

Chapter 2 - The Oath

Flashing crimson lights illuminated the side of the ER wing of Herman Memorial Hospital as the ambulance came to a stop. The back doors were hurriedly flung open and Jack was rolled out on a gurney with two paramedics moving along, still applying pressure and trying to stop the gushing wounds across his abdomen. He was rushed by the paramedics towards the awaiting bevy of nurses and doctors as he lay there dying, eyes rolled back and closed.

“We’ve got multiple gunshot wounds, with perforation of the left lung, spine, and lower intestine,” said one paramedic as he passed the gurney over to the ER staff.

“I need a stint in his lung, and his airway cleared or he’s gonna choke. And we need to open him up ASAP or he’s gonna go septic.” Cried the lead doctor as everyone went to work.

Jack’s bright-blue eyes fluttered open and he looked up briefly. Everything was a blur of motion and voices that sounded distant. A single gurgling gasp left him before all went dark again.

“Fuck, we’re losing him. Get a crash cart!”

“Well Jack, you got yourself good and FUBAR’d this time brother.”

Jack knew that voice. The world began to clear as he emerged from the darkness. Pain, there was pain; though, also a strange numbness that made it feel far off. Seeing was difficult, and the voices seemed so far away, but he recognized that voice. For a moment he thought he was back in the Army hospital; then it all came back to him. He took a struggled gasp for air that came as a soft wheeze accompanied by the hiss of a machine.

“Relax Jack. You’re in good hands. They finally got you stable, for now. You had me and Kass worried for a while there,” said the man at his bedside.

He was tall, with dark, lightly grayed black hair that looked as if it had just been cut by the barber at Basic. A thick, bristly mustache, that was also greying, covered his upper lip. He had pale skin from too much time spent in an office or at meetings in recent years, but it was wrinkled with stress lines and roughened by time spent in the field earlier in his life. Though fairly fit for a man of upper-middle age he’d thickened around the core over the years; giving him the burly look not too unlike that of a lumberjack. He wore a freshly pressed camo uniform, and had his cap resting on a nearby tray that had a single vase of flowers resting atop it. A highly polished silver eagle pin adorned his collar, and over his left breast pocket was written the name “Barret”.

A smile curled across Jack’s lips and he tried to speak, but his throat was too dry.

“Hey, hey. Easy soldier. That’s an order. Don’t worry. You’re at the hospital, and I got the tab covered; I owe ya anyway for Bosnia, right? Kass is watching your house for ya. I told her she should be studying, but she damn well insisted. You know how hard-headed she can be.

She's too much like her mother," Colonel Barret carried on as he tried to ease his brother in arms and friend.

Another wheezing breath left Jack as the smile disappeared from his face and he grimaced with pain and struggled to breathe around the tube in his throat; but he was too weak to resist.

"Jack they really did a number on ya. What made you go and do a fool thing like getting yourself caught up in MS-13's business? You were out; had a free and clear life, just with a limp," teased the Colonel as he tried to make light of the situation. But, from the circles under his eyes, and the look in he held in them things were bad.

The world began to feel distant again, but this time different; not dark, but relaxing. Still Jack was a soldier to the end, and he knew better than to not answer a superior when asked a question. With a shaky hand he reached out and weakly pointed to the small flag sewn onto the Colonel's right shoulder.

"De Oppresso... Liber," he tried to sturrngle out around the tube; the words sounding choked and garbled at best.

Jack smiled and slowly closed his eyes as sleep took him.

The Colonel stared at his friend and nodded as he choked back tears, and chewed at his upper lip nervously. Silently he turned behind him to a young, smartly dressed man in a three-piece suit wearing a lab coat that had "Dr. Archebald" on the upper left breast. He was tall, taller than the General by a few inches and near Jack's height; with combed back, sandy-blonde hair. He had a thin frame but an athletic build and gleaming titanium grey glasses rested gently on his nose that his cool, sparkling hazel eyes peered out from behind them. The suit was finely made and tailored to fit; a rich black long coat, with a matching vest and, dress pants. A pressed, white shirt with a black tie, a golden Compass Rose tie-pin held it perfectly in place. A polished, golden watch adorned his right wrist with the symbol of the Gordian Knot engraved laid with gold and set into the gleaming, black face of the elegant timepiece.

"Give it to him," ordered the Colonel.

"General, he's dying. There's every chance this could kill him. Even not being in the state he's in there's a chance it would kill him. And, if it does work, I can't guarantee we will get the results we're looking for. Are you sure he exhibits the right characteristics to be a viable..."

"Look son, I know this man better than you and I know the risks involved. I also know it's his only shot. It might be the only shot we get in our lifetimes. And, it's the best shot we got. Give it to him."

General Barret stood and looked Dr. Archebald squarely in the eyes with his dark, imposing gaze and gave a nod before moving out the door of the hospital room.

"Usual NDA, no talkers," The General said over his shoulder softly before turning and heading down the hallway.

Dr. Archebald moved forwards as he produced a small, vibrantly green vial from his pocket with a smile. He examined the fluid closely for a moment, staring into the glass before removing a syringe. He inserted the needle; draining the small vial into it before clearing it of any air-bubbles.

Dr. Archebald moved towards Jack's bedside and, grasped his IV drip in one hand before slowly injecting the fluid into the main arterial drip-line running to Jack's neck. As the solution made contact with the saline it seemed to lose its color and disappear into it; invisibly flowing into the dying man's veins now.

"Like grandpa always said. The world needs heroes."