

Chapter 1

Going down a river in a patrol boat is more dangerous than one would think. Yet recon said we were clear for a while yet so I just sit here in a free seat reading a letter that my wife had written me, and smiling at the accompanying picture.

“Hey Blue what you got there?” A large black bear asked as he sat across from me having given over the gunner’s turret to the Silverback Gorilla that was with us.

“Oh. Nothing really Black, just a letter from my misses, she is getting nice and big though. She says that Junior keeps kicking her hard every time she tries to cook her famous dishes from home.” I reply showing him a picture of my wife. A tall blue tigress that was quite clearly about to have a cub.

“Hey guys check out the Lieutenant’s misses. We got to do something special if she is that far along. Why didn’t you tell us you were havin your first cub Blue?” Black says taking the picture smiling.

“Well because when in combat one tends to think about either the mission at hand and how to complete it effectively with minimal cost to our side, or he does his damndest to stay alive so he can get home in one piece.” I reply taking the picture back and showing it around to the other guys in my squad. Silver the silverback gorilla, Shadow the wolf, Red the fox and Big Brown the bull.

“Damn Blue you got a hot wife there. Can she cook as well as she looks?” Red said dodging out of my reach so I couldn’t cuff him over the head.

“Yeah she does laddie. However I doubt any of you ground pounding apes would have had anything as good as her Haggis.” I replied with a laugh

“Hey I take offense to that. I’m a gorilla not an ape.” Silver says causing us all to laugh.

“What’s Haggis. That some sort of desert?” Shadow said as he cut the engine to the boat letting the river speed to drive them downriver the rest of the way.

“It’s a Scottish dish Shadow. I won’t say what’s in it because then you won’t try it. But I promise its damned good when made right and my beautiful wife makes the best Haggis in the states.” I replied causing the others to cock their heads in interest.

“Oh come on Lieutenant tell us how it’s made. “ Black said in a deep rumble.

“Tell you guys what. I will tell you but only if you give your word to try it if I outgun you guys today.” I say grinning evilly knowing the odds were I would outshoot them due to my kill record.

“And what happens if one of us outguns you?” Silver said as he scratched his chest under the double bandolier of .50 caliber rounds.

“Hmmm...well I know how you boys like to see your dear Lieutenant get embarrassed so how about this. If one of you maggots out kill me, I will walk around camp for the rest of the month in nothing but a diaper.” I said causing the lot of them to burst out laughing and put their fists out for our traditional knuckle bump giving them the bumps with my massive blue paw I fold up my letter and picture and stuff them into a pocket high up on my tactical vest.

Running the boat into the bank on the left side of the river Shadow says, “Alright guys we’re here. Remember our mission is to get to the enemy base and free the P.O.W.’s that are there. This is a heavily guarded area so keep the chatter to a minimum. And remember your silencers.”

“Right, now I know normally you would insist on going with me Fox but you will be needed to help them sneak the P.O.W.’s out. I will get the highest position possible and snipe from there. Remember though minimal casualties. Kill only if you have to even if we DO have a

bet going on. No heroes here got it.” At their nod I say, “Roughnecks move out.” Then I sling my Dragunov SVD sniper rifle over my shoulder and check my pair of revolvers with their custom made silencers before slinging “Big Bertha” the rocket launcher over my back with a grin.

As the others slowly made their way through the trees towards the camp I climbed the closest tree and started running the branches and jumping from tree to tree until I found a rock wall that over looked the entire valley. Smiling I climb up the wall using my natural agility as a Maltese tiger. Getting up top I notice two men patrolling the edge where I needed to be and they had their backs to me. Carefully sliding over the edge to get on the flat ground I pull out both revolvers and take aim. With a muffled pop both men dropped like a stone and fell off the edge of the cliff. “shit.” I whisper.

“Blue you alright?” Red says over the com link in my ear.

“Yeah, but the two I just killed fell off the damn cliff. Be careful and keep your eyes open.” I whisper as I move to the ledge on my belly and pull the rifle off my back and slide the silencer in it before taking aim at the camp. The thing I love most about my rifle was the fact I have a custom built scope for it that let me zoom so close that I could shoot the nuts off a gnat a mile away. Made confirming kills much easier than it used to be I tell you what.

Scanning the camp I quickly got a lay of the land and relay where there is a weak spot in the fence and patrol through the headset to the others. After that all I could do was wait and bail them out if necessary. If I had to I would use “Big Bertha” but I hoped I didn’t need to. After an hour I saw Red sneaking up to the wall of the makeshift base right under the watch tower there.

After checking the other tower to see if the man inside was facing away I turned back to the first one and quickly took my shot at the guard there as I saw him notice Red. Turning back

to the other tower I took out that man as well and whisper. “Close one Red you got spotted but I took out the guard before you were ousted. I also took out the other tower guard too so watch it.”

“Sorry Blue. Okay here we go.” He replies cutting a hole with his wire cutters in the fence big enough for silver and Black to pass through though he didn’t need them that big as most of the P.O.W.’s were his size or at least no bigger than Shadow. Slipping through the hole he sneaks up to the back of the Prisoner barracks and slips inside it. Laying there I start to sweat as there was no sound on the com link nor any alarms set off in the camp I was about to get up and go help when I heard the tumble of rocks on a rock.

Turning round I saw a huge Bengal tiger wearing the uniform of the enemy flying through the air at me with a very nasty looking knife held to impale me. Reacting fast I manage to roll away avoiding being speared on the end of the blade but then I was forced to fight this man in hand to hand combat which I was never that great at but could hold my own in a one on one fight. Eventually I manage to slide behind him and snap his neck. What I didn’t realize was he had managed to stab me in the right side and when I get back into position I see Red slipping out behind the P.O.W’s but my vision was blurring.

“Blue...Blue you okay? I heard a scuffling over the com.” Silver whispers.

Feeling a burning in my side I put my hand there and feel a wetness coming out and I say, “No...I’ve been stabbed. Enemy is dead...need pickup...gonna use Bertha to clear that camp give me the all clear when your 50 yards from the walls.” And I slide “Big Bertha” over my shoulder and fight my vision to keep focused enough to make the shot when told so.

Five hours later I groan and cover my eyes trying to block out the light of an overhead lamp above the cot I was lying on.

“Well looks like you finally woke up. How do you feel Lieutenant Saber?” A grey eyed calico says as she peels my eyelids open and checked them with a penlight.

“Like I had a hot brand stuck in my gut. How bad am I doc?” I say knowing where I was.

“You’re lucky. Ten minutes later and you might have died on us. As it is you will live. However...” She says with a sad look on her face.

“Don’t do that...don’t give me a fucking pity look just tell me how bad it is.” I snarl feeling scared.

“I’ll handle it Jen you go on and check the other patients.” A large bulldog said coming through the door with a silver eagle pinned to his right shoulder and a caduceus on his left.

Raising my hand I salute the colonel and say, “Sir what’s the problem. Just tell me I don’t like being babied or having things sugar coated.”

“Very well son, just don’t take it out on my doctors. They did everything they could. Long story short your bladder was damaged by the stab wound beyond our capabilities. We could fix it so it didn’t leak anymore but the damage severed the nerves that would give you that warning that you have to go. Because of that you will be unable to tell when you need to go and end up needing diapers for the rest of your life as your bladder will release on its own. And unfortunately you are going to be given a medical discharge. However due to your actions and making sure the enemy couldn’t follow your squad back you are being promoted before you go.” He said firmly but kindly after returning the salute.

“Damn it. Damn it to hell. Tell me at least everyone got out okay. Did I at least ensure that before I passed out?” I say pounding my fists into my legs.

“Everyone got back okay and the P.O.W.’s are all safe.” He said bending down and pinning my new Lieutenant’s bar on my shoulder. “You went beyond what was needed and

because of that you ensured their safety. By the way, that little fox from your squad came by and said to tell you that they tied your number. There were enemy units on the way to the camp that they took out stealthily. He and the others are going to come by later and said to let you know that.”

This caused me to smile, “Oh boy that means I get to see their reactions when they try my Kylea’s Haggis.”

“Oh I see you had a little bet. I was wondering what was going on when he asked me to tell you this. What would have happened if you lost?” The Bulldog asked.

“Heh...well...if they had BEATEN my score I would have had to walk around our camp for the rest of the month with just a diaper on. They love seeing me get embarrassed just like any soldier does with their superior’s. Though they will get their prize in a left handed way now, *sigh* Oh well. At least I can live a normal life for the most part even with these damn things. Colonel may I ask a favor?”

“That depends son, what do you want?” He replied patting my shoulder.

“Can you hold my discharge off, that is to say my actually going home, for a week so my boys and I can go all at the same time? We came here from our base back in the states together and I promised them we would all go home together.” I ask staring him in the eyes.

“Well that’s easy enough. You need a few more days’ bed rest to recover from the surgery so by the time they go home you will be ready to travel too. And you can call me Flay son. I am proud of how well you took the news and what you’ve done since you came to this hell hole.”

“Thank you Colonel Flay. Just curious is there any way I can get some food. I feel weak as a new born cub.” I ask as my stomach gives out a loud gurgling sound.

“Heh don’t worry son the nurses will be coming in shortly with food trays for the entire post op ward. If you feel like writing a letter home there is a pad and a pen on the stool on the other side of you there. I’m sure your misses will be happy to hear you’re on the way home.” He said patting my leg and getting up to leave.

Looking at the pad I think for a moment then pick it up to write a letter.

“My beloved. It’s your precious snuggle cat. I loved that letter you sent and the guys were surprised to see your picture. It’s kind of hot here but I won’t have to deal with it much longer. I was going to let it be a surprise but circumstances have changed things a little. I will be coming home at the end of the week and should be arriving at the airport with my squad on Monday afternoon. I told the guys about your cooking and made a bet with them and now they have to try your delicious Haggis. Could you please get the stuff you need and make some for when I get home? I know you’re wondering why I have to write to you now instead of surprising you by showing up out of the blue. I am fine but I was wounded in the line of duty. I will be able to live a normal life but I need you to pick something up for me...it’s embarrassing to say it so...you know those “supplies” I bought before leaving in expectation of Jr’s birth...we will need some in my size now. Other than needing those I am whole and fine dear so please don’t cry and freak out. I miss you so much. See you soon. Saber”

Looking it over several times I shrug and look up right as a nurse comes over with a tray full of food and a glass of milk. “Oh that looks wonderful. Can I get an envelope to send this letter to my wife?” I say as I slide the tray up my lap and place the pad on the side of my leg.

“Sure thing dear Mail won’t be going out for another hour so just tell me what city and state it’s going to and I will put the stamps on for you.” The nurse said smiling.

“Atlanta Georgia. Thanks.” I say before digging into the food as she put the milk on the stool Colonel Flay had sat on when he talked to me.

After eating my hamburger and fries I put the tray on the stool and laid back thinking about what there was to do now that I was going home. Life would definitely be changed once I got home since I was no longer in the Marines. On the one hand I have my Master’s degree in biochemistry with a minor in computer programming. I could easily get a job with the government as a researcher for medicine and to program scenarios into a computer to find out the effects of drugs on specific diseases or illnesses. Or I could get a job as a teacher in a college or high school to teach the Chemistry classes. I certainly had options. But then there is the fact I didn’t know life outside the military.

“Hey Lieutenant how you do ya feel?” Silver said coming through the door with Black, Shadow, and Red.

“Hey guys I’m doing alright. I got good news and bad news for ya guys. Good news is we are all going home together.” I say smiling.

“That’s great but what’s the bad news man.” Shadow says sitting on the edge of my bed.

“Well you guys will get your part of the bet in a left handed way...that stab wound was bad. It damaged the nerves that give me the signal to go so...yeah now I need diapers.” I say shrugging in a matter of fact way.

“Shit you can’t be serious.” Red says staring at my stomach.

I pull up my shirt showing them all the bandaging on my stomach and then drop the sheet over my legs enough to show them the diaper I had felt there since I woke up. “Fraid so man. But at least I got my promotion before getting a medical discharge. So pop can be proud as he sits up

there in heaven. But since you guys didn't beat me. You all have to try Kylea's Haggis. I am fixing to send her a letter to let her know we will be landing Monday afternoon."

"Okay about that you never told us what it was so spill Saber let us know what it is."

Silver said causing me to chuckle.

"Basically Haggis is a savory pudding containing sheep's pluck (heart, liver and lungs); minced with onion, oatmeal, suet, spices, and salt, mixed with stock, and traditionally encased in the animal's stomach and simmered for approximately three hours. Most modern commercial haggis is prepared in a sausage casing rather than an actual stomach." I say seeing Silver blanch at the thought.

"Well. A bet is a bet and I stand by my bets whether I win or lose so I'll try it. But damn that sound disgusting." Silver says as he swallows a lump in his throat.

"Yeah same here. But for now I think we best let you sleep. We have to fill out our reports on the mission before we can hit the sack tonight as Major Murphy wants to know how pissed to be with you. Yes he gave you the promotion but he is pissed you were hurt too." Black says clapping me on the shoulder.

"Alright I'll see you guys on the transport back to the states. Roughnecks fall out." I say causing them to salute and give a loud grunt of, "Hoorah" before leaving the room.

Shaking my head I lay back on my pillow and pull the sheet up on my chest to go back to sleep. Or at least try to.