

Sidewinder

Act I

As I stare out at a beautiful meadow, the sun sinks beyond the horizon. I begin to wonder where I am, or even how I got where I am. Just as I'm thinking that, a lovely doe leaps out from the woods that stand to the left side of the meadow and I stare at the beauty of the bounding deer. About half way across the meadow, the deer stops and stands magnificently in the grass. Then the deer begins to stumble about and, shortly thereafter, falls over. As I run to see what happened to the deer, the meadow starts to sway to the left and then to the right beneath my feet. I faintly hear a woman crying out my name. "Phillip!! Phillip, wake up!!!" I try to ignore the voice but it grows even louder until I blink and find myself looking at the ground from a large height above the ground. Dangling by a rope wrapped around my left leg, I'm practically helpless as to my predicament and then the rope keeping me suspended. starts to slip. The woman from my dream continues screaming my name as I try to find her in the sea of my confusion. I look up to find a large bridge, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the rope keeping me from falling is actually the seatbelt from the passenger side of an SUV; however, before I was knocked unconscious, I was not in a vehicle. The woman screams my name again and draws my attention back to my predicament. I scan the length of the bridge until I see a beautiful blonde woman, looking quite frantic, staring down at me. I curl up my upper body trying to grab the seatbelt. I attempt once, and fail, falling back down to my original hanging position. I try once again, and this time just barely grab the seatbelt. I hang on to the seatbelt as I flip my body so it is facing upward, and then I begin to climb up the seatbelt and into the car, half the car of which is hanging off the bridge. Upon reaching the seat to the car, I begin to feel the car teeter off the edge. It's apparent to me that any

second the car will be on a path to the water. I quickly try to climb to the top of the car but I can't and lose my footing when my foot slips off the seat cushion. Before falling too far, I grab the car door and hang from the door. The woman screams again in fear. I look at her and I can see the fear in her eyes. I climb up the door and onto the top of the car. The car then begins to teeter to the point where I know it will fall. "Jump!" says the woman in fear. I take the first step to run to the top of the now diagonal SUV. I make it to the rear of the car and I leap for the bridge. It's as though the whole world slows down as I pray that I can reach the ledge of the bridge. As my gaining altitude quickly turns to my losing altitude, my fingers brush the ledge of the bridge and my body is forced backward into a falling position. The sensation and hopelessness that comes from falling now envelops my mind and it's as though I'm suspended for a few short seconds before smacking the cold Hudson River. The world grows dim and I slip into unconsciousness.

I once again stand looking into an open meadow. The woods still to the left of the meadow. The peaceful serenity of the great outdoors overwhelms me. Then out of the woods, instead of a doe, a woman walks. Clothed in a white dress, she walks toward me. As she gets closer, I can see her mouthing something but I can't make out what she is saying. It looks like one word is coming out of her lips but I can't make it what word it is. The ground begins to shake beneath me once again. As the ground shakes harder and harder, the woman's words now reverberate through the meadow like she is talking into a microphone. She says one word, "Fight!" That word now exiting and then reentering my mind several times before the ground shakes harder and more violently, then I blink and I'm staring at the ceiling tiles of what looks like a hospital.

I pick my head up quickly and frantically try to figure out where I am. As it turns out, I am in a hospital and on the end of the hospital bed, Beth Spears, the woman who was screaming my name back on the bridge, is resting her head. She's asleep and I intend not to wake her, so I lie on the hospital bed, and begin to think about my childhood. . .

I ran around my kitchen, in circles around my mom, and then I ran into the living room, adjacent to the kitchen, where I found my little brother, the bad guy. I drew my plastic sword and my brother and I have a pre-duel. "So. . . We meet again Lord Dignitus." I said with the voice of an 8 year old boy. My brother, Roy, laughed maniacally and tried striking me with the sword. I blocked the attack and swung back at Roy. He also blocked my attack and I turned to run. I ran outside and climbed the tree that stood in the middle of the yard. I climbed the tree with such agility that I had about five minutes to get prepared for my brothers attack.

My memory then changes to a time when we were a little older. I was around eleven and Roy was around nine. Roy always liked to pick fights with guys bigger than him. One time, he and another guy named Billy, who had about fifty pounds on Roy, got into a fight. Roy was only around seventy-five pounds at this time but he was a spitfire. Roy told the guy he was a sumo wrestler and he got it from his mom. The guy, being furious, ran at Roy and caught him up in his much bigger clutches. About that time, the boy head-butted Roy and broke his nose. Then I ran in from the right of the kid and punched him in the ribcage as hard as I could. The boy dropped Roy and turned to me, who was only about twenty pounds bigger than Roy. Billy quickly decked me and I took it but didn't fall. I looked at Billy and said, "Pick on someone your own size." Billy laughed and I punched him in the gut. As he keeled over, I grab Roy and we run as fast as we can to get away from him.

Beth picks up her head slowly from the end of the bed and she looks up at me, expecting me to still be unconscious. When she sees that I'm awake, a huge grin slips across her face. "Hi." she says with that smile still on her face. She sits in the chair that's in the room and just says "Hi." with a smile.

"Hi." I say back. "How long was I out?"

"Four days. Do you remember what happened? They said you might not remember." she said.

"I remember. Do you remember my brother, Roy?"

"Yes, you never told me what happened exactly."

"I don't like to talk about it, but it was my fault." I say.

"Phillip, you can open up to me."

"I know but it's not easy."

The doctor, dressed in scrubs, then walks in and asks me if I remember what happened, and I tell him exactly what happened. He tells me that there's nothing broken or wrong with me and that he'll get the go ahead to let me go. After he leaves, Beth just looks at me and grins.

"Well, that doesn't matter now anyway. I'm just glad you're ok."

Beth looks beautiful, her hair falls perfectly past her shoulders, gorgeously curled. Her blonde locks are the perfect color, and her green eyes deep and caring. It's safe to say that I have an attraction to her. Unfortunately, she's way out of my league, and the man she's dating is in her league. Her and I have just been really close friends since the end of our high school years.

"I remember one time, Roy and I were playing paintball and it was the two of us against a bunch of other guys," I tell Beth as we walk out of the hospital. "I covered the left side and Roy covered the right side. We had it covered pretty well; I was behind cover and I turned to check

where the guys were and as I turned the corner to check, so did one of the other guys. Without thinking - and I don't know how I did it - I grabbed the guys paintball gun and flipped him over my shoulder and then shot him. Roy covered me during that, and then I covered him while he did the same thing basically. Needless to say, we won. Good times."

By the time I finish my story, we've reached Beth's apartment. We say goodbye and I begin to walk home. On my walk I begin to think more about Roy and his death. I begin to sob as I realize that he's gone. I make it back to my apartment and shower, still sad about Roy but know it'll be ok. I walk to the wardrobe, which is to the left of the bathroom door. The bed lies straight out of the bathroom and the television and kitchen are to the right of the bathroom. I get dressed quickly and sit down on the couch to watch some tv. I just get to my favorite show when my cellphone rings. The screen reads "Robert Adams", Beth's boyfriend. I answer the phone and Robert greets me with the same goofy greeting, "Howdy partner, ready to wrangle some cattle?" I laugh and tell him he's weird. "Hey, I heard you got out of the hospital, that's good! Beth was really worried about you. Hey. Can we meet at Sully's?" He asks. Sully's is a coffee shop right off of Central Park where Robert and I always get coffee when we're discussing big things. "Yeah I'll be right there." I tell him, but inside I'm dreading leaving my apartment again. I grab my leather coat and head for the front door, which is on the other side of the kitchen.

I reach Sully's before Robert and grab us a coffee and a seat for us. The place is nicely kept and clean. It's fancy for a coffee shop but not too fancy. The lighting is darker but not so dark that I can't see, and the walls are a nice shade of light green. Not long after I sit down, Robert walks in. He's taller than I but just barely; his eyes are hazel and he's dressed sharply in a

dress shirt and tie. He sits down across from me and I ask him how he's doing. He replies and for a few moments we small talk and then he hits me with the big conversation opener.

"Ok, so Beth likes this other guy and she doesn't know that I know but I can see it and I don't know what to do. What do you think I should do?" He asks.

"Well, who is he? I think the first thing you should do is relax, she does like you so she's not going anywhere." I reply.

"He's a very dear friend of mine and I appreciate him, and he's a great guy. If you say she's not going in though, I trust your judgment."

"You should trust my judgment, remember that time in Iraq, when we were ten feet from being ambushed." I joke, slightly bragging.

After a short laugh he replies, "Yeah, if this were Iraq, I'd trust you a little more," he begins to laugh loudly. "But this ain't Iraq."

"Hey now!" I laugh.

After a few moments of silence, Robert pipes up and says, "You know what happened to Roy is not your fault right?"

I say nothing, seriously contemplating my next comment. "He never should've been in that position, and I put him there, that was my call, not his."

"They sent us into a death trap."

"That doesn't change the fact, he's dead because of me." I say as I finish my coffee. "Well, if you can't tell, I'm awfully tired so I'm going to go home and go to sleep." I say trying to change the subject.

"Dude, you got four days of sleep, I think you're good." He laughs.

"Nah, bro, I don't think so." I say as I turn to walk out. I exit the coffee shop and enter the huge city that is miles and miles wide. Roy comes back into my head as I continue to walk through the streets. My mind wanders back to our days in boot camp. It brings me back to the adventures we had as kids, and the sports we played. Now, my brother is dead, no longer living, and it's my fault.

The days roll on after I'm released from the hospital and I go about my daily work. I work at a chemical plant called Bethers Brothers. I go to work and come home from work every day and hang out with Beth and Robert frequently, but I realize they think there is something different with me since the bridge.

One night Beth forces me to tell her what happened to Roy. "You are not allowed to leave until you tell me what happened exactly, and I'll not leave your apartment door until you tell me." Knowing Beth, she wouldn't leave my apartment door so I decide to tell her.

"When we were in the Marines, Roy and I were in the same platoon, and in the same squad, and I was the leader. We were jumping a standard HALO jump. Uhhh..... That's a high altitude low opening jump over Iraq. It just so happened to be really dark when we landed in the middle of a small village. Roy, two other guys, and I thought we cleared the perimeter, but then a rocket shot in out of nowhere. Luckily I saw where it was fired from and I moved the team to the south side of the village. Two walls lined the streets, separating the street and the sidewalk, and in front of us to the left was a truck. The team and I lined the sidewalk side of the wall and prepared for a vicious firefight and a vicious firefight we had. Bullets were flying in from every direction and we fired them back. Luckily we took out more of them than they ever could've taken of us. After a half hour of shooting back and forth we made the call for air support or

reinforcements. After that I told Roy to move up to the truck that was in front of us. As soon as he got there, an RPG was fired and directly hit the truck, sending Roy flying." The tears flow down my face as I continue to tell my story. "After that, we heard the very faint sound of the BlackHawks fly toward us. I told the guys we just had to hang in there a little longer and pulled up over the wall to release a volley of bullets just as another rocket shoots past me and into the sidewalk. Upon explosion, all three of the rest of my team are flung from our cover and we were all knocked out when we hit the ground."

"How do you know he's dead?" Beth asks.

"When I was recovering in the hospital, the admiral came in and gave me the confirmation of death and he was KIA." I answer.

A very blank expression comes over Beth's face, and I tell her that's why I didn't want to tell her. She becomes very quiet and the air becomes very thick. The restaurant seems to get quieter as well and both of us go several minutes without saying a word. The memories of the night he died flash through my head for those minutes and then I'm snapped back to reality when the waiter comes over and asks when we would like the check.

After dinner, I walk Beth back home in the rain. The walk turns more into a run as we try to get out of the rain as fast as possible. Upon dropping her off, I put the hood from my sweatshirt over my head to prevent myself from getting wet as much as possible. I've been walking down the street for about three minutes when I hear a profound scream reverberate throughout the streets. I turn toward the direction of the scream but can only hear the downpour of torrential rain. I hear another scream come from the alleyway that stands to the left side of the street. I quickly run toward the scream and find a menacing looking man dressed in black

standing over top of a woman, who is clutching to her purse with all her strength no doubt. The two are locked in a tug of war for the purse and the woman screams again. The woman slips on the wet pavement and the man achieves possession of the purse. I decide its time to step in, and with the rain dripping off my hood, I say, "Drop the purse."

"And what are you exactly gonna do if I don't?" says the thief.

"Trust me, you don't want to know." I threaten. The thief then runs toward me and raises his right hand to strike me. Just as the fist reaches just inches from my jawbone, I attempt a dodge but quickly receive the blow to the right jawbone. My head turns with the mans fist and my world becomes fuzzy. I don't get a chance to recover before I receive another blow to the gut, knocking the air out of my lungs. The thief gives me just enough time to recover and then tries for a third blow, this time to the chin. I have recovered enough to anticipate the incoming blow and I step to the left, grab his forearm, and use his momentum to flip him onto his back. When he hits the ground, I deliver a precise strike to the nose. He writhes in pain on the ground as I grab the ladies purse and return it to her. The woman sits against the brick building to the left of the alley. She is soaked and crying about her purse. I hand her back the purse and ask her if there's anything else I can help her with.

With a smile on her face, she looks at me and says, "You got my purse, you've done more than I could've asked. You're a hero." I grin at her and tell her I'm not a hero, I'm just a friend trying to help. I help her up and I continue my walk home.

On my walk, I begin to think of my good deed. My mind races with thoughts about how I could avenge Roy by doing the city a public service. As I walk I begin to think about what I could do.

One year later. . . .

I crouch on the corner of an apartment building roof. Many thoughts run through my mind, from Beth and Roberts wedding to the small legend I have built throughout the past year, it all runs wildly through my mind. Then the task at hand comes to mind and I focus strictly on the task. Tonight is the night I finish the Kings of the Streets, a violent drug dealing gang. For the past year I've pushed to get them off the streets, and tonight I find out more about the other three gangs. The gangs work in somewhat of a pecking order, and I've started at the bottom. One of the gangs supplies drugs to the other three gangs and I consider that the biggest, although I don't know which one it is.

I pull my cowl over my head and make sure I have my tools on my belt. The cowl pulls over like a hoodie but it's skin tight. The mask itself covers from my nose up leaving only an opening for my eyes and mouth. The bottom of the cowl however is opened enough to show my bare jawline. I look at my fairly new suit and smirk. The suit itself, is made to look like snake scales from head to toe. I wear black gloves that reach up to my elbows, and black boots that reach my knees. A bow staff is secured to my back and I have decided only to use it when necessary.

I then look up to examine the gangs compound. After observing for several minutes, I determine that three men patrol the outside walls, all of them carry weapons. I decide it is time to get to work and with one leap off the roof I transform from Phillip Rice to The Sidewinder.

I approach the windowsill of the apartment building opposite of where I leapt. Before my leap turns in to a helpless descent, I grab the windowsill and regain control of my body. I then turn around. While keeping one hand on the windowsill to prevent me from falling, I look for a

place to safely drop to the ground. Luckily, the gloves I wear have extra grip so the hand that holds the sill will not move. About ten feet down, there is a trailer parked. I drop down quickly and then jump off the trailer on to the ground. Upon reaching the ground, I slowly and quietly move toward the first compound. I crouch behind a road girder and I wait for a good opportunity to remove the first guard from the equation. Several minutes pass until I'm approached by the guard. I lunge out of the shadows and clasp my hand immediately over the guards mouth to prevent him from letting out a cry for help. Quickly I knock him to the ground and make sure he's at least passed out. I contemplate taking the gun but then determine I want to try to keep this take down quiet and I move on. I crawl up using the shadows until I can see the other two guards standing directly beside each other. I decide that I will have to remove them at the same time and when I reach the point where I'm directly horizontal to the two, I break into a dead sprint toward them. I leap at the guard closest to me and wrap my arms around his neck. The momentum I have created forces me past the guard, quickly jerking his now broken neck with me. Then I deliver a quick jab to the second guards knee. Knocking him to the ground, the blow delivers how I wanted and I then deliver another quick jab to the guards temple, knocking him out. The entrance door to the compound lies just behind the two now unconscious guards. I turn the doorknob and enter the compound. After entering the dark corridor inside the doorway, I slowly and quietly close the door. I turn around and I'm instantly struck by a bright light so intense it literally blinds me for a moment. I am just regaining my composure when I receive a blow to the right cheekbone, sending me collapsing to the ground. "You have foiled my plans and thrown my men in prison, then you have the tenacity to attack me in my own home?" A voice from above me interrogates. The voice is Russian in tone and I know only one gang lord who's voice is Russian.

"Vladimir Krankenchoy." I say through clenched teeth. The pain in my right cheek pulses and I feel like it swells up automatically. I stagger back to my feet and notice that Krankenchoy has men surrounding me. As the men begin to attack me I fight furiously, with one man in mind to defeat, Krankenchoy. One of the men approach me from the left and I dodge an incoming blow meant for my left cheekbone. I deliver a swift blow to the right nostril of my attacker. The rest of the men take a moment to rethink they're strategy. They look directly at each other and then nod. Three of them take a few step forward, leaving just one more not fighting other than Vladimir. One stands on the left side of me, one stands in the middle, and one stands on the right. The one in the middle attacks first and I realize that I can't dodge left or right. He very ignorantly throws a straight punch with his left hand and I quickly duck under it and use his momentum to throw him over my back in a somersault motion. He lands hard on is back and lets out an exasperated gasp of air. I turn quickly and kick the attacker in the head, which knocks him out. I'm about to turn around when I am grabbed from behind. I'm dragged around so that the attack that I believe was on the left can face me. He immediately approaches with a strike to the stomach. I take it with excruciating pain shooting through my body. As he winds up for another blow, I leap up and wrap my legs around his head. I rotate my body with as much force as I can, raising my right leg and lowering my left. Gravity takes over and a swift crunch from the snapping of his neck rings throughout the room. By now the last thug has entered the fight and the thug holding me has let go. I leap back to my feet and decide it is my turn to fight. I run at the thug that was holding me and throw a false punch with my right hand. He easily dodges it, just like I wanted him to. The thug steps backward to avoid just as I roll my body and make a momentous strike with my left elbow. Immediately, the thug falls to the ground and I decide not

to worry about him. Now, Krankenchov looks scared and he starts to run. I quickly knockout the last thug and take off after Krankenchov. He runs down a long hallway and I sprint as fast as I can after him. As he turns a corner to the right, I catch up to him and tackle him before he can turn the corner. The momentum of the both of us sends us crashing through the wall and down to a lowered parking lot. Krankenchov takes the brunt of the fall and I feel only most of the pain. I struggle to get up but I will myself to be strong to get answers. "Who do you get the drugs from?!" I exclaim trying to strike fear into the now defeated Krankenchov.

"I'm not going to tell you. But there is a secret entrance into the headquarters, that's all I'll give you." Krankenchov says with a smart look on his face.

"Who is the leader?!" I interrogate.

"I don't know." Without question I strike a major blow to Krankenchov's kidney which sends him into a scream of pain.

"Who?! If you want any of your arms and legs to work then you'll tell me." I threaten.

"I don't know his name. No one does. He just goes by The Hawk." Krankenchov says now through tears of pain. I deliver a powerful blow to his temple and knock him out. After, I use his phone to call the police and tell them where he is.

Back at my new apartment, much bigger in size and much easier to have a hideout, I hang up my suit with the three others in my wardrobe. Upon sitting down, I begin to think. 'The Hawk, The Hawk. Where do I even start with that? A secret entrance? Where? Maybe I can get more information from James Smith. James Smith, the leader of the Blood Pack. Can I do this all alone? Should I get help? No, I can't hurt someone like that. You know where this is going to lead Phil. You'll end up in jail. But you need to take down this drug operation.'

The Blood Pack is notorious for ruling the Bronx area of New York. I decide to start there. I move from my desk after writing down furiously several names, and several ideas, such as the secret entrance, The Hawk, and James Smith. The only other two gangs that are known are the Birds of Prey and the Masters of Shadows, both of which are higher end gangs and not as ghetto so they could be the drug dealers, but The Hawk seems like a Bird of Prey. I still decide to take down the Blood Pack and the Masters of Shadows before anything else. On that note I lay down on my bed and quickly fall asleep.

I stand now in a city where massive amounts of destruction have taken place. The skyscrapers have all but fallen and the smell of fire and ash now permeates through my nose. I begin to wonder what in the world is going on. I walk through the streets and slowly realize. . . this is New York. I run to Robert and Beth's house to make sure Beth is all right. Upon my arrival at their house I discover an exploded house. My heart drops into my stomach as I discover the worst feeling of defeat and loss. I drop to my knees and bury my face into my hands, weeping bitterly. Utterly defeated I look up at the lot of the house and see that the front door still stands, as well as the chimney, and the left side of the house although looking through the windows I can tell the inside is destroyed. I slowly crawl up to the house trying to find any evidence that they were alive. I pass through the gate of a once white picket fence now stained brown and gray by the ash in the air. I crawl on hands and knees up the brick pathway to the once pleasant house. I keep my face looking at the brick pathway as I continue to sob. Suddenly, my left arm is grabbed by another hand. I quickly dart my head to the left to see who it is and the surprise shocks me to roll onto my backside. A tattered and torn Robert reaches out to me. Blood streaks down all sides of his face and I notice his legs are severed evenly just above the knees. His hair has vanished

and his scalp shows through a bloody mangling of skin. "You! You did this to us! It's all your fault Sidewinder!"

"What?! What's my fault?! I did nothing wrong!" I scream. My right hand is then snatched by another hand. I frantically scramble to get away from that hand before even seeing who it is. After I have turned away from the arm, I see a devastated Beth all but blown to pieces. She is barely recognizable, but I know it's her. Tears stream down her face and she looks at me with a look of disappointment.

"Why, Phillip?! Why didn't you stop?! Why?! Why?! Why?!" Beth screams in an agonizingly painful tone. I close my eyes and curl up into a ball, giving up on all hope. The sound of crackling fire grows louder and louder, followed by the screams of Beth and Robert. I squeeze my eyes closed harder than I've ever tried, but then find them open. I now sit in darkness. Pitch blackness. I glance around and then try to turn myself around, being back to a seated position, I find this very difficult. I finally get turned around and see the woman from my dream while in the hospital. She is robed in a beautiful white dress and she just stares at me. Several moments pass and then I ask a question, one word.

"Why?"

"The Hawk is a lot more than just a drug dealer. He is using that money to build a superweapon. That will all come to pass unless you destroy him." She says in a very beautiful voice.

"But this is just a dream, it can't actually be a superweapon?" I reply.

"Is this really just a dream? Or a vision of the future?" She says, and with that comment I shoot up in my bed and immediately my head turns, looking around the room for the white robed

woman. After realizing she's not there, I jump out of bed and run to my desk. I quickly write down everything in my dream and then I am blindsided by a burly man dressed in a black suit. He sends me hurdling through the wall and I land in a room that's the perfect size to relocate my little hideout. I bounce up of the ground and quickly prepare to defend myself but find the burly man gone. I look around frantically trying to find him, but I can't and with one blink I'm staring at the ceiling above my bed. Once again I walk over to my desk and write down everything from both dreams that I had had. Then I decide to get a sledgehammer to hammer through the wall into my new hideout, which is actually an abandoned warehouse. After hammering through the wall, I move all of my gear to the new hideout. 'What should I call it?' I begin to think. As I think I put in a retractable electronic door that is activate by the lifting of an old dial phone. when the door is in place, it looks just like the wall I had knocked out so that it is perfectly disguises itself. By the time that my hideout project is finished and my thoughts are all posted and nailed to a wall, my suits are also placed in the hideout and hidden away. I have by this time thought of the perfect name for my hideout The Snake Pit. I set up a computer from which I can put all of my gang information and hopefully where certain people are at certain times, but to do that, I'll need to be in two places at once, here to pinpoint and on the streets to catch them. 'It's time to add another person to my legend.' I think.

Act II

'Who can I trust?' I begin to think. I think of all the people that I know, then I remember an old marine friend. She acted as our intelligence officer and she could tell all of us any information we needed to know at any time on mission. We called her HQ but she was really a part of our team. From what I remember, she was gorgeous, but where could she be now? I

decide to do some tracking so I can find her. I call my commanding officer to try to find out more information. "Hey, Peter, do you have any idea where Desiree went after the night that we all gave up?" I ask.

"Yeah, I believe she moved up to Minnesota. Tried to get away from it all. Why? Trying to rekindle a relationship?" He asks with a laugh.

"Not exactly. What city does she live in?"

"That's all you need," he says with another laugh. "You're good enough to find her if I tell you the city. St. Paul."

"Thanks." I say and hang up.

Immediately, I rush out of my apartment and jump in a cab, telling the driver to head to the bank. Upon reaching the bank, I tell the driver to wait while I get a loan. I get the loan very quickly and jump back in the car. I tell the driver now to head to a motorcycle dealership. On the way I glance outside to see the buildings passing by on a beautiful summer day. Once we reach the dealership, I jump out of the yellow taxi cab and head inside the dealer to talk to one of my old teammates, Bubba.

"Hey! Bubba!" I say cheerfully.

"Ay! Phillip! What you doin hea?" Bubba says in his thick Jamaican accent. Bubba is a very burly black man, who is tall enough to have to duck through every doorway.

"Well, I kind of have a favor to ask, I need to get to Minnesota." I reply.

"Minnesota? Why you need ta go dea?"

"I need to bring Desiree here to help me with something." I explain. "Is there any way I could buy a bike from you?"

"What? No, Phil, you can ave bike." Bubba says with a chuckle. "Aftah everyting you done foa me? I could not dream of askin you to buy bike from me."

"Awesome! You're the best, Bubba!"

"Take yah pick, mon?"

I don't even hesitate to take a very nice Yamaha motorcycle, that just so happens to be the same shade of dark green as my suit. After saying goodbye to Bubba, I start my long journey to Minnesota.

After about twelve hours of driving, I finally reach St. Paul in the middle of the night. I find a place to sleep for the night and begin my search for Desiree in the morning. At daybreak, I drive to the town office. I find out where she lives and then find a way in to her house, since she is not home. I sit at her kitchen table, which is right inside the front door, all day until she finally gets home. It is dark by the time she gets off of work and I hear her walk up to the door. I know she sees the lights I have turned on and I can tell as she is hesitating to open the door. Slowly, the door opens and the muzzle of a handgun peeks out of the slit in the door. The door opens slightly more and, as it does, the muzzle begins to appear more. I let out a chuckle and watch as the door swings fully open.

"Is that how you'd greet an old friend?" I ask through my laughter.

"Phillip!? What are you doing here? I thought you lived in New York." She asks in the same confirming tone that I was used to having in my earpiece. She looks as beautiful as ever. Her golden locks fall perfectly on her shoulders, and her blue dress looks absolutely stunning. The shade of blue she has chosen matches the color of her eyes positively perfect, as it brings out her eyes to look like the sky on a clear day.

"I do. . . but I need help from someone I can trust, and I know I can trust you." I explain.

Over the next few hours, I explain what's been going on and talk her into following me back to New York to be my offensive coordinator as it were.

"First, I need to do some things here, I may be out of the army but I still keep my foot in the door. If you really are trying to help the world out, I need you to do something for me. There is a man by the name of Ahmed Ihibad, he is a known terrorist here and he's got a sleeper agent in the city that we don't know about. The way I see this is we can test out your little plan before I pack up and head out to help you." Desiree explains.

I agree quickly and she gives me the run down of an approximate location of the sleeper agent. "We have a good idea where he is but we don't know for sure."

"Good, my favorite kind of fugitive, the hidden one." I reply.

"You're gonna need something discreet to wear, so you don't get plastered on the news."

I walk over to the small bag I brought with me and unzip the middle zipper on the top of it. "Don't worry, I came prepared." I say as I pull out my suit. Desiree shoots me a big smile and tells me that once I get ready we will be close to all set.

After getting ready, I walk back in to the dining room to find a large map of the area, and a picture of Ihibad.

"Ok, Ihibad has a large complex here." Desiree says as she points to a corner on the map.

"The best way to get in is through the sewer. As long as you have the abilities that I think you have, the man hole cover is almost directly in the center of the complex which will be undoubtedly covered by guards, but Ihibad's office is in the southeast corner of that room."

"What if I took the skylight and descended in that way, I could drop directly into his office and grab him then, providing he is there. If he's not there then I can get information on where he is. The hard part will be getting back out." I offer.

"Ok, that will work, and he more than likely will not be there, that's one of five warehouses that he jumps to to stay off the radar." Desiree says as I walk out the door.

I look into the complex through the skylight that I had designated on the map. "Good, you haven't been seen yet, but here's where it gets difficult." Desiree says into my earpiece.

I hold my left index finger to my ear and reply, "Thanks, I figured that."

I slowly lift up the skylight and swing my body through the hole. I grab the ledge where the skylight sat and begin to look for a beam to grab on to. I find one within arms reach and reach out with my right arm to grab the beam. I grab the beam and my body is held in suspension between the two ledges. I take a deep breath and let go of the ledge with my left hand, moving it quickly over to grab the beam. I grab the beam fully with both hands and look down at where Ihibad's office is. It sits about twenty feet down on the other side of the complex, which fortunately is a straight shot on the beam. I climb up the beam between the rafter, and get a firm footing. I cross between the beams and reach where the office is at. I look down at the top of the office, which is about ten feet down, and I try to figure out the best way down. After looking for a few moments, I find a pipe vertically standing against the wall. The only problem is that the pipe is against the wall about five feet away. I contemplate my situation and I deeply consider leaping directly from the beam onto the roof, but then realize that would be too loud. After realizing that, I leap to the pipe and barely latch on to it. I slowly climb down the pole and touch

down onto the roof of the office. I look into the window that lies on the roof to make sure there is no one there, and enter the office.

Upon landing, I put my left index finger once again to my ear. "Desiree, I'm in, he's not here." I say.

"Ok, well, get some information on the desk that is facing away from the complex."

I walk over swiftly to the desk she mentioned and immediately see a plan to ambush someone that had been a threat to them. I quickly begin shuffling to the papers, trying to find out who this someone is so I can protect them. And then I see the word agent and immediately I think of Desiree. She's the agent that's been after all of them, and she's undoubtedly the one they are going to ambush. I quickly put my finger to my ear to warn her, "Desiree, you need to. . ." I begin before I receive a crushing blow to the back of my neck, knocking me out instantly.

"Phillip, what are you doing?" says the woman dressed in white again.

"I'm trying to save the city, trying to save Robert and Beth, I'm trying to make Roy proud."

"Are you sure you're not in this for you?"

"Yes, I'm in it for them. . . and the city." I say.

"You're lying to yourself. You're doing it for a personal vendetta against crime, and you'll undoubtedly fail."

"NO!" I scream.

My eyes slowly flick open to a blurry world. I can make out a figure that looks dark and menacing. Immediately, I naturally move to defend myself but find my arms restrained by

something. My eyes begin to clear up and I see Ihibad, clearly the spitting image of the picture I had seen in Desiree's house.

"Good, you're awake. Now, you can die knowing that the agent is about to die because of your failure." he says in a Middle Eastern accent as he chuckles and walks away.

Fury wells up inside of me and as he walks away I begin to pull at the ropes subduing me. After a few moments, I receive a blow with what feels like a lead pipe to the left arm. An excruciating pain shoots through my left arm and I let out a scream. The thug pulls back to strike me again, and this time I anticipate it. I throw my legs into the air and wrap them around the pipe, dodging the strike. At the end of the swing, the thug begins to pull back, but I use my legs instead to roll him into an aerial somersault. He hits the ground hard and I somehow use the adrenaline to break the ropes and get free. I stand overtop of the downed thug and ask him a simple question. "Where'd they go?"

I pull my mask back over my face as the thug tells me I'm too late to save her, but he has already told me where they are going.

"We'll see about that." I say as I drop my knee onto the thugs face, knocking him out.

I climb back onto my motorcycle which is precisely where I left it, and I dart off toward Desiree's house.

I drive furiously toward the house and when I turn on to the street, I can see that there are two guards standing outside the house. I accelerate quickly down the street and, just moments before I reach the guards, I leap off the motorcycle toward the guards. With an insane amount of momentum, I strike one guard across the right jaw. After knocking him down, I very quickly spin and strike the other guard in the nose, knocking him out cold as well. I turn to face the house as I

see the door swing open. From out of the doorway steps Ihibad with Desiree gagged and subdued.

"You are a persistent, aren't you?" he says as he throws Desiree down the three steps bridging the brick walkway with the porch. She smacks the ground hard and every fiber of my being wants to rush to help her, but I know if I do Ihibad will prey on it and I'll be defeated. He walks down the stairs with two other men and kicks Desiree in the stomach on his way past. She lets out a wincing growl of hatred and the two men split from Ibihad to the left and right until they reach a ninety degree angle from me.

"Let her go now!" I yell.

"Or what? You'll kill me. Oh, that is a thought." Ibihad laughs as he pulls a large silver revolver from his belt. "I could kill her."

"Don't!"

"No, I won't, I'll tell you what. If you can beat both of my men then I will allow you to take me in and I will go to jail. But, if you can't, I'll kill her."

"Ok." I say.

"On the right stands a twelfth degree black belt in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, Judo, and Tae Kwon Do. And on the left stands an ex-professional boxer, kick boxer, and wrestler." Ihibad informs me through a cackle.

"Bring it on."

My peripheral vision seems to widen as I see the guard to the right of me move in first. As soon as he is within reach, I lunge at him, expecting him to dodge it, which he does, and I spin with my elbow to strike him in the temple. He stumbles, taken by surprise more than anything,

and I move in to strike him again. I strike a major blow to the stomach and the air leaves his body quickly. I begin to pound on him about ten times faster than I ever knew I could. As he looks to be about knocked out, I wind up for a major blow the jawbone just before I'm scooped up from behind by the boxer. Quickly, I find myself on the ground receiving multiple blows to the head. My vision blurs and I begin to see less and less of the world. I can feel the blood flowing down my face as I start desperately trying to escape from my predicament. Finally, I catch a break and I dodge one blow. My vision almost instantly clears due to the adrenaline now pumping through my body, and I see a weak point on the boxer; he is holding himself up with one foot. I quickly move my arm to trip him up and watch as he tumbles to the ground. Immediately, I jump on top of him and put my hands around his left arm in a triangle-type shape. I apply every ounce of pressure I can as I hear the distinct snap of his bone. He lets out a sharp cry of pain and throws me off of him to clutch his now broken arm. I quickly get up and deliver a swift kick to his head and he passes out almost instantly. Just as I am about to turn around to finish the other guard, I feel the full weight of the last guard on my back. The arms of the guard are quickly wrapped around my neck and locked into place so that I cannot get out. I feel the circulation to my head cut off. I begin thrashing around trying to loosen the grip that the black belt has on me. As the world begins to darken around the edges of my vision, I begin to panic, thinking I could lose my life, and Desiree's, then one idea pops into my head. I quickly jump and throw the upper half of my body forward as much as I can. My body does an in-air somersault just as I planned, and then my body lands squarely on top of the guard, knocking the wind out of him. To my relief he loosens his grip just enough for me to break free. I turn myself over and continually punch him in the cheek until he doesn't move.

"Good, I am a man of my word. I'm all yours." Ihibad says as he untied Desiree and walks toward me. I tell Desiree to call the police as I tie him up and secure him to the ground

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Back in the Snake Pit, I show Desiree the map of the city and the distinctions of which gang controlled which district. I told her everything that I had discovered so far and updated her entirely.

After explaining everything, Desiree hesitates before saying, "Wow! You are a crazy insane psycho."

I laugh and slightly agree with her, but only in my mind. "I wouldn't go quite as far as that but your probably right."

Just then my cell phone begins to ring from the inside of my jeans pocket. Seeing it's Beth, I quickly answer the phone. "Hey, what's up?"

"Nothing really, Robert and I are going to Pedro's and we are wondering if you want to come."

"Uhhhh. . . I have a friend in town, mind if she comes?"

"Oooooohh, Phillip has a girlfriend?" Beth says with a chuckle.

Although I can't see myself blushing, I feel my skin turn about fifty times warmer than I've ever felt. "Just shut up, ok?"

Beth laughs again and complies to my request. "See you soon. Oh, we're going to be there around eight."

We say our goodbyes and I quickly hang up.

"Who was that?" Desiree asks curiously.

"It was Beth, one of my best friends. She wants us to meet her for dinner." I say.

Desiree complies and says, "Finally! I'm starving!"

I laugh and tell her that the gangs can wait.

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We arrive at the restaurant shortly before eight and get seats for our group. Five minutes later, Robert and Beth walk in laughing, hand in hand. A tinge of jealousy finds its way into my chest as they walk over, but Beth is happy so I'm glad deep down, I think. They sit down and we begin looking at the menu's. The restaurant is small and the booth seats that we sit in are cushioned very thoroughly. The table itself is made from oak, and the light that is suspended from the ceiling is shaped in an oval form. The menus have wonderful Spanish and Mexican dishes on them and I have a hard time deciding what to eat. The colors in the room are majorly green and red, with the occasional yellow or brick color making it's slight expression of relevance.

"Beth, Robert, this is Desiree, she gave the updated orders to me and Roy's group before he died." I say, finally breaking an almost awkward silence.

"Well, hello Desiree! You are very pretty!" Beth says, seeming far giddier than usual. I try not to look into it too much but the thought does cross my mind that she has been happier the past four months she's been married to Robert.

"Well thank you but no, I'm not so sure about that." Desiree says modestly, which actually makes me think she's even prettier. I begin to think that I am actually going to like her as more than just a friend.

"So how have you been Phil? Your like a recluse now. We never hear from you anymore, ya know?" Robert finally speaks up. He's right, if I'm honest with myself. It hurt to watch the girl I'd

loved for so long get married to one of my best friends. I withdrew just because it hurt too much I think.

Quickly snapping out of my thoughts I say, "Yeah, sorry, I've just been busy with work and other things."

"Work? Where do you work at now?" Robert says. I hesitate because I have just changed jobs.

"Uhhhh. . . now I just sit in a cubicle at Hospey." I say.

"You got a job at Hospey?" Robert practically exclaims.

"Yeah, I just got it, like today." I say, somewhat lying, because I've had the job for about a half a year. However, I did get the past two weeks off so I could officially start my "side job".

"Dude, that's awesome!" Robert says.

"How have you guys been?" I ask.

"Really, really good! We just moved into our new house and our jobs are really awesome! But today we found out something really amazing!" Beth says extremely excited.

"And what is that amazing thing?" I ask, curious but at the same time nervous for some reason.

"I'll tell you after we eat!" Beth exclaims as the food arrives.

We eat dinner slowly and talk between mouthfuls. "So you guys met in the army?" Robert asks to Desiree.

"Yeah, I kinda told Phil here what to do." she replies.

"Good, keep him obedient." Robert says with a smirk.

"Hey now." I speak up quickly trying to end the conversation quickly.

We finish up dinner and as the empty, dirty plates, crumpled napkins, and empty cups were strewn across the table, Beth practically begins jumping up and down, eager to tell me exciting news apparently.

Reluctantly, I ask, "Ok, what was your big news?"

Immediately, Beth shoots into a long and complicated story. "Ok so this morning, I had a doctors appointment, no big deal right? Well half way through the check up, doctor gave me a funny look and led me down a cool hallway. Well anyway, long story short. . . I'm pregnant!!!"

Taken completely aback, I begin to struggle for the right words to say. Part of my heart sinks and even dies I think, and part of it is excited for them. "That's. . . that's awesome!" I say, that's the only thing I can honestly think of however. I try to hide the part of my heart that has now died. "I'm so happy for you two!" I finish.

The room becomes fuzzy and my head begins to swirl. I take my receipt and Desiree's receipt to the cash register and pay, then quickly walk out, trying to find a place to get alone. I finally find a park overlooking the Hudson Bay and the Statue of Liberty. A railing divided the park from the cold Atlantic water, and the trees sway in the slight ocean breeze. I lean my body on the rail and begin to think about Beth and all that her and I have been through.

'Is it selfish to not be happy for them? You did love her Phil, you still love her.' I try not to dwell on it and look up at the harbor.

"That was rude." comes a woman's voice from behind me.

"Well, what else was I supposed to do?" I say as I turn to face the woman, tears streaming down my face.

"I was talking about her." Desiree says. Unable to control myself, I let out a small laugh.

"How was she rude?" I ask, puzzled.

"It's obvious some part of you still cares about --- possibly still loves her, and she has the tenacity to tell you that without warning?! Rude." Desiree explains, trying to make me feel better. To my surprise it actually works and I cheer up a little.

"I don't know. She's my best friend, so she probably didn't know it would hurt me."

"Do you still love her?"

"A part of me screams yes, and a part of me is telling me to move on" I inform her.