

**PROLOGUE**

“Bravo two hold what you got.” The smooth voice of their commanding officer could be heard through the comms. Grace Wairimu, was one of the toughest and the best COs Patrick had ever had. Many soldiers and operatives harbored reservations and discomfort regarding the prospect or idea of being led by a woman. Patrick himself had heard people he considered close friends utter such words. He wasn’t really sure what led to him cutting them off. If it was the disrespect they had towards the female officers or the fact that he had had a thing for her since they had been introduced three years ago. Even after several attempts to make them reason only led to physical disagreements. Those sentiments mostly came from deeply ingrained societal norms and traditions that portrayed the male species as the dominant ones and the feminine ones as week and incapable. Essy, as those close to her called her, had risen above all those notions and negative sentiments to a captain’s rank. A rank held by very few female officers. This raised his respect for her even more.

Patrick Ouma, on the other hand has risen fast through the ranks from a private, to a Lance Corporal to a lieutenant. This had been as a result of his belief and walk in the black and white world. His rise in the force had ended the day he had crossed over to the grey world and started questioning the politically involved missions. The latest mission had been one of them and had left a deep black hole in his soul. He knew that his days in Special Operations Brigade were numbered. He wasn’t ready to retire but what choice did he have. This was his unit but the captain had swept it away from him for this mission.

“I count thirteen hostiles. But I suspect there are more inside.” He could feel the eyes of his team members on him. These were men he had come to trust with all he got with time. His second in command, Mark Nyaga, was a quiet man who always seemed to know what he was thinking at all times. He wasn’t the incredible hulk kind of guy but he wasn’t small either. He was a man who Patrick would hate to be on the other side of his weapon. But for a huge guy, he was incredibly quiet when he moved. Most people never noticed him until a moment before their necks were broken or throats slit. He was a man you crossed and never lived long enough to regret it. Bravo four, Fredrick Kiplagat or Fury as many knew him, was the opposite. He was talkative, funny, and seemed to find a funny thing in a situation where they had a seventy percent of not surviving. He had a baby face when happy, which kind of seemed to disappear and be replaced by a dangerous one when the bullets started flying. His fists seemed to end up in other peoples’ faces when his ego got wounded.

He had noticed that the tangos made a call after every ten minutes which he perceived as a check in. That’s all they needed to get in and out. Their mission was to rescue two South African journalists, a US super rich billionaire and a Kenyan politician who were being held hostage by the Somali Martyrs Fighters in the Golis Mountains, also known as the Qar Golis.

Patrick believed that his team could pull this. The COUNT team, as it was known, was one of the best teams in the Kenya Defense Forces. His team comprised of seven men. Patrick, Mark, Fury, Raven, Spartan, and his two snipers, Ghost and Cobra. “We move in in thirty.” The captains voice came through and was followed by six double clicks of his team. So he also pressed and held the PTT button then releasing in he pressed it again signaling that he was also ready but he could not ignore a thin layer of doubt in the back of his mind. They preferred to operate in a code of silence in stealth and minimizing their communication to essential signals only

In the thirty first mark, shadows sprouted from the bushes and started moving fast but with stealth towards the main cave. Report from command stated that drone surveillance had shown that the other caves were not in living conditions and at the risk of collapsing. That left one cave. Dressed in camouflage pants and long-sleeved camo t-shirts, the guys looked like they had been born to be part of the mountains. He had a target aimed as did everyone else. Dispatching the hostiles needed to be done quietly so as to keep the element of surprise. A grin crossed his face as he remembered the words of General Kiprop that the COUNT boys were always silent one would think even their shadows tiptoed.

They were on en-route to exfil when hell broke loose. Old Land Rovers started emerging from the opposite direction. Fury was on the wheel trying to keep the old minivan from skidding into tree bunks. The van took a hard right and a couple of curses were heard. “This old babe can ride.” Fury’s words were received with sneers and a laugh from Captain Essy. The back windscreen shattered as Mark cursed. That was one of the rarest things to happen and had everyone turning to him. A red clot was forming on the right shoulder. “Bastards got my wing.” Patrick could hear Captain on the phone demanding for air support and evac. Pat was sure that requesting didn’t include ‘fuck you’ and other curses. Whoever was on was either a friend of hers or that she was really mad. The latter seemed more probable. He could feel a sense of pride rise in him as he watched her work, and he wondered why. She wasn’t his woman and he knew that that would not change in the near future. The rules of the army restricted members from the same unit having a sexual relationship.

As much as Patrick liked watching her, he had a crew to get home. This could not be achieved with the thirty or so hostiles on their tail. He grabbed his FN SCAR-L, a weapon he had come to admire, and shouted to Ghost to apply pressure on the wound. He, as well as everyone, knew that the evac CSAR would not land in a ‘hot’ area. They needed to keep a healthy distance between them and the pursuing vehicles. Spartan joined him as he tried to aim at the driver of one of the land lovers and failed. It was becoming difficult with this terrain. He would pick his team for a mission to hell. But this was becoming harder that invading hell. So many good women and kids depended on him to bring their husbands and dads home. He thought of Mark’s kids. He was father of two. Although they had separated with his wife Gladys, he new that the lady still loved him. Every member of this team still hoped that the two would bury their egos and continue with their happily ever after.

Then the guardian angel came, or that what he thought of the Boeing UH-60 Black hawk and the guy flying it. The helo was flying at around 150 to 200 miles an hour and still managed to drop the hellfire missiles and 7.62mm bullets fired from what Patrick had heard to be a M134Miniguns, with precise accuracy. It was scary and fun to watch at the same time. He had carried out too many missions to count, too many close calls for him and his men, lost many friends to this life, and sacrificed his happiness for his country and motherland, Kenya, but none of those had gotten to him like this mission. But as the helo landed several meters away, as Mark was loaded into it and different tubes connected to him by ghost who acted as their medic in case of an injury in the battlefield, Patrick decided that this mission would be the last for him.

**CHAPTER 1**

Grace hated flying. It always brought back memories of her brother Henry Waweru. Henry had been one of the best pilots the Kenya Air Force could produce. Thinking of her brother always made her cry. Or in this case, being in the economy class of a connecting flight back home, make her eyes misty. Henry had died in a rescue mission in Somalia. Grace could remember the general’s words through her mobile phone. At first, she had thought she was being called in for a mission which was normal for her. Only to get news that her brother had been killed in a crash that had taken the lives of 7 more operators. Up to this day, she blamed the death of her brother on Felix Omari and Hassan Barre. Four years ago, no one in the Kenyan Special Warfare would have thought that the two names would be in the same sentence. Now, the two were Kenyan biggest and worst enemies. Omari had turned to the ‘dark side’ after he six months of undercover. No one had believed at forst, but after several attacks on military camps near the Kenya-Somalia border, and chatter between lower members of various sleeper cells in Mandera and Isiolo, it had become evident that Captain Omari as many new him, was now an enemy of the motherland. Grace had met the man once and never liked him. The man still believed that women should not be allowed to serve. He had tried to seduce her a couple of times as she and her team had tried to prep for a mission. This mission was where she had met the man who still invaded her sleep and memories, Patrick Ouma.

The voice of the beautiful Ethiopian hostess came over the radio to announce the start of their descend brought her back. She realized that her thoughts had moved from her brother, to the traitor and the terrorist, to a man she new she would never meet again. Last she had heard that he had retired. She hated the fact that she still remembered she had even researched to find out he was still single. That could be termed as wrong use of government resources. She new if she could, she would use one of the few satellites used by the Kenyan government to keep tabs on him. That was stalking, right?

The fact that she was moving back to Kenya still angered her. She still could not figure out how, in the twenty first century, men still viewed women as tools of pleasure and nothing more. Her latest scandal with the Kenyan ambassador to the United Kingdom was a way to prove her point. She was vacating her position due to harassment from the fat old man who looked as if he would give birth to two bouncing baby boys at any time. Did I mention ugly? Yeah he was. After she had refused to sleep with him, rumors had started to circulate that she had approached him offering herself for a promotion to chief of all operations in the embassy. Grace was more than a hundred percent that the ambassador was behind the rumors in attempt to make her leave. Which is what she had done. That was according to many people. But she new the truth. She had never allowed anyone to control her and she was not about to start now. The real reason she had come back home was as a request from the president and general Mutua. One of the presidents security chief advisors. She was not sure why they had requested her personally, but the general, who was also a close friend, would not have asked her to abandon her post at the embassy unless it was important. And if she guessed right, she would be asked to rejoin the military. She was not sure how she felt about that.

**CHAPTER 3**

He was being followed. He could feel it. After years of being an operator, he knew he could trust his guts and instincts. He had read somewhere that one tactic of following someone unnoticed, was to detach any feeling or emotional connection with them. Nairobi streets were overly crowded after seventeen hundred in the evening. And trying to figure out who was following him in a street occupied by hundreds of people was close to a joke. Opposite Platinum plaza in Tom Mboya street was a road that led to the upper sides of Nairobi. Those area were not as crowded as Tom Mboya street and River road street. A plus on his side was that there being a lot of cars and glass doors, he would try to use them to know who was following him, how many they were and what what their intent. As a security advisor and weapons trainer, he was not sure if anyone would want him dead. He had left the life of danger behind.

As he moved past Uganda house, he noticed a woman on the opposite side of the road. Those attires looked familiar. Had she been in the same street as him earlier? Or was she just a woman going home after a stressful day? Another rule of following a target was not to focus on items that could be lost easily. Being a hat, or a coat, and in this case, both. He decided to increase his pace and turned on to Kenyatta avenue. The lady increased her pace but then she moved past him. Maybe he was being paranoid. Or maybe he missed his old life. Which he was sure he did.

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Grace was not sure if Patrick had made her. After he had turned on Kenyatta avenue, she had walked past him and took the next street. Keeping up with the man was seeming stressful. One thing was that he knew he was being followed. Seeing him again had been very unsettling. His movements were deliberate. She knew that. Every time she thought she had a clean approach, he would shift directions unpredictably, vanishing into the crowd before reappearing further ahead.

Grace steadied her breath. If Patrick knew he was being followed, then this was turning into a game—one she couldn’t afford to lose. She adjusted her pace.

Then, just as she rounded a corner, a strong hand went her throat, while another dragged her into a street with two homeless dudes who didn’t care that someone or people were invading their spaces. Her first instincts were to fight. But that scent was familiar. It was Patrick. She was becoming uncomfortable as his hand was blocking her airway. He hadn’t recognised her yet. She felt his hands go to her waist, all around. To a walk-by, those were just two people who had decided home was too far for a quickie. She realized that he was searching for a weapon. She never went unarmed, but for this one time, she had decided to leave her Glock 19 at her new office. Her back up piece was another story. “Who are you?”, “Why are you following me?”, he asked now turned his focus to her face. She watched as recognition hit him. Something, she wasn’t sure what, shifted in his eyes.

“Hi Grace.” Patrick asked as if they hadn’t jus met after more than four years apart.

**Chapter four**

“You m..mi..mind re…reeleasn me?” He noticed that he was till holding her by her throat. That got him a kick to the thigh. He was sure where the knee was aimed at. He let her go but still focused on her face. She still looked the same. Except, she looked more fit, and more beautiful. What odd features to notice after several years spent apart. He made a mental note to tell he she looked more beautiful once they were done with the introductions. And yes, after she told him why she was following him. As he stared at Grace, one thing clicked, he had enjoyed the last twenty something minutes more than she had enjoyed anything in the last four years.

“Why are you following me?” He asked after she had caught her breathe. She was bent forward, hands on her knees, with her chin lifted up staring at him. This gave him a peak at her boobs, which was also an odd thing to note at this moment. But, he was a man, and he loved boobs. She noticed this and straightened up, He made the right but hard decision of returning his gaze to her face, and noticed that she was still studying him. Had he changed? He was still in shape, that he sure of.

“We need to talk.” That was her response after several seconds. Under normal circumstances, these were never good words to start a conversation. But this was not a normal occasion. Last he had heard, she had gotten a job at the Kenyan embassy in United Kingdom.