



THE FALLEN

A Novel

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For Ian and Sean

“We all shine on like the moon and the stars and the sun.”

—John Lennon, “Instant Karma”



PART I
SECOND COMING



CHAPTER 1

Lieutenant Charlie Walker tracked the van rolling down the road toward Checkpoint Delta through his M24 sniper rifle's scope. He had the crosshairs centered on the driver's head, finger caressing the trigger. *Pow!* he thought. *Pow. Pow.* Calm. Like target shooting. Not real flesh and blood. Not a person. Not a human being. Just a target. He rehearsed the kill in his mind. Two shots through the driver's head. Shift so he could watch the passenger jump out. *Pow.* Pick him off. Anybody in the rear? Shift to the right, catch them as they scrambled out of the back.

Wearing a ghillie suit, a Nomex flight suit camouflaged with leaves and brush, he hid on a hillside overlooking Cheyenne Hills, a sprawling five-star resort outside Colorado Springs at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. A member of the Colorado National Guard's 19th Special Forces Group, Charlie was invisible among the shrubs and underbrush that covered the slopes.

Darkness covered the hillside, the sun still blocked by the surrounding mountains. The thin Colorado air was cold for mid-June. At sunrise the temperature would jump dramatically. It would be damn near impossible to lay out in a ghillie suit in scorching eighty-degree sun. He wasn't looking forward to it. It would be a long, hot day. Already he was coated with a slick of sweat. His stomach grumbled. He had a peanut butter energy bar in his pocket and a canteen of lukewarm water. But he knew a cold six-pack of Coors was waiting for him when he was done.

He also had to pee. When this van passed through, he would crawl over to a stand of aspen and relieve himself. He had considered the aspens for his sniper nest, but it was a partially obstructed view of Checkpoint Delta. But in the hot daytime sun, he might consider it, at least part of the time. The open sunlight would be brutal.

Charlie peered through AN-PVS 7B night vision goggles, everything

glowing green. Charlie slowly swiveled his rifle, tracking the vehicle, a red panel van. The National Guard manned checkpoints at strategic sites along all entrances to Cheyenne Hills in preparation for the G8 Summit. The summit officially began at ten a.m. with the arrival of twenty heads of state and their entourages. Checkpoint Delta was just west of Cheyenne Hills West, one of the fancy castle-like resort buildings on the west side of Double Mirror Lake.

The red panel van slowed to a stop by the checkpoint. Charlie focused the crosshairs of his rifle sights on the driver's-side door and waited. How many times tonight? Twenty? Thirty? A hundred? Over and over during the night he repeated the routine and nothing exciting happened. He didn't think it would. This G8 thing was a big, big deal. The Secret Service ultimately ran security, overseeing Brigadier General Frank Cole's command of the National Guard troops. From what Charlie could see, Cheyenne Hills was zipped up tighter than a plastic baggie.

Charlie had only two minutes to live.



CHAPTER 2

Sergeant Sandy Kosell stepped around the barrier at Checkpoint Delta, holding up her hand to the approaching red panel van. A white sign on the door advertised Rowan & Ogilvie Spirits & Fine Wines. Traffic through the night had been sporadic, as expected.

Although they all knew the importance of security for this event, a part of her — the less professional part — thought this was boring. What terrorist would be crazy enough to try to attack an event like this? F14 fighter jets enforced a no-fly zone with a seventy-mile radius around Cheyenne Hills. Nothing larger than a blue jay was entering this airspace except for commercial flights into Colorado Springs Airport, and that was going to be shut down when the dignitaries flew in and out. Every road into the resort had multiple National Guard checkpoints.

Cheyenne Hills itself was crawling with Secret Service agents and Bureau of Diplomatic Security agents from the State Department. Her team even met a couple of Israeli guys, Mossad or something, and some spooky Russian agents with flat eyes and serious bad attitudes. There were leaders from twenty countries coming to this thing, and each one had a slew of their own security people.

She didn't think anything was going to happen here.

The van slowed. Sandy Kosell saw at least two men inside. She kept her M4 carbine ready as she cautiously approached the driver's side. Three of her fellow soldiers covered her back. Randy had the laptop out, ready to double-check the van's security pass.

The doors opened and a man stepped out on the back side of the truck. She got the driver, the talkative one. Lanky, broad-shouldered, in black slacks and a lightweight windbreaker, his eyes snapped with energy and charm. A straw cowboy hat tilted at a cocky angle on his head. He

seemed vaguely familiar to her, but she didn't know why. He was good looking in a bad-boy sort of way that she found appealing.

He grinned at her. "Hey, good morning." A touch of Texas laced his voice. "Are we in the right place? This Cheyenne Hills?" He laughed. "Like I don't know from all the other checkpoints. You're not gonna frisk me, are ya darlin'?"

Kosell relaxed. Just a good ol' boy who was a little stuck on himself. She smiled back, willing to play the game. "Only if you want me to, sir."

The Texan said, "Well, now, there are worse ways to spend the evenin' than bein' patted down by a pretty gal such as yourself."

Sandy felt herself relax even more. But something from her briefing popped into her head. *Look at their hands*. This guy's hands were tucked into the pockets of his windbreaker. And it was also a little unusual for people to actually get out of their vehicle. She straightened up, back to business.

"Sir, please —"

Both hands popped from his pockets. With a nonchalant toss he threw one object at her, the other over her head. The man on the passenger side of the van also flung something. She raised her weapon. The man spun so his back was to her. A massive flash of light, like being at the center of the sun, exploded around her with a sizzling pop. An acrid odor bit at her nostrils.

Disoriented, Kosell stumbled. Blind, but unhurt. "*What — ?*"

Then she thought — flash grenade!

The last thing she felt was a silenced bullet exploding into her skull.



CHAPTER 3

Lieutenant Charlie Walker watched the red panel van slow to a stop. The National Guardsman — a woman — walked forward, hand up. Even from a distance, he liked how she looked — oval face, blonde hair tucked under her helmet. Her three backup spread out a little bit so they could cover the vehicle. Doors opened on each side of the van and two men climbed out.

The guy on the driver's side looked casual, nonthreatening. Charlie kept the sights of his scope on the driver, just below the brim of his cowboy hat. *Pow*, he thought. Charlie moved his crosshairs directly onto the cowboy's chest and said, "*pow*" in a soft whisper.

The cowboy pulled his hands from his pockets. He tossed something directly at the woman, and threw something else behind her. On the other side of the van the other figure also tossed something. The rear doors of the van popped open and two, no, three figures —

A surge of adrenaline burned through Charlie's veins. Something was —

The world exploded in an electro-chemical flash. It was a silent flash from Charlie's distance, but that didn't matter. The night vision goggles he wore utilized both infrared, heat, and light magnification. He was watching through the LM setting, the apparatus magnifying light intensity by hundreds of times. The flash of light turned his world into a green-white explosion that seared his eyes before the circuit breaker cut in and compensated.

In the brief explosion of distraction and blindness, the man in a matching ghillie suit, who had been silently stalking him for the better part of the last hour, leapt up and fired a silenced bullet into the back of Charlie's head.

The man rushed over and studied Charlie for a moment before he

reached down and removed Charlie's radio set and whisper microphone. He focused his own goggles down toward Checkpoint Delta.

When the flash grenades exploded, the four National Guardsmen were momentarily blinded for about thirty seconds. An eternity as far as trained assassins were concerned. The two men outside the van and the four who leapt from the now-open doors raised their silenced assault rifles and ruthlessly gunned down the soldiers in an eerily soundless display of violence.

It took far less than thirty seconds.

Four of the assassins moved in an unhesitating, rehearsed manner, dumping the bodies of the guardsmen into their Humvee, which was pulled off to the side of the road. The four assassins wore identical camo and took up the post alongside the barricade, almost as if nothing had happened.

The leader of the assassins — the cowboy — said into his throat mic, "Check in by the numbers."

Up in the hills surrounding the resort, additional members of the group called in, confirming that they had taken out their snipers as well. "One here. *Cobra*."

"Two here. *Chacal*."

"Three here. *Vibora*."

The assassin who had so deftly taken out Lieutenant Charlie Walker said, "Four here. *Lobo*."

Through his goggles, Number Four, *Lobo*, saw the cowboy — The Fallen Angel — nod in satisfaction and climb back into the panel van. A moment later he heard The Fallen Angel say, "First perimeter. On schedule."

Number 4, *Lobo*, began a slow crawl to a different location in his ghillie suit. He wanted to move a good distance away from the dead National Guard sniper. Nobody would see the body, the way it was camouflaged, but in the rising heat of the day it was going to stink and attract flies and maybe even vultures.

He considered a stand of aspen. Yes, that would work. A nice shady area.



CHAPTER 4

The cowboy they called The Fallen Angel drove the van for Rowan & Ogilvie Spirits & Fine Wines along Pikesview Road and turned into the entrance to the Cheyenne Hills Resort. It was a sprawling, five-thousand acre complex surrounding a small lake split by a bridge. The main complex, The Cheyenne, was a meandering stucco castle, ten stories tall at its main tower. The leaders of the G8 — or G20, as the summit had become — would be living in The Cheyenne for the duration of the summit, scattered among its many wings and floors.

The Fallen Angel, who had been born Richard Coffee, grinned at that. They wouldn't be living long.

He didn't head over toward The Cheyenne, however. Instead he cut left and drove past the tennis complex toward Cheyenne Hall, the International Center, and Colorado Springs Hall. It was a three-building complex where the actual meetings of the G8 Summit would be held.

There was another roadblock. This one was manned by Secret Service. They all wore black camo, their MP5s and Uzis held loosely in their arms. One of the agents approached with a mirror held on a long handle so he could check underneath the vehicle for bombs. Another agent stepped forward with a German shepherd on a leash.

The lead agent, Larry Ferrigno, was a broad-shouldered, muscular man with a jowly face and blotched skin from too close a shave. Coffee watched his face, noting the habitual look of suspicion and skepticism. Remembering his research, Coffee knew he had to be careful with this one. Ferrigno was a pro, a dedicated patriot. The Fallen Angel had not found any obvious weaknesses or exploitable quirks in his life; at least, none they could leverage in a relatively short period of time.

Ferrigno said, "Please step out of the vehicle, gentlemen."

The Fallen Angel and his partner, who was designated *El Tiburón*,

clambered out. Ferrigno said, “You have your paperwork and identification with you?”

Nodding, The Fallen Angel handed it over to Ferrigno. Ferrigno rolled his shoulders as if to relieve tension as he looked over the credentials. “What’s inside the truck?”

“What it says,” The Fallen said. “Dom Pérignon, Krug, several cases of wine. They wanted extra, just in case.”

Ferrigno nodded. “We were told about the last-minute order.” He chewed on his lip, watching his team go over the truck. The agent with the mirror said, “Clear.”

Ferrigno nodded. “How’s it going, Matt?”

The agent with the German shepherd reappeared a moment later and shrugged. “Seems okay.”

Ferrigno seemed relieved. “Okay. You’re clear. Go around to the loading dock. The agent there, Vincent Silvedo, will walk you through security.”

“Thanks.”

The Fallen Angel and *El Tiburón* climbed back into the van and drove toward the loading dock. “It worked,” *El Tiburón* said. He was a dark-skinned man, Colombian, with a narrow face, thick mustache, and long-fingered hands as delicate as a girl’s.

“Yes.” The Fallen smiled. “Of course it did.” He took off the cowboy hat, tossed it behind him and ran a thick-knuckled hand through his straw-colored hair. *Of course it did.*

The dogs couldn’t sniff through a vacuum. The van was refrigerated. The refrigeration unit contained a compressor. Built into one end of the van was a heavy, steel compartment. In it were guns, C4 plastic explosives, detonators, ammunition, and gas masks. The compressor sucked the air out of the compartment, effectively sealing it.

After loading the gear into the compartment, they had washed down the interior of the van with bleach, then spilled several bottles of wine and champagne on the floor, mopped it out with detergent, rubbed in some oil and grease and mopped that out as well.

But the compartment was only part of their cargo. The champagne bottles themselves were even more important.



CHAPTER 5

The Fallen Angel backed the van into the loading dock area. It was large enough to accommodate two full-sized semis side-by-side, with a loading platform at the back. Unlike many loading docks, it could be shuttered with rolling steel doors. He and *El Tiburón* climbed out and were met by Vincent Silvedo, the Secret Service agent. Silvedo also wore black camo and carried an MP5. The man looked like a walking muscle, his upper body a taut V that stretched his tight black T-shirt and vest.

“Any problems?” he asked, scratching at a bristly five o’clock shadow.

The Fallen Angel shook his head. Silvedo had been an easy recruitment — a combination of flattery and bribery. Hammering in on the man’s vanity, his ego — *passed over for two promotions, obviously they don’t recognize your abilities, but we will, Vincent, oh yes, with us you’ll rise to the top. And we’ll make you rich in the process.*

The Fallen Angel reached over to a control panel inside the truck and flipped a switch, cutting the power to the compressor. “We’ll just unload things and you can point the way.”

Silvedo’s teeth flashed. “Excellent.” He studied his notepad and scribbled something, then handed the paperwork to The Fallen. “Show this to Agent Bannister inside.”

The two men unloaded the truck, moving the bottles of wine and champagne onto dollies. Once everything was properly loaded, Silvedo handed each of them a packet containing the black pants, shoes, white shirt and jacket of the catering staff. Richard Coffee and *El Tiburón* stepped into the van and quickly changed clothing while Silvedo kept watch.

Once dressed, The Fallen Angel knelt by the lockbox, turned a handle, waited a moment as the vacuum released and air hissed in. It opened

with a sucking sound. The contents were in three crates labeled Dom Pérignon, but instead contained weapons and explosives. He removed the three crates and hauled them to a waiting dolly. He looked at Silvedo.

“Ready?”

“Absolutely.” Silvedo grinned. “This is going to be fun.”

The Fallen Angel locked eyes with Silvedo, who instantly calmed down. In a low voice, The Fallen said, “Discipline.”

“Yes, sir.”

The Fallen nodded. Had Silvedo been too easy? Had he overlooked something when he recruited him as a sleeper years ago? Too late now. But Silvedo wouldn't survive the day. He would make sure of it personally. “Very good,” he said. “We'll see you inside.”

The Fallen Angel tapped his throat mic. “Second and third perimeters breached. On schedule.”

He and *El Tiburón* pushed their lethal cargo into the loading area of the International Center.



CHAPTER 6

Michael Gabriel walked out his apartment door, driving mug of black coffee in his hand, and strode toward his pickup truck. He wore the uniform of the Cheyenne Hills Resort maintenance staff—rubber-soled shoes, khaki pants, and denim shirt. An ID badge hung on a lanyard around his neck and what looked like a normal cell phone hung on his belt, although it was, in fact, an Iridium satellite phone.

He stopped by the truck, a beat-up blue Dodge Ram, marred with rust and Bondo. He stretched his six-foot frame and ran a hand through his thick wiry brown hair. *Just a couple more days. One way or the other.*

He took a sip of his coffee before climbing into his truck, looking toward the mountains. He liked the view: Pikes Peak, the Colorado Rockies. It was beautiful here, but it wasn't home. He wanted to go home. *Just a couple more days.*

“Hey, *amante*. *Qué pasa?*”

Michael turned with a smile. “*Amante?* What’s that mean?”

The speaker was a woman, Maria Sanchez. She worked for the food service at the resort’s International Center. Working in the International Center and all over the resort for the last eight months Michael had gotten to know Maria pretty much whether he wanted to or not. Maria Sanchez was in her twenties, with large liquid eyes, black curly hair, and a vivacious smile. She was a flirt and Michael Gabriel knew exactly what *amante* meant in Spanish.

She wore her uniform for the day—a black skirt that stopped an inch or so above her knees, a white blouse, hose, and heels. “You make that uniform look illegal, *querido*,” he said.

Maria laughed, the sound like high-pitched bells tinkling in the thin Colorado air. “All this time you knew!” She threw him a lascivious look

followed by a mock pout. “All this time I have been waiting for this tall, dark, and handsome *senor* to sweep me off my feet.”

Michael Gabriel grinned. “Ah, Maria, I’ve seen you hanging around with your boyfriend, the one with all the muscles. He’d break me into pieces if he caught me smiling at you.”

“Oh you!” She linked arms with him. “Aren’t you going into work early today?”

He shrugged. “Big day.”

“Long day, you mean. All those world leaders pretending to be so proper, to have their moral authority. How many times do you think some prime minister will pinch my *nalga* today, eh?”

“Sell it to the *National Enquirer* for a hundred grand.”

“Ah, I wish. Well, I got to go, unless you want to give me a ride?” She flashed him a coquettish look, ever the vamp. Over the last six months he had given her the occasional ride into the resort or back to the apartment. They’d even had a couple dates. Fun, nothing serious. He wasn’t sure Maria was looking for serious, and God knows he kept his emotional distance. If it bothered her, she hid it well.

Only once, eating Mexican food at a place in Colorado Springs called El Azteco, did she seem frustrated with him. “*Ay, Dios mio!* Michael, my tall, dark *senor* with all the secrets. You never talk about yourself! You are a *bandito* with a dark past, no?”

He had laughed and said, “I am a *bandito* with a dark past, *si*, *senorita*, and you should be worried about what you don’t know about me. I am a bad *muchacho* who would do horrible things to you in the darkness.”

She had wriggled in that terribly sexy way of hers and said, “Ooh, *senor*, what kind of horrible things?”

“Wicked, evil, nasty things, *senorita*. So you should watch yourself.” They had moved on, and she hadn’t again suggested that she wanted to know more about his past than he was willing to give.

“Maria, Maria,” he said, arms wide, “I would love to drive you in today, especially with the hassles with parking. My chariot is your chariot. Hop aboard.”

With another laugh, Maria ran around the truck and jumped into the passenger seat. Michael Gabriel, whose real name was Derek Still-

water, climbed into the truck, fired up the engine, and headed toward the resort. Despite the beautiful, flirtatious woman in the passenger seat chattering away, he thought, *It's almost over. One way or the other, it's almost over.*