

## Chapter Twelve

The funeral was larger than most people expected. Sam spoke for an hour about his times with him and the past. This was one of many funerals happening around the city, but most felt they had to come to this one, all except for Ana. She sat in her room with her gun afraid to see anyone. She missed several appointments with her doctor and the prosthetist. The blood had dried on the doorjamb and the floor staining the wood. Wendy and Cathy tried to talk her out of the room, but nothing could talk her down. The funeral was coming to an end. Sam was one of the pallbearers with the mayor, chief of police, the principal of the high school, the new elementary school principal and Owen. The town laid Principle Edward Antonio Dyas to rest with all the honors the city could provide.

Three days earlier, Owen heard something from the bedroom. He remembered how Ana was having night terrors when she slept alone, so he picked up a vest he had hanging near the door and went to the room. He opened the door to a flash of light and a pain in his shoulder and chest as the vest pulled out of his hand and back as Ana emptied her gun at him. He backed away with a round in his shoulder and what felt like broken ribs and a broken wrist. Sam heard the gunfire and came running with his Glock 19 and a shotgun on his shoulder finding Owen on the floor waving him off. Owen said, *“she has ten magazines.”* Sam asked, *“what the fuck is going on?”* They could hear Ana drop the empty magazine and load another. Sam pulled out his phone and called Wendy. After a few rings, Wendy answered, *“make this quick Sam.”* Ana fired into the door near the sound of the phone. Wendy screamed into the phone asking, *“is that gunfire?”* Sam said, *“I don’t know what’s going on. Owen said that Ana was having bad dreams and well, maybe we should have taken her gun..... Oh yeah, she shot Owen, and we need some help.”*

Jorge sat naked in their room watching the news and all the coverage of the school then the funerals. He was halfway through a bottle of whiskey while smoking a cigar laced with marijuana commonly known as a blunt. Sitting next to him was a Glock29. A day after the shooting, Luis drove to the border to find out what was happening on the other side. He came back a few hours later saying how the border was closed. That night Luis packed a bag and

planned on taking a trip across the desert hoping to contact a friend back in Mexico and see if the government is moving in. His departure left Jorge alone with time and his thoughts. He watched the news, drank, smoked and stared at the gun wondering what his first day in hell was going to be like. In his dreams, he could see the kids falling and blood flying while on that day all he could see was smoke and targets. Soon he came to see that he couldn't shoot himself while his sister was still a prisoner back home. He got dressed and went out looking for something to do. A few hours later he saw a rail-thin man walking along a sidewalk scratching at his arms showing all the signs of an addict needing a fix. Jorge followed this man thinking if he finds the dealer just maybe he could do some good.

Wendy, Jill, Jack, and Zoey sat in a car watching a dealer as he sold his wares to his clientele seeming oblivious to them watching him. The man was an affront to good taste. He sat up against a wall with a sign saying, "will work for food." He was a special kind of dirty that unless you didn't know what to look for you wouldn't know it was all makeup and props. To add to the effect, he wore a filthy poncho. The customer gives him the cash, and he takes their hand slipping the drugs into their palms in a sleight of hand worthy of a street performer. He was a small-time operator dealing in pills and small amounts of the heroin being brought across the border and would have slipped by their watch, but Cathy wanted to see what happened to the ash-brown haired girl once her dealer was dead. She followed her around until she saw this dealer. A man straight off the central casting for a zombie movie walked down the street to the dealer. Behind him was a strikingly handsome Hispanic man. Wendy thought he seemed familiar, but she wasn't sure. The man pushed the addict out of the way while pulling a gun and pointing it at the dealer.

Jorge decided to shoot the addict and the dealer, but the dealer would be first, so he pushed the addict out of the way and drew on the dealer. He pointed the gun, and the man became a small child covered in blood. Jorge hesitated. The dealer stared at the strange man wondering if this was from a rival gang or just maybe the cartel was tired of waiting for his payment. The addict stayed on the ground with his face down saying, "*I didn't see nothing.*" The mix of booze and pot was changing what Jorge saw into what he saw in his mind. The dealer

slowly moved to his right trying to pull the Walther PPK he had hid under the poncho. Jorge lowered his gun and wondered what would happen if he just walked away when the dealer pulled out his gun, and a shot rang out. Jorge pointed the gun back at the dealer and fired three times stopping when he saw the dealer was already dead with the back of his head spread across the brick wall. A van pulled up behind him, and a woman stepped out. Wendy said, *“come with us if you want to live.”* Behind her, he saw a younger woman with a scoped rifle. The addict started to scream, *“I didn’t see nothing, I didn’t see nothing.”* Jorge handed the woman his gun and got into the van.

Cathy gave Jorge a cup of coffee and placed a plate of shortbread cookies on the table in front of him. Wendy asked, *“what do you know about these men that have your sister?”* Jorge remembered Wendy from a month or two ago from a truck he and Luis followed. She had purposely crashed into a barn. He remembered thinking she was crazy. He said in broken English he used to make himself seem less prepared than he was for his mission, *“I know too much. We worked for them to try and see if anyone still live.”* Cathy asked, *“and Lewis went back to see what was happening?”* Jorge shook his head then he nodded saying, *“Luis and we were both in the army, but he has more friends still in than I do so he went across.”* He looked around seeing a bigger operation than either he or Luis had expected. He said, *“we came here to America hoping to find help, but this country is just so violent that we just didn’t see any way we could get help.”* Wendy turned to Cathy who nodded and left the room. She turned to Jorge and said, *“we have a friend who knows this guy that runs a specialty security service that well, specializes in such operations and I think he would help as long as we aren’t already too late.”*

## Part Two

Wendy and Cathy sat in bed watching the news as the police moved into the ranch. The local news station was showing unedited coverage including bodies and blood. Two days earlier, they were in a van following a dealer on what was going to be their first drive by hit, but something felt off to Wendy, so she aborted what was going to be a trap with the dealer’s gang waiting for them around the corner. As they pulled away, Cathy got a call from Alice talking

about several ambushes and how they lost contact with April, June, and Ivan. April and June were a couple that seemed to belong to every group. Two adult women that found each other on the ranch. Ivan was a hacker from Russia with a messy background. Wendy turned around and sped to where April and June were going to be only to find the police and a burning panel-truck. Lying on the side of the street where the bodies of April and June along with another person that was too mangled to be recognizable. About the time the news feed went to the other side of the ranch and found the people that were crucified Cathy had enough and turned the sound down. She whispered to Wendy, “*should we try and find any of the others?*” Wendy pulled her close and said, “*no, we should let all that go like it never happened.*”

Wendy awoke to find Cathy was gone. Her dream about that night the ranch felt real enough to make her question whether this was now or just a part of the dream. Only when she saw the parts to the unassembled crib in the corner did she know the truth. She got out of bed and put on a robe. Thinking about the strange houseguest she also took a subcompact from her small safe and checked it to make sure it was loaded and ready. The voice of Greg the firearms instructor from the ranch always went through her head when she would pick up a gun, “*a gun without one in the chamber might as well just be unloaded because when seconds count you don't want to have to waste them racking the slide.*” Like so many on that day, Greg was murdered by David. He was in his sixties but built like a man in his twenties with a grey crewcut and always in desert camo. They spent a few nights together as he told her about his days in the Marines and she tested the limits of his age in bed. She never found those limits.

She found Cathy in the common room sitting in a loveseat across from this strange man that somehow seemed familiar. He had showered and slept on the couch that night after calling his friend in Mexico and finding out the news about his village. Luis told him that his friend working with the American DEA said they were searching along the border and were closing in on their village. Jorge said, “*we have maybe a week before they closed in and from what Luis said they were planning on taking no prisoners or survivors.*” Cathy said, “*Ruth called, Jack and a few of his friends were on their way and would be here as soon as possible.*” Wendy looked at Cathy giving her a, “is this a good idea” look. She didn't know Jack, but she did know about his

business and their work relocating women and children out of dangerous circumstances. They moved and hid women from everywhere including the middle-east and even the heart of America. This part of the business was just a part of what was a mercenary for hire company. Jack was a Jewish man from Ohio married to a Muslim Woman from Iraq living in Hawaii. Wendy sat next to Cathy feeling something hard just underneath Cathy's leg. Jorge got up and went for a cup of coffee. He was in a thin t-shirt and boxers that didn't cover much. Wendy watched him walk into the kitchen then she checked what was underneath Cathy. She saw it was Cathy's Chiappa White-Rhino. Cathy whispered, *"I don't trust him. I think he's hanging out near naked hoping to distract us."* Cathy saw Wendy was staring at his ass. She whispered, *"you know he's gay right?"* Wendy asked, *"when has that stopped us?"*

A Gulfstream G650 flew over the Pacific Ocean on its way to California then a small one-strip airport somewhere in New Mexico. Jack Pressler sat looking over reports while watching his tablet with footage from a satellite showing a small village in Mexico. He left his wife and five children behind with their youngest teething and their oldest refusing to go back to elementary school. Jack was what could be called an ethical mercenary. He only works for good causes, and after many years behind the gun, he knows his days in this lifestyle are coming to an end. Most of their current jobs were guard work, but it pays the bills. In the next row was a tall, beautiful ebony-skin woman with long platinum-blonde Senegalese Twist hair flowing down past her shoulders. Her name was Tima Cocks, but she insisted people call her TC. She was reviewing a final draft of a book she wrote about her late parents and their work with the World Health Organization or WHO. She left out their charity work as a sort of underground railroad for abused women and children because she was still doing the work. Next to her was a former LA SWAT officer named Janet who spent the entire trip staring out the window. Rounding out the flight was three men in desert camo were Dan, Ted, and Jimmy. This would be the first time they all worked together on one job in years.

### Part Three

Luis walked into a warehouse near the border where he ran into a guard who gave him a smartphone and a message from Jorge, "call me." Jorge spoke to Luis that night about being picked up by the woman in the truck and how they were willing to help them save Maria and how they didn't know about their mission. Luis spent the last two days trying to find help getting Maria and her children out of the village, but no one was willing to go into a warzone for a woman without a significant amount of money. Luis found a quiet place out of the sun and called Jorge using the new phone. The call consisted of a split screen between Jorge and a strange slightly dark-skinned stranger. The stranger said his name was Jack and he and his friends were on the way. Jack said, "*just stay where you are, and we will meet you there in about six hours.*" Luis asked, "*wouldn't it be better if I come to you?*" The image on the phone changed to an aerial picture of the village showing a military buildup to the southwest. Jack said, "*we don't have the time. In the morning they are moving in, and all hell is going to break loose.*" A voice said, "*Sir, we are about to land.*" Jack said, "*we are on the way.*" The call ended, and Luis turned the phone off not wanting the American to be able to track him.

Wendy watched the Gulfstream land on what was little more than a smoothed-out patch of dirt in the desert. She had met Jack before, but he seemed to have aged thirty years since she last saw him. A man that had to be the pilot followed him with an angry tone saying, "*this isn't an airport. We need fuel or this plane isn't going anywhere.*" Behind him was a tall supermodel of a woman with long blonde braided hair and a rifle case over her shoulder. A woman with a prosthetic hand and three other men got out and started to unload the plane into the truck Wendy brought for them. Jack walked over to Wendy and said, "*we need to go now.*" Wendy looked over at her pink van. Only Jorge, Scott and Jill came with her thinking they were going back to the station. Jack said, "*if we leave now, we can make it to the village by midnight, but every minute wasted brings us closer to the military moving in.*" Wendy said, "*OK, I'm sending the van back. There is a place along the way we can get another truck, but I don't want to take anyone that isn't willing to go.*" Jack looked over at the hot-pink van and said, "*yeah, that might stand out.*"

Two hours later, they were closing in on the border with Scott behind the wheel of a Toyota Forerunner with Jill at his side. Wendy told Jill to drive the van back to the station, but she said, *“there is no way I’m not going on this.”* They ended up leaving the van with the plane’s pilot to drive to the station and arrange for some fuel. Luis told them he would have weapons for them across the border and using the smartphone he, Jack and Wendy planned out the operation. Wendy didn’t like bringing a teenager, but it wouldn’t be the first time she did. Jack was on the phone with his daughter saying, *“yes I do understand, but you can’t kick him there.”* After some silence, he said, *“he won’t know you like him if you kick him between the legs.”* He ended the call and said to no one in particular, *“my daughter thinks the way to tell a boy she likes him is to kick him in the nuts.”* Jill said, *“it could be worse, I had my first time with a boy in an elementary school bathroom when I was in the fifth grade.”* Jorge looked at the clock than to the phone then back to the clock wondering just how long he would have to be around these people.

Luis watched as three vehicles approached from the east. He opened the garage door, and they pulled inside. Luis pulled Jorge aside and asked, *“can we trust them?”* Jorge replied with a question, *“do we have a choice?”* Luis turned to the others, and without introducing himself, he showed them to the guns. He had several old rifles spread across a table. Most of them were bolt actions that looked old enough to have been used in World War One. Wendy shook her head saying, *“you have to be kidding me.”* Luis replied, *“this was all I could manage in such a short time.”* Jack nodded to the woman calling herself TC. She went to one of the trucks and pulled out three bags. Inside were nine FN P90s with suppressors. Jack said, *“we have some contacts with the Israeli Army as well as a few Russian friends who can get us almost anything we need.”* Another bag had two m40 sniper rifle suppressors. Wendy handed the rifles to Scott and Jill saying, *“this is the only way you two are going to be a part of this.”* They knew not to bother arguing after she gave an order.

Jack rolled out a map of the village of Jaluco. He looked to Luis and said, *“mark where she should be as well as any security you know.”* Jack handed Luis a bag filled with little green army men as well as a red queen from a chess set. Jack said, *“I’m going to need to get those back, or my son will kill me.”* Luis put the queen on the house near the outskirts of the village.

He then placed a series of the machinegun men around the village with four of the spotters around showing where the sentries are placed also showing an opening where they could move in. Jack placed two diecast cars on the map near the blind spot. He then placed a diecast tank on the west side of the village saying, *“this is the direction the army is coming.”* He placed another tank on the east then another on the southern side and said, *“also here and here.”* He added a small diecast replica of Santa Clause and his slay. Pushing Santa between the two cars and into the village, Jack said, *“with Scott and Jill acting as overwatch, we move in and take the girl as quietly as possible.”* Jorge put a soldier on a building near the center. He said, *“they use this warehouse as an armory. I take it out while you get my sister.”* Luis said, *“we take it out before you strike leading them away from the house while helping in the army invade the village.”*

#### Part Four

Luis checked the time seeing they had five minutes to go. He and Jorge made their way into the village and the building. Luis leaned over to Jorge saying, *“when this is all over, we take your sister and the kids southwest to the coast..... We do this, kill the Americans and leave this all behind.”* Jorge asked, *“are we going to kill them? I mean they’re helping us?”* Luis pointed to the side of the warehouse facing the street saying, *“it might sound strange, but we need to enter on that side. The back and other side have an alarm.”* Jorge looked back at him saying nothing. Luis shook his head, *“they know too much. If we let them live, then we..... Your sister will never be safe.”* Jorge turned to the west and where his sister was. He asked, *“then how can we trust them to save her?”* Luis said, *“their plan was shit and would have had the village ready for the army while this plan takes the drug away from the cartel.”* Luis grabbed Jorge by the shirt and pulled him in close saying, *“remember where your loyalties lie.”*

Jack hit the throat microphone and said, *“the house is dark, but the infrared shows four people inside.”* Wendy, Jack Pressler, TC and Tina watched the house where Maria was from an abandoned home nearby with the other Jack and the rest positioned along the way set up to cover their escape. She asked, *“any movement?”* Jack didn’t say a word. TC hit him on the back and said, *“go on and say whatever you aren’t saying, whitey.”* Instead of saying it he handed Wendy

the scope and pointed to the far side of the house. She counted two smaller blooms of heat than a larger third. Then the third and fourth became one then two again until it became clear the man was raping her again. Wendy checked her watch saying, *"two minutes."* The large heat signature pulled away from the smaller one then it walked out into what had to be a hallway then out the door. The smaller heat signature walked into a room with the larger of the two other blooms and seemed to merge. Wendy's watch beeped. She said, *"time to go."* TC waited in the abandoned house while Wendy, Jack, and Tina went to the house. Over the radio, TC said, *"the girl is on the move heading to the front door."* Tina dropped her gun at the back door. Jack picked it up and handed it to her with a look that seemed to say something, but Wendy didn't know what it meant. TC said, *"Tina so help me if I have to, I'll hot glue that gun to your hand."* Tina attempted to flip her the bird and, in the process, dropped her gun again. Wendy checked her watch saying, *"the guys are moving.....now."*

Luis tucked the P90 under his arm inside his jacket. He said to Jorge, *"walk upright like you belong here and just follow me."* Jorge did the same with his gun, and the two walked over to the warehouse. Luis stopped just as they approached the corner of the building and looked around. He said, *"something's wrong."* Jorge asked, *"guards?"* Luis said, *"there should be two to three guards by the door, but there's no one."* Keeping his gun in place, Luis went to the door with Jorge following. The door was unlocked. He opened it, and the two slipped inside. In the center of what was a mostly empty room was a rack of unloaded AK47s and a table with a couple of bricks of C4. Jorge whistled saying, *"wow here comes world war three."* Luis called out on the radio, *"overwatch.... Do any of you have night vision or something?"* Jill answered back, *"yeah."* Luis said, *"look to the east and south. Look for people."* After a couple of seconds, Jill said, *"what the fuck? Is this some sort of party? It looks like the entire village is standing on the southwest."* After another couple of seconds, Jill said, *"move it's starting."* A second later they could hear the gunfire.

Maria stood by the door as she did every night thinking about what would happen if she locked the door. She knew he would beat her again or worse, but a part of her didn't care. She heard a sound at the back. She turned and saw a man and two women. All of them were armed,

and one of the women had an artificial hand. Wendy handed her a note. She opened it and read, *“Little Maria, if you are reading this then I need you to take your children and go with them. Its hard to explain but I needed to be somewhere else but know it was me, I came for you, and I will never leave you again.”* Maria looked at Wendy and asked, *“how do I know I can trust you?”* The gunfire grew louder. Jill said over the radio, *“the army is pushing past the people on the southwest as they scatter. There shooting everyone in sight.”* A second later she said, *“I don’t think these guys are army.”* Wendy turned to Maria and in her best broken-Spanish said, *“your brother sent us to save you and.”* Maria said in English, *“this will take forever if you keep trying to talk Spanish. Just say what you have to say.”* Jack smirked. Wendy said, *“you can stay here and be shot or come with us and live.”*

Luis said, *“we don’t have enough here to do this job, but we could attach it to the large gas tanks on the other side. They connect to several businesses and would make a large noise.”* Two men came into the warehouse wearing all black carrying AK74s. Luis and Jorge shot them both before they could make a move. Luis checked the men opening one of their shirts revealing a collection of gang tattoos. Jorge said, *“oh shit, this isn’t what we thought at all.”* Luis called out over the radio, *“those men taking the town aren’t army there something else, just get Maria out.....We’ll do what we can to slow them down.”* Luis went to the table and cut the blocks of C4 into small chunks placing them in cans then filling those cans with assorted nails he found around the warehouse. He stuck a wireless trigger in each piece of C4. Luis put the cans into a bag saying, *“I don’t know if these will work.”* Jorge replied, *“does it matter?”* Luis checked his gun and said, *“I’m still planning on going to the beach next week.”*

A Jeep turned a corner firing into the houses with a pair of mounted 50caliber machineguns. TC fired a round from a 50caliber Berrett rifle striking the driver. The Jeep swerved left into the front of one of the homes. *“hey whitey, there goes the neighborhood.”* Jack called out on the radio, *“we’re on the move, fall in as we pass. Overwatch shoot anything that follows us.”* A few seconds later a shot rang out then another as people dropped in the street. Jack said to Wendy, *“get them out.”* Jack switched to semi-auto and went to a window as Wendy and Tina led Maria and her children out the back. Jack called out, *“I’m coming out.”* TC answered, *“I*

*got your back Jack just get out and go.”* Jack said, *“are you telling me to hit the road?”* TC smiled saying, *“shut up whitey.”* Jill called out, *“more on the way.”* Wendy and the others past TC who joined them and together they made their way to the next stopping point picking up the others as they passed. Jack went out to find Jorge and Luis. A man came running out of the house where the Jeep hit firing wildly into the air. Jack put two rounds into his head and kept going. Around a corner, he heard a suppressed round. Down the street, he saw Jorge pull someone into a house. Jack put his back to a wall and using the shadows made his way to them as quickly as possible. He put his ear to a back door and tried to find out if they were alone or not.

Jorge and Luis ducked into a house as a large group of men came down the street shooting back at another group. Among them was a man Jorge knew. The man that spent the last three years raping his sister was on the run with what looked like blood on his shirt. Jorge pulled out a pair of brass knuckles and called the man over striking him across the face. The man went down, and Jorge pulled him into the house. The man rolled over and saw Luis. He said, *“I thought you two died in the desert.”* Jorge went to his knees next to the man and said, *“how could I leave without my sister Maria and your bastards.”* The man lost his smile looking at Jorge then at Luis. He said, *“she loves me.”* Jorge replied, *“she’ll get over you.”* Luis leaned in and said, *“we did an awful lot to bring this about. Jorge and I thought or knew that if we brought enough heat to the border, then the army or someone would move in and cleanse the village of your filth.”* Jorge pulled a knife and jammed it into the man’s chest. Luis smiled and said, *“we killed so many Americans to make this moment possible, and it was all worth the cost.”*

Jorge and Luis left the house and took control of a Jeep with two dead men behind the wheel. Jack followed them. Three blocks away Luis triggered the bombs. Seven explosions cut across the village taking twenty people with them as shrapnel cut people to ribbons. Jack cut away from them and made his way back to the house and a Jeep he passed. Jorge turned the Jeep down an alley where they found four men all in black. They waved for them to stop. One of the men yelled, *“we got them on the run.”* Luis whispered, *“speed up.”* Jorge sped up striking two of the men pushing the other two out of the way. The remaining two opened fire as Jorge turned the

corner. Luis slipped to one side then nearly fell out of the moving Jeep. Jorge grabbed him as he came to a stop. He helped Luis down to the ground. The right side of his head was misshapen with his right eye swollen shut. Luis whispered, "*beach.....home.....love you.*" Jorge checked for a pulse and found nothing. He picked up the body and put him in the back of the Jeep and drove to the meeting point.

An hour later they found themselves all together on the road heading to the border. Before leaving, they dropped all the guns and other weapons that could tie them to last night. They were stopped several times with police looking them over and talking about the village. Jack watched Jorge who spent the trip holding his sister. He also noticed the not so pleased look on her face. Wendy watched Jack as he watched Jorge wondering what happened out there. They made their way to the warehouse where everyone stretched and took a break before the long trip back to the station. Jack pulled Wendy aside telling her they need to talk. Outside the warehouse, Jack pulled out his phone and played a recording from the house and the confession from Luis about killing Americans. Jack said, "*if I wanted to make some noise and I didn't care who I killed then shooting at a school or blowing up a church would make a big noise.*" Wendy turned and looked at Maria and her children. Jack said, "*the man holding her killed one of the kids when she tried to leave him.*" Jack turned to the door seeing Maria and her children. Wendy made sure she was in the truck with Maria without Jorge for the final trip so they could talk.

Six hours later they pulled onto the strip of sand acting like an airstrip. Jack Pressler and his people started to pack the jet. The pilot came over to Jack telling him they are fueled and ready. Maria picked up one of her children and led the other by the hand to the plane. Jorge asked, "*where are you going?*" Maria turned and said, "*I know what you did, and I don't want you around my children.*" Jorge turned around to see Wendy with a gun at her side pointing down. She said, "*I can't prove it was you at the truck stop the church or the school, but I do know what was said in that house and that you aren't welcome here.*" Wendy nodded to the plane saying, "*she's going with them to Hawaii where they will help her make a new life for her and her children. Just maybe put all this past her, but she says she never wants to see you again.*" She dropped a set of keys at his feet, "*take the dark gray truck and go.*"