

Deeper Than The Grave

Chapter One

Trey's mouth was at my ear, his chest solid against my back. "Slowly."

"Got it."

"Firm and gentle pressure."

I sighed. "I have done this before, you know."

"And yet you're still snatching." He adjusted my grip on the revolver so that the butt of the gun rested solidly in my left palm. "Take a breath. Half exhale. Then squeeze. One smooth motion."

His voice was muted through the fancy electronic hearing protection muffs, but that hardly mattered – he was saying the exact same thing he always said. I wiggled my nose to adjust the safety goggles, sighted along the barrel. The revolver's sights bobbed red against the target, a human-sized silhouette with concentric rings highlighting its heart. I took one deep breath in, trickled it halfway out. Then I dropped the barrel a smidgen and squeezed. The .38 kicked in my hand as a fresh bullet hole appeared at the target's groin.

Trey examined the result. "You're supposed to aim for center mass."

"I'm supposed to stop the threat. Which I certainly did."

His blue eyes flashed annoyance behind his safety glasses. "Do you want to learn proper technique or not?"

I sighed again. Then I took my stance and emptied the rest of the rounds into the

target. The holes clustered in the figure's chest region, right at the heart. Or where the heart would have been had I not pulped it.

I gestured with my chin. "There. How's that?"

Trey eyed me reproachfully. He was a stickler. I could recite his mantras from memory – watch your muzzle cover, watch your periphery, watch your background.

"Why didn't you do that with your first shot?" he said.

"Jeez, boyfriend. Unwind a bit, it's just practice."

"It's not practice, it's training. There's a difference."

"So you keep saying. Over and over again." I double-checked the cylinder to make sure the gun was empty before laying it on the shelf in front of me. "Let me try yours."

Trey retrieved his H&K nine-millimeter, popped the empty magazine. He thumbed bullets into the mag, then clipped it into place with the heel of his hand and handed it to me, careful to keep the muzzle downrange.

"Feet hip width apart, slight lean forward, right arm straight, not locked."

I racked the slide. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Got it."

Trey's P7M8 was very much like him – sleek, powerful, efficient – and I savored the control and punch of it, even if the pleasure came with an edge now. It had been only four months since I'd held that same gun in my hand, the sights centered not on a paper target but on a human being. I remembered that same gun in Trey's hands, later that same rain-slashed night. Three shots, precise and ruthless.

I squeezed the grip to cock it, then fired three times fast, twice at center mass, then once at the forehead. To my dismay, only the first two hit home.

Trey stared at me. "What are you doing?"

"Mozambique triple tap."

"You don't need—"

"I've needed a lot of things I didn't think I would."

Trey didn't argue. He simply held out his hand. "Give me that."

I handed the nine back to him. He stepped up, then hit the switch with a closed fist and the target rattled its way toward him. He fired two shots, then a third a half-second later. As the target flapped to a stop in front of us, I saw two serrated holes in the center of the heart, and one final shot right below the nose. If the two-dimensional paper had been flesh and blood, the last bullet would have ripped a trajectory through the medulla oblongata, dropping the body like a meaty marionette with its strings cut.

"There," he said. "Triple tap, properly known as a failure drill. Useful in circumstances when direct hits to center mass do not stop the target, most likely due to a tactical vest." A cock of the head. "Is that what you want to learn?"

I fingered the ragged paper. "Yes."

"Okay. Then work on your stance, your form, your breathing, your aim, your draw, and the ability to target center mass. Because without those basic skills, you'll never master this one." He checked his watch. "We've got fifteen minutes. Back to triggering."

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