



Mad Dogs

Sixth



Brenda Cothern

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ISBN-13: 978-1489539304
ISBN-10: 1489539301

First Printing January 2014

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Brenda Cothorn Books, Inc.
136 E. 145th Avenue
Tampa, Florida, 33613 USA

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Dedication

To all my friends, family and fans but especially my husband who loves me even when the voices in my head take control!

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Bubba's Sport's Bar in Tampa for letting me treat the bar like my personal office.

My wonderful Beta Team, what can I say that hasn't already been said? I don't know what I would do without you. Thank you, Sparkles, Mine, Lora, Tracy and Joe, for all your hard work on this novel!

Chapter One

“Fucking McCormick!”

Markus looked up from cleaning his sniper rifle when his team leader stormed into the barracks.

“What’s the asshole ‘Coredick’ done now?” Clearwater asked as he looked up from the book he was reading. The only time the man wasn’t reading was when he was in the field blowing shit up.

Markus grinned at his teammate’s question and waited for their leader to launch into a rant. *Poke the bear, Clearwater, poke the bear.*

“What hasn’t he done?” O’Tool bitched but it wasn’t like they hadn’t heard it all before. “It wasn’t bad enough that they dragged our asses back here for a refresher course on shit we can do in our sleep...Noooo. God forbid if that wasn’t enough!”

Markus raised a brow in amusement at Clearwater before he glanced over at his other two teammates. Higgins and Rodriguez grinned as they kept playing Call of Duty and didn’t even bother to look up from their game. They, like he and Clearwater, knew O’Tool well enough to enjoy his temper tantrums.

“So, our orders come in, or what?” Clearwater prompted.

Poke the bear... Markus thought again while continuing to grin.

“He’s not making us do the teaching shit again, is he?” Rodriguez interjected.

“There’s no way we are due for that rotation yet,” Markus growled. “Nothing is worse than that shit.”

“Teaching isn’t so bad,” Higgins piped in without taking his eyes off the game.

“Only because you like seeing how green you can turn the ‘bad ass’ recruits with your slides and shit,” Rodriguez shoulder bumped the Unit’s medic.

“Better they see it on a slide when they puke for the first time than on an actual casualty,” Higgins replied.

“True dat,” Rodriguez agreed.

“Will you fuckers listen?” O’Tool snapped but they were all used to him doing that as well. “It’s worse.”

“What the hell could be worse than teaching Rangers?” Rodriguez asked, still not looking away from the game.

O’Tool stopped pacing and a forlorn look engulfed his face as he said despairingly, “Coredick is making us six.”

All of the men stopped what they were doing and looked at O’Tool as if he had grown another head while the sounds of gunfire and death continued from the TV.

“Don’t fuck with us, man. That’s not even funny,” Higgins frowned.

“Do you really think I would fucking joke about becoming six? Fuck you, Doc.” O’Tool snapped again and flopped down heavily on the couch next to Markus.

A sixth.

Markus knew they were all thinking the same thing. They didn’t need a sixth. Hell, there wasn’t even a position for a sixth. O’Tool was intel and recon, Clearwater was munitions and demolition, Rodriguez was communications, and Doc was, well Doc. For the life of him, Markus couldn’t figure out where a sixth would fit. O’Tool was his spotter when he needed one while he was in the nest so there was no need to add another man to their team.

Another man will only fuck up our dynamic...unless...

“Who is being replaced?” Markus asked and all eyes turned to him as if he had just shot one of them at point blank range. O’Tool still looked pissed and Clearwater looked thoughtful, like he always did.

Fucker thinks too much for a demo guy.

Rodriguez and Higgins both shared the same slack jawed expression of disbelief that he had dared to suggest such a thing.

Markus knew he was the newest member of the team and he also knew he replaced their sniper who retired. No one else on the team was due to re-up so no one was planning on retiring.

“I didn’t hear anything about replacing someone,” O’Tool admitted.

“Damn spook,” Rodriguez grunted and grinned at O’Tool. “You’re fucking eavesdropping again and getting us worked up. For all you know, the sixth will only be training with us while we are back here.” Rodriguez shook his head. “It’s happened before, you dick. Got us all riled up for nothing. Asshole.”

Markus watched as Rodriguez and Doc totally dismissed O’Tool and went back to their game. Clearwater still looked thoughtful as he buried his head back into his book and that left Markus to distract O’Tool.

“C’mon,” Markus smacked O’Tool on the thigh and stood. “You need to run.”

O’Tool grunted again before he stood. Neither man looked back as they stepped out into the cool night of the quiet base.



Brian Hay stood at attention in his superior’s office and prayed the man was going to give him the news he longed to hear. He knew his service record was exemplary and had a feeling all of his hard work was about to pay off. Being the best sniper the Rangers had ever produced and graduating at the top of his class only added weight to his abilities. Brian focused his gaze over his commanding officer’s left shoulder but that did not stop him from seeing the man flip through the pages of his file.

“At ease, Hay.”

Brian shifted his stance to parade rest and waited for his commander to speak. He knew his age was the only thing that might hamper his chance at Delta.

Delta Force: America’s special force the Army wouldn’t confirm or deny, Brian thought and had to fight the grin that threatened to grace his lips.

“Two tours in Iraq, three in Afghanistan.”

“Yes Sir.” Brian was proud to serve his country and was never relaxed unless he was on a mission. There was just something peaceful when every fiber of his being was focused on a single goal.

“You either have a death wish,” his commander commented and Brian’s gaze flicked to the man’s face before returning to the invisible spot that rested over every superior’s shoulder. “Or you have combat in your blood.”

“Combat, Sir.”

“A purple heart, two bronze stars and a silver,” his commander seemed to have the need to remind him.

“Just doing my job, Sir,” Brian replied and meant every word.

He didn’t join the Army to be a glory hound so those pieces of metal and ribbon didn’t mean much to him. In fact, they were why he hated wearing his Class A’s. Only the lives of his brothers mattered and if the U.S. Army wanted to give him tinsel for caring about them and doing his job, well, there wasn’t much he could do about it. From the corner of his eye, he watched his superior close his file and lean back in his chair before he spoke.

“You have a new MOS, Staff Sergeant.”

Brian's heart leapt with excitement but his years of being a Ranger sniper allowed him to present the calmness that was expected of a soldier of his caliber.

"You are to report to Fort Bragg. USASOC has approved your transfer to JSOC and The Unit is expecting you for OTC first thing Monday morning."

"Yes Sir," Brian replied and it took all of his training to remain stoic in front of his superior.

"Congratulations, son."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Dismissed."

Brian saluted before turning crisply on his heel to exit his commander's office.

Delta. Fucking A!

Brian's grin finally broke free and could not get any bigger as he made his way to the barracks to pack.



"Staff Sergeant Brian Hay reporting for duty, Sir." Brian saluted and stood at attention before his new superior.

"At ease, Sergeant."

Brian relaxed into parade rest and set his gaze to the invisible spot over Sergeant Major McCormick's left shoulder.

"OTC is already two months in," McCormick began.

Brian's heart plummeted. He knew that the standard Operator Training Course was six months long. The thought of sitting idle at Bragg for four months did not appeal to him at all but he kept his face schooled.

"Your OTC is being fast tracked due to your record and experience as a sniper with the 75th," McCormick told him as if this was an everyday occurrence.

Maybe it is?

Delta training was so secretive that it was no surprise that Brian had never heard of a candidate who didn't have to complete the full OTC. However, he sure as hell wasn't going to argue with the man if they wanted to fast track him.

"You will bypass marksmanship since it is clear that you are qualified and will be placed directly with your unit, the Mad Dogs."

Brian was stunned. Marksmanship was only a small facet of being a Delta Force soldier. *Is this how they normally train new Delta's?* What little he did know about OTC had just been dismissed with a few sentences uttered by his new CO.

"You will be reporting to Master Sergeant O'Tool in Barrack D. I'll escort you there."

"Yes Sir." Brian saluted and followed McCormick out of his office because that was the only thing he could do.



O'Tool came through the door of the barracks in such a huff that the door bounced off the wall before slamming itself almost shut on the rebound.

The team just looked at him and waited for the outburst that was sure to follow their team leader's show of frustration.

“Our sixth is here,” O’Tool glared at Rodriguez. “I fucking told you that asshole was making us a six.”

“OTC is a quarter of the way in so what Unit is he from?” Rodriguez ignored the ‘I told you so’ glare O’Tool was drilling into him.

“He’s not.”

“What the fuck does that mean? They aren’t placing a green recruit with us without at *least* finishing OTC, are they?” Rodriguez stammered.

“Who’d we piss off for that death wish?” Higgins piped in. “We told you to quit spookin’ on McCormick. Talk about making my job more of a bitch than you assholes make it already.”

“Shut it, Doc,” O’Tool growled. He hated when they used the word spook when he gathered intel, like he was with the fucking CIA or something.

“Maybe we didn’t piss off anyone. Maybe he did,” Clearwater added his two cents quietly without looking up from his book.

“What kind of fuck-up are they sending us if that is the case?” Markus couldn’t help but ask.

“You ass-wipes will just have to figure that out on your own.” McCormick’s unexpected voice cut through the conversation. “You have six weeks. Try not to kill each other.” McCormick looked at the Mad Dogs and gave Brian, who followed him into the barracks, the same glare for good measure.

Brian stood next to his CO and in a glance took in the Unit before him. Not a single man seemed thrilled he was now a part of their team. *Great.*

“This is Staff Sergeant Brian Hay.” McCormick indicated him with a wave of his hand. “Hay, these are the Mad Dogs. Don’t let them infect you with their rabid personalities.”

That was the entire introduction Brian received before McCormick threw him to the wolves that were now his comrades in arms.

Markus watched their CO leave and shifted his gaze to the kid that now filled the doorway of their barracks.

“Asshole,” O’Tool muttered loud enough for everyone to hear.

Markus ignored his team leader as he continued to look over their new team member. *Shit, he’s just a fucking kid. He looks fresh out of Ranger school.* Markus grunted. *Probably a rank chaser as well.* Markus couldn’t help his thoughts. *Just what we fucking don’t need. Some over achieving prick whose wet dream is to be Delta.*

Brian took in the five men in the barracks as he adjusted his duffle bag on his shoulder. They all shared the same expression. Not happy. Except for the lanky black guy on the couch who just resumed the book he was reading as if Brian wasn’t even worth the time of day.

I won’t apologize for being here. I have earned this and I won’t take their shit about it either.

“I was told to report to MS O’Tool.” Brian’s voice sliced through the silence. “So, which one of you is that?” More silence greeted him and his anger decided to make an appearance. “Fine. If you assholes want to pretend we are all in the third grade and I am the new kid on the playground who has cooties then I am sure the next six weeks are going to be a shit ton of fun.” Brian walked across the barracks until he came to a bunk that wasn’t made to military standards. A chuckle reached his ear as he tossed his bag next to the bed and he didn’t bother to turn around to see who was amused.

Kid has balls. Not many men would give a Delta unit shit and none would taunt the Mad Dogs, Markus thought as he tried to decide if he liked the kid’s gumption or not. He continued to watch Hay as he unpacked his duffle and noted the tension that was evident in his broad shoulders.

From Markus’s seated position he thought the kid was about his height. Their build was similar, as well, and that made them the ‘smallest’ of the team. Not that he, nor Hay, were small by any means since they were both close to six foot. Hay raked his hand through his short brown hair before he settled his hands on his hips.

Long fingers, lean hips. Markus couldn't help but note and gave his head a shake. He glanced at O'Tool before scanning the rest of the team. They were all, including Clearwater, looking at O'Tool who seemed to be trying to get his tantrum under control.

O'Tool was an excellent spook when it came to gathering intel for them but it still never failed to amuse them when he threw such tantrums. They all continued to watch O'Tool because he *was* the team leader and it *was* his responsibility to keep the team cohesive. They would follow his lead and what he did next would tell them which direction they were heading with the kid.

Brian was pissed and wanted to hit something. He didn't expect roses and wine upon his arrival but he sure as hell wasn't expecting to be totally shunned by the team he was now attached to. A team who would cover his ass and keep him alive just like he was expected to do for them. Suddenly, he missed his old unit. He didn't miss the expectations they all had for him but, where there had been comfortable camaraderie, there was now a void.

That void will be filled. They just need time. Brian tried to tell himself. *Still, fucking Delta should know how to adapt.* Brian forced himself to stop thinking about the men behind him in an effort to calm his anger.

"Hay," a cool voice called out to him.

Brian turned to the group of men who were still in the same positions as when he stormed over to the vacant bunk he now stood beside.

"I'm O'Tool."

Brian locked his gaze on the man and refused to salute. *Respect in a unit is earned asshole. Say something about not saluting you.* Short blond hair and an unremarkable face looked back at him. He looked to be in his mid-thirties but, like the rest of the team, he was soldier fit. None of the Mad Dogs had that gym bunny look.

"Master Sergeant Xavier O'Tool, team lead, and intel," O'Tool introduced himself in the same cool voice.

Great, the team lead doesn't even want me here. What a fucking mess, Brian thought as another comment reached his ears.

"When he isn't throwing a tantrum."

"Fuck you," O'Tool said to the man who was busting his balls. "That asshole there is SFC Hector Rodriguez, communications." O'Tool gave his com teammate a glare and the man only nodded at Brian as if to prove his point about the tantrum issue.

"I'm the one you'll be whispering to in the dark." Rodriguez actually smirked.

"H," the man beside him said and Brian didn't know what to make of what sounded like a warning.

Still, Brian couldn't help but grin at the Latino man who antagonized their team leader. Straight black hair and dark eyes greeted his gaze as the man offered him another nod.

"SFC Oliver Higgins is our medic," O'Tool indicated the man seated next to Rodriguez. Pale eyes acknowledged Brian and the man's sandy blond hair made him think the medic could pass for a surfer on a beach somewhere if he wasn't so large. He was the largest in stature of the Mad Dogs.

No fear of being left behind because the medic is too scrawny to drag my ass to safety, Brian thought as he gave the man a nod.

"Doc," Higgins said in way of introducing himself and stuck a hand out. Brian had no choice but to move closer to the group in order to shake the man's hand.

"SFC Lawrence Clearwater," O'Tool indicated the lanky black man on the couch who still had his nose buried in his book. "Munitions and demolition."

"El," Doc added.

"I blow shit up," Clearwater said with a straight face before breaking into a grin without ever looking up from his book.

“Yeah. The only place you are safe is in here,” Rodriguez added with a wave of his hand around the barracks. Brian couldn’t help but chuckle at the comment even though he didn’t think the Latino was joking.

“SFC Markus Sullivan,” O’Tool introduced the last of the five men. “Sniper extraordinaire.”

Brian’s gaze shifted to the last member of the team. Dark auburn hair that looked like it might curl if it grew much longer framed almost ivory skin. Deep green eyes settled intensely on Brian as he looked at the man. A sudden chill raced up Brian’s spine as he stared down his fellow sniper. The feeling got worse when the guy grinned.

What the fuck? Brian thought and forced himself to look away from Sullivan. *So every man in the room is a Sergeant First Class except for O’Tool. Thirty plus for them all. So not only am I the youngest, I am the lowest ranked as well.* Brian suppressed the groan he wanted to set free.

“M can shoot the wings off a fly before it even realizes it isn’t landing on the ground of its own accord,” Higgins commented.

“So, we know you didn’t come from another Unit. Who’d you blow to get placed with us?” Rodriguez asked bluntly with a raised brow.

“Actually, I want to know what makes you so special you don’t need all of OTC,” O’Tool interjected.

“Or who did you piss off?” Higgins mumbled.

Brian waited for Clearwater or Sullivan to comment and when they didn’t, he replied. “I didn’t *blow* anyone and as for pissing anyone off,” Brian shrugged. “Maybe that falls on your shoulders?” Several grunts filled the silence before he continued. “I’m not special but I am a damn good Ranger and I am damn good at sniping.” There was no cocky tone in Brian’s voice. He was just stating the facts.

Damn good at sniping. Markus heard the words and had to bite back his smart assed reply. But, before he could say anything at all, O’Tool spoke again.

“We already have the best, so plan on being damn good at playing spotter.”

Brian bristled at the words and even more at the smug expression on Sullivan’s face but he didn’t change the neutral expression that he had schooled on his own face. He didn’t come here to replace anyone but he wasn’t about to be slammed on his abilities.

“Well, I guess we will just have to see about that then, huh?” Brian gave his fellow sniper a smirk and knew that proving himself to the man was going to be the first step in getting his new team to accept him.

Markus gave the kid kudos again for not backing down under O’Tool’s claim. It would be interesting to see if the kid’s ability with a rifle could live up to the confidence he was currently displaying.

“Rest up, you’re gonna need all the sleep you can get tonight,” O’Tool ordered him and left the barracks.

Brian turned back to his rack to make up the bunk and finish unpacking. As he headed to the shower, he noticed the rest of the Mad Dogs had left the barracks, presumably to follow O’Tool