a janitor. The janitor led them down the hall to a door on the other side of the building where they stopped.

"We're just getting the audio feed online," the janitor whispered.

Richter nodded then glanced back at his team again, noting the hard eyes behind the tactical goggles, the tight muscles stretched across clenched jaws. They were ready. He switched his radio to the command net and his earbud hissed slightly. He cupped his hand over his ear to catch the conversation.

"...one million dollars. But we have some conditions."

Richter heard a grunt then: "There are always conditions."

There was a pause and then some scraping noises. "It has to be on December Twenty-fifth. He'll be in New York that day."

"How do you know that?"

Richter heard a sigh, then, "Please. We have our sources."

There was another pause, more scraping noises. "It has to be public?"

"Yes."

"That increases the risk significantly."

More scraping, another sigh. "How much?"

"Two million."

Richter heard some whispering, some words in Spanish that he didn't understand.

"Okay. Two million."

"What about the family?"

"They're unimportant. But if they get in the way, so be it."

"Okay. I think we have a deal. But just to be clear...you try to fuck me over, you know I'll hunt you down."

A second later, there was a click, and then Richter heard a much clearer voice in his earbud.

"Green Light! Green Light! Green Light!"

As the janitor opened the door to the alley, Richter switched his radio back to the assault net. Then he stuck his head out, glanced once in each direction before dashing across the alley. Crouched in the darkness behind the dumpster, he did another headcount then held up three

fingers and pointed to his right. In a half crouch, three men moved down the alley along the brick wall to the back of the building. He held three fingers up again then pointed to his left. Another three agents moved silently toward the front. Two men remained with him.

When the teams were in position, he turned and nodded to the three men crouched at the back corner of the building. He got a nod in reply. A second later, he got another from the three men in front.

“Go! Go! Go!” he hissed as he jumped up and ran to the side door, stepping out of the way of the agent on his heels. The man behind stepped up to the door, holding the Stinger ready. A second later there was a bright flash from the rear of the building followed by a loud bang. The agent swung the thirty-five pound steel battering ram at the metal door. It only took two strikes and the door flew open.

“Police!” Richter shouted as he sprang across the threshold, his gun in both hands. He darted to the left. A second agent followed, darting to the right. The third agent came last, a gun in his hand now, the battering ram discarded outside.

There were shouts from the front and the rear of the building. After a quick glance around the room—empty except for shelves of ingredients and supplies for the bakery in front—Richter and the two agents ran to the door that led to the hallway. Two shots rang out as they burst into the hall. Seconds later, he and his team converged on the back room where three men were lying on the floor.

“Clear!” several agents called out simultaneously.

Richter’s eyes darted around the smoke-filled room then down to the men lying at his feet. Two dark-skinned men were writhing on the floor, hands cupped over their ears. He noticed blood seeping through one of the men’s fingers, the tell-tale signs of a burst eardrum, courtesy of the flash-bang grenade. His eyes moved to the third man, a tall sandy-haired thug with a chiseled jaw—the Russian. The Russian’s shirt was stained with blood, with more seeping onto the floor; his face was contorted in pain. One agent secured the Russian’s gun while another knelt down to check his wounds. The Russian glared at the agent and then up at Richter. A second later, the hint of a smile crossed his face. Richter felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up and reached for his web belt.

The Russian was quick. Despite his wounds, he sprang off the floor, knocking one agent over then lunging at another. Richter chopped once with his tactical baton, catching the Russian behind the ear. He crumpled to the ground.

Richter and one of his men exchanged a look. The agent nodded then placed his foot on the Russian’s head, holding him down, while another agent cuffed him. Richter glanced around the room, did a quick headcount again. All of his men were accounted for, all uninjured; all except, he noticed, for the pride of the agent who had been knocked over.

Richter pulled the microphone wand closer to his mouth.

“Three tangos secure. Two with minor injuries, one wounded and unconscious. Request an ambulance.”

“Copy Blue Lead. Three tangos secure. Ambulance on its way.”

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President David Kendall sat on the couch in the Oval Office across from FBI Director Patrick Monahan and National Security Advisor Brett Watson.

“Early this morning,” Monahan began, “we arrested three men in New Jersey on charges of planning to assassinate the chief of operations for the DEA.

“Joe Delia?” The president frowned. “Go on.”

“They were only in the planning stages, sir, but the attack was scheduled to take place in New York on Christmas Day.”

Monahan handed three photos to the president. Kendall glanced at them briefly before passing them to Watson.

Monahan continued: “Two are Mexican nationals and one is a Russian immigrant. The Mexicans offered two million dollars to the Russian to arrange the killing.”

President Kendall scowled; Watson remained tight-lipped as Monahan continued.

“The Mexicans work for a group known as *Los Alacránes*. They’re what’s left of the *Zacatecas* cartel. After we shut down the *Zacatecas* operation, there was a power play. Their former turf was split between the remaining members of their security force, who go by the name *Los Alacránes*—The Scorpions—and the Baja cartel.”

Monahan passed another photo. “The Russian is a former FSB officer who has ties to the Russian Mafia.”

“How did we find out about this?”

“The CIA has been picking up chatter and tipped us off. Working with the NSA, we were able to trace several cell phone calls and eventually identified the two Mexicans. We learned that they had set up a meeting with the Russian. He’s someone that we’ve been watching for some time. We obtained a search warrant and, after recording a conversation where the Mexicans offered money in exchange for the murder, our men arrested them.”

“This was in New Jersey?” the president asked.

“Yes, sir. Newark.”

“Matthew Richter?”

“He led the team, sir.”

The president and Monahan exchanged a glance.

“And the motive?”

“We don’t know definitively, sir,” Monahan responded. “The two Mexicans aren’t talking.”

Watson studied the photos for a moment. He laid them on the table then looked up.

“Could this be revenge for Calzada?” he asked.

The president nodded, a scowl on his face. “I was wondering the same thing.”

Roberto Calzada, along with the head of the *Zacatecas* cartel and his key lieutenants, had been arrested two and a half years earlier under a joint operation between Mexican and U.S. forces. Calzada, a former commando with Mexico’s Air Force, had deserted five years earlier along with forty of his fellow commandos to form a private army for the *Zacatecas* cartel. After his arrest, his younger brother, Ramón, a former federal police officer, had quickly stepped in and, with a ruthlessness that would have made the older Calzada proud, taken over the organization. Now, instead of merely protecting, the enforcers had become the cartel.

The older brother, Roberto, along with the eighty-nine other high-ranking cartel members captured under the operation, code-named Project Boston, had eventually been extradited to the U.S. Most, including Roberto, were still awaiting trial.

“It’s possible,” Monahan responded. “That was my first thought, too.” He looked at each of them. “But two cartel hit men arranging for the killing of the head of the DEA?” He hesitated.

“You don’t buy it?” the president asked.

Monahan shook his head. “Why didn’t they handle the killing themselves? Why outsource it? These guys are assassins. This is what they do.”

“Could they be looking to focus blame elsewhere,” Watson wondered out loud. “To create some confusion?”

“A diversion?” the president asked.

Watson nodded. “It’s possible.” He laid the photo on the table again. “If you think about it, since we shut down Project Boston, the DEA has significantly stepped up their focus on cartel operations in the U.S., infiltrating and shutting down cells, disrupting their distribution networks. At the same time, the ATF has put a crimp in weapons smuggling. This has to have hurt them. Maybe not as much as Boston, but with more and more enforcers taking on leadership roles in the cartels, we’re dealing with a different enemy now.”

“But why use a middleman?” the president asked.

Watson shook his head. “I don’t know.” He picked up the photo of the two Mexicans. “For years, the cartels have targeted people who have refused to cooperate with them: local and federal officials, chiefs of police, you name it. If they can’t be bought, they’re killed. The Mayor of Ciudad Juarez has been on their hit list for some time and now lives on our side of the border, in El Paso. But keep in mind, all of their focus has been in Mexico.” He tapped the photo. “This might be a subtle way of telling us that if we continue to disrupt their business, they’re going to bring their terror campaign here.”

The president sat back, thinking. After a moment, he leaned forward and looked from one man to the other. His face was grim.

“We need to understand if this was an isolated incident. Was Calzada seeking revenge for his brother or does this represent a greater threat to us?” He looked at Watson. “We have a National Security Council meeting next week?”

Watson nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“This needs to be on the top of the agenda.”

Watson nodded again and the president turned to Monahan.

“And Joe? I assume he’s aware of this.”

“He is, sir. He’s increased his security. The Secret Service has also put protective details on his wife and kids.”

“Good.” The president nodded as he stood. “Keep us informed on this one, Pat.” He shook hands with both men. “And Pat? Tell Matthew I said, ‘Good job.’”

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Matthew Richter glanced at his watch, checking his speed. A six-twenty pace. *Not bad at four miles*, he thought. He turned the corner, glancing briefly at the hill before him; a steep slope almost two-tenths of a mile long. It had been a couple of months since he’d last run this route, and he wondered for a moment whether he would be able to hold the pace. When he reached the top of the hill ninety seconds later, his breathing was strained, but he recovered quickly. He checked his watch again. *Only lost a few seconds*.

It was two more miles back to his home, a condo nestled in the woods of central New Jersey. After a year in an apartment, he had finally purchased the condo. While he could justify the price—he had paid half of what it had sold for three years earlier—the condo wasn’t a commitment by any means. Still unsure of where his life was heading, he had nonetheless

exchanged a six-month apartment lease for something a little more—not permanent, he thought, but what? Was there something in the middle?

As he picked up his pace, he thought back to the raid. The fact was, other than the mistake Agent Reardon had made in assuming that the wounded Russian was no longer a threat, the raid had gone smoothly. No one had died. No innocent people had been hurt. Other than Reardon's bruised ego, no one on his team had been hurt either.

He hit the five-mile mark and glanced at his watch, happy to see that his pace was still strong. Even though the uncertainty nagged at him, he enjoyed his job as the SWAT team commander for the Joint Terrorism Task Force. The JTTF was an FBI-led partnership with the New York City Police Department as well as the departments from surrounding states. The taskforce included representatives from various federal agencies—Homeland Security, ATF, DEA, Immigration and Customs, as well as his former colleagues from the Secret Service. They investigated leads related to potential terrorist activity and, since September 11<sup>th</sup>, the role of the task force had grown. Intelligence gathering capabilities were significantly enhanced through the use of paid informants as well as surveillance and infiltration of the radical groups and terrorist cells operating in the U.S. At the same time, the task force worked to identify the funding sources of these operations and to cut off the stream of cash from sympathizers.

While his investigative partners walked the fine line between civil liberties and keeping America safe, Richter's SWAT team focused on enforcement. The team was often called on to execute search warrants in high-risk situations and, occasionally, to engage and arrest heavily armed and violent criminals before they could carry out their plans.

Unlike his old job, where his days could range from the boredom of standing watch to the adrenaline surge and occasional flashes of panic whenever the president ventured out of the White House, working for the SWAT team was different. When they weren't on a call-out, they were either training or briefing. He found he could lose himself in his work.

After five years in the Secret Service, including eighteen months on Presidential Protective Detail, he had been on the cusp of leaving law enforcement altogether. FBI Director Patrick Monahan, newly named to the job, had made an aggressive pitch to join the Bureau. More as a courtesy, he had listened as Monahan discussed a variety of opportunities, all based in Washington.

"You're a good cop, Matthew, and I could really use you here."

At the time, Richter had nodded but said nothing.

"The Bureau has slipped in recent years and, more and more, we have begun to look and operate like we did during the Hoover era." Monahan shook his head. "I don't need to tell you that that's something we can't afford to do. The president has asked me to reorganize the FBI, to reform it."

Richter had waited, certain what was coming next.

"I am creating a new role: Special Assistant to the Director. I want you to help me."

Monahan paused. "Then, within the next year, I'm sure a number of positions will open up. While I can't make any guarantees, I'll give you a lot of latitude to choose what you want. So"—Monahan sat back—"what *do* you want? What would you like to do?"

Richter shook his head. "Right now, what I want is to get away from Washington for a while."

Monahan had been persistent, and several months later Richter had finally agreed to join the Bureau but with an agreement that his role—whatever it turned out to be—would not be in Washington. After completing the training course in Quantico, he had requested to train with the

elite Hostage Rescue Team. He excelled thanks to the two years spent with the Army Rangers before college. Four months later, when the job as the SWAT team leader for the New York City JTTF opened up, Richter had expressed an interest. He was surprised when, two days later, Monahan told him that the job was his.

Richter hit the button on his watch as he reached the entrance to his condo and slowed his pace to a walk. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. The summer sun was hot and he could feel the sweat running down his chest, below his shirt. He glanced at his watch. Not bad, he thought—a six-twenty-one pace overall. He was considering running the New York City Marathon in November and would have to decide soon. Although he had no doubt he could complete it, the training was a large commitment—three months or more—and he was concerned about his job. He was on call twenty-four hours a day and there was no telling when his phone would ring next.

