

EVOLUTION – UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

CHAPTER ONE

Lazarus was standing by the patio door looking out on the small gathering on his deck. Derek Grimsrud, CIA black ops team leader, and his family were visiting for the week. It was the first time Derek brought his wife and kids along with him.

Derek had recovered from the bullet that struck him in his neck, having left him paralyzed. His quick progress had surprised the doctors and everyone who knew Derek, except for Lazarus. Lazarus had for days after the shooting wondered if Derek would ever even walk again. When he saw him on his feet when they met for dinner in Maryland, he knew then nothing would stand in the way of the former Navy Seal making a full recovery.

It had not been an easy path for Derek. He pushed through pain which would have put most on the ground, and many who would have given up. Not Derek. He never wavered in his commitment to recovery. When he was released from the hospital, he went home and had an exact duplicate of the hospital rehab facilities built in his garage. Craig Young Bear, his pilot and closest friend on the team brought six men with him from Tama, Iowa and the Meskwaki Settlement, to carry out the construction under the watchful eye of Dale Pushetonequa; direct descendant of Chief Pushetonequa who ruled led the Meskwaki tribe until his death in 1919.

Craig was a constant at the Grimsrud house for nine months. He rarely spoke, which was his nature. His presence was motivating to Derek. He knew Craig would not let him quit. He couldn't – or he'd never hear the end of it from the former Marine.

The visit to Lazarus home would be his last free time before heading back to El Paso and resuming his place as the leader of a CIA Black-Ops team based out of Fort Bliss.

Lazarus was enjoying seeing his friend, one of his very few, running with his boys and seeming to be having a great time. The entire experience which had revolved around the shooting had changed Lazarus perspective. He was told several times it was a 'family matter'. First by his arms dealer, Stephanie Salerno, who refused payment. Then it was the hard-core Marine General Nick Fischer, Deputy Director of Operations for the Central Intelligence Agency. Despite all the hints and comments, Lazarus still didn't get the concept of family.

On a whim, Lazarus and Derek had gone by themselves to Key West the day before, re-visiting the place where Derek and his team had been ambushed by members of a drug carter. Derek handled it well, even making a couple jokes about working on 'ducking techniques.'

They spent hours talking over a couple of beers about the team members, especially Gustaf Reichart. The German explosives expert was one of a kind. Openly and flamboyantly gay, he had been invaluable to Lazarus, if a bit challenging. Encarnacion, Lazarus' man in Costa Rica still talked about the full-on kiss Gustaf laid on him when they met.

Lazarus realized he'd been standing there reminiscing a long time when he noticed the sun was down and LJ had built a nice fire on the patio. He smiled as he slid open the patio door to join the group gathered around the flames, engaged in animated conversations peppered with laughter.

CHAPTER TWO

"It seems years have passed since that night I got myself shot in Key West," said Derek, sitting on the water side of the fire pit. His profile was lit by the burning logs; the stone fire-pit more for appearances than warmth. "I'm just glad the paralysis was temporary, otherwise, I wouldn't be able to kick your ass for putting me there in the first place." The night was muggy, to the point of intolerable. The swimming pool behind the two men was getting plenty of use.

"I know what you mean, Derek," answered Lazarus from the other side of the fire. "Yet, at times it's like it was yesterday when I got the letter." He either didn't hear the little barb from Derek, or his mind was clearly taken with the loss of his close friends, HH and Darnell.

Anyone close to Lazarus knew about “the letter”; it was always referred to as such. The letter he received the night of his reunion with Derek Grimsrud, the CIA operative across the fire-pit.

It was a night of complete absolutes. It began with absolute joy when Derek stepped out of the wheelchair at the restaurant. He had been paralyzed from the neck down by a round taken in his upper back. It was as close to miraculous as Lazarus would ever concede.

Moments later, Lazarus was taken to the depths of sorrow as he read a letter from his close friend, Darnell. The letter bore news of the death of Darnell’s wife, Lazarus’ closest friend, Helen; gunned down in the street by one of the Tongs in South Chicago.

Lazarus never heard from Darnell again. The word on the street was the former shock-collar for the Dark Lords of Chicago, took over two dozen members of the responsible Tong before being killed himself. Darnell had requested an oath from Lazarus to not come to Chicago. Lazarus had new responsibilities in a world he was just beginning to understand; a world where the man who had been a virtual island for three decades, now found himself with a family.

Lazarus honored his promise in his own way – the only way he could and live with himself. There was no way in any world he would let the deaths of his friends be without repercussions.

Lazarus traveled to China under a rarely used identity, that of a former missionary to China. It would explain his relative fluency in the language. Lazarus traveled to Beijing, preparing a special gift for each of the five Chicago Tong. Not just the one who had killed HH.

It is no small challenge to ship questionable packages from the Mainland. Fortunately, Lazarus knew his way around the Party Regulations, using a gift shop to send the packages for him. He paid the elderly man and his wife five thousand in American bills. They would have no problem using the money, China is always looking for foreign currency.

For an extra thousand, they agreed to delay shipping them for a week, allow Mr. Hawthorne to leave the country prior to their release.

The five packages, clearly marked in Chinese, didn’t raise an alarm with any of the targets. One of the packages arrived at the main location of each one of the Five Tongs in Chicago on the same day.

Filled with curiosity, the offices where they were opened were packed. The explosives performed with the precision of their maker, sending ball-bearings in every direction, piercing walls, and shredding not only the assembled members of the Tongs, but others as well. The police estimated the death toll in the eighty to ninety range, but consensus was the number was well over one hundred. A number which satisfied Lazarus’ need to avenge the deaths of his two closest friends.

The men sat in comfortable silence, enjoying the Highland Park 18 scotch while savoring a Gurkha Chairman Select – an excellent cigar by any standard. Lazarus had saved Derek’s life twice now – Derek’s parents spared by the same man. The man they first knew as the Chameleon; sent to kill them. Lazarus voided the contract after doing his due diligence on the targets, deciding they did not deserve to die at his hand. To say it was a rough start would be an understatement. It was Lazarus’ unvarnished and direct delivery of the circumstances, coupled with the assurances of Derek, Dan and MJ came to accept the man as he was, and a strong friendship developed.

It made for a unique relationship between Lazarus and Derek. One, an international assassin, wanted in at least a dozen countries, the other, CIA Black Ops team leader with a father who was an NSA analyst.

It was the friendship with Derek which drove Lazarus to all but eradicate a Mexican drug cartel and kill CIA Special Agent, Phillip Steven Weaver. Weaver had set the wheels in motion that resulted in the wounding of Derek and two members of his team. One fully recovered, however, former Delta Ranger, Sergeant Jason Johnson, lost his left eye in the Key West attack. It took everything he had to prove he could still function at the highest level, one eye or not. He succeeded in his efforts.

The events were over a year behind them now, but not the fallout that came with “The Chameleon’s” aerial assaults on Chihuahua, Mexico and the mountain stronghold of the former Cartel, Los Zapatos de la Muerte. It followed Lazarus like a shadow for over a year. He had garnered international coverage during the air-strikes from American and Mexican news services. The positive side of the coverage was his stature and reputation had grown to almost mythical proportions. The negative repercussions were shown with the attempt by one of the Chicago Tongs sending someone to take him out.

Fortunately for Lazarus, the shoulder-launched missile used by the man charged with bringing down the AC-130, was an old British design, The Blow Pipe. It was, quite possibly, the most inaccurate missile ever created. It hit the mountain side hundreds of yards behind the banking Spectre. The fact of the matter was Gustaf Reichard, one of the CIA operatives supplying support had shot Tommy Huang after he fired the missile. Without the operator for guidance, it was destined to miss.

The entire mission was driven by Lazarus anger for Derek being first kidnapped, then shot. He got support in very non-typical fashion. Primarily the help came from Retired Marine General Nick Fisher, Director of Covert Operations for the CIA and Ferdinand Villa, the newly elected President of Mexico.

The Mexican government went as far as flying an old C-130 into a remote mountain valley as a cover for Lazarus. The official word was "The Chameleon" was killed in the crash; not that many of the criminal contingency bought the deception.

"When are you heading back to El Paso?" asked Lazarus.

"Day after tomorrow," said Derek. "Fischer is sending an Air Force T-39 to pick me up at Homestead. I will be flying in style; not as sweet as your Gulfstream, but it ain't bad."

Lazarus nodded. "The Sabreliner is a fine aircraft. Fitting for a hot-shot CIA operative such as yourself."

Lazarus got the middle finger in response, and a chuckle for his effort.

"Fair enough, Mr. Black," said Lazarus, using Derek's cover name.

"No problem, Camo-man," dead-panned Derek.

Their repartee was interrupted by a disembodied voice coming over the hidden speaker on the deck.

"Dinner is ready, that is if you two are done reminiscing."

"Was that Rebecca?" asked Derek.

"Yep," replied Lazarus.

"You think she made dinner?"

"If she did, we are going to eat it without complaint, got it?"

"Copy that," said Derek. "I just hope her cooking has improved."

"Beggars can't be choosers, Grimsrud, get your ass in there and man-up." Lazarus delivered the statement flatly, but his eyes betrayed his concern of the evening's cuisine.

Together they marched into the house, for all the world looking like two condemned men walking the final mile to their execution.