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## PART III CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Charlton “Whoosh” Woolry was certifiable. Even before surviving multiple tours during the Korean War as a helicopter pilot, he was always a bit off. He either was brave, crazy, or a little of both. He defied orders not to return to assist soldiers besieged by enemy troops and did so multiple times. He managed to evade enemy ground fire but after being shot down he was returned to his base only to take off again in another helicopter. He was awarded various medals and commendations as well as a demotion for failure to obey orders. He didn’t care. When given the opportunity in 1953 to fly helicopters for the CIA, he enthusiastically accepted and was welcomed by Donner Bly into his Special Actions Group. He flew every type of helicopter and flew them well on multiple missions through multiple conflicts. By 1995, he was in his early 70’s. A geezer’s lifestyle never quite suited Whoosh and he longed for days of action. He never wanted memories to be more prevalent than current activities.

He remained in good physical shape, at least he convinced himself that the older man in the mirror was only a CIA disguise he was trying hard to remove. He had some progressive back problems, a few herniated disks, all initiated by some hard landings and one or two actual crashes. Overall he was spry and always ready for an adventure. His most recent adventure had been passage of a mid-sized kidney stone. It was 50/50 that surgery would be needed or it would pass. It made its way out at nine in the morning. His pain subsided after he took a few Vicodin pills and he felt a physically internal “plink” as if a coin had been tossed into a fountain. He didn’t realize the “plink” was the stone entering his bladder. He felt good and his new narcotic friend was a friend indeed. He felt the slightly jagged stone move out of his bladder and begin its rocky trip through his urethra moved along by the passage of urine. It was painful, and even Vicodin didn’t provide an acceptable level of numbness. When the stone eventually passed, Whoosh was pleased. He eyed it as he held it up between his index finger and thumb. He couldn’t believe his body was turning on him like this. He stared at the stone and gave it the look of a disappointed father. *Little Mother Fucker* he thought.

He was instructed to save it for analysis to aid in diagnosing the cause of the stones. Instead, his vanquished enemy found its way to his tiled bathroom floor and met the final crushing defeat under his right shoe. He popped one more Vicodin figuring he deserved it and lamented the dwindling quantity remaining in the plastic prescription bottle. KC and The Sunshine Band entered his head and his celebration ended with a little dance and a spin while he sang *Do a little dance... ..make a little love...get down tonight....get down tonight.....*

His financial situation had always been shaky. He was never much for accumulation of possessions. He received both a military and CIA pension, and managed

to accumulate a small cash stash augmented by danger pay and extra compensation for overseas service. But mounting medical and other bills reduced that stash. He no longer had his helicopter license and took a position at Wal-Mart. It was a good gig and paid the rent. He had his lady friends. The younger ones liked his stories, and the older ones liked his Viagra. He would have preferred it the other way around.

He felt this day would be a good one. The stone was gone. As the clock slipped closer to eleven he decided to meet some friends for an early lunch and cold beer when the phone rang. Usually he would let it ring as recent calls had been inquiries into when he was going to pay this or that bill. At the last second he picked it up.

“Yello.”

The monotone voice responded with “Ultra Light.”

His eyes darted around the room as if an explanation would be found on the walls. He shook his head in disbelief.

“Ultra Light? Are you *shitting* me? *Ultra Light?*”

When he was operational and wherever he was in the world, he was summoned to action by those two words. He knew reporting was immediate and awaited the location code.

The voice again spoke, “Ultra Light...Depot.”

He recognized that location code from years ago and knew where to go. The “Depot” had been a covert CIA facility located off of Skyline Drive in Virginia’s Shenandoah Mountains. Secluded and protected within hundreds of miles of national parkland, it stored miscellaneous supplies, weapons, and ammunition. There were also specially modified aircraft, helicopters, and vehicles. It was a jumping off point for many operations.

“OK, OK. Ultra Light Depot, right. Got it.”

He sat down in his recliner and thought, *Is this a joke?* The activation code was taken very seriously and dissemination was limited since the codes were classified and protected at the Top Secret SCI level. He slapped his head hoping to wake up. No, he was already awake. His heart began to race. When he was younger that would enhance his experience, but as a current member of the Geezer Club it could be deadly. His body appeared to react well and he felt young. If the CIA old man disguise couldn’t be removed, possibly it could just be forgotten, at least for now. After a few minutes he got up, packed a bag, locked his door, and began his three-hour drive west.

The drive time went fast and the sound of his tires impacting the joints connecting the cement road sections reminded him of a train riding the tracks. His mind was in constant thought, reliving his operational years and running through potential scenarios prompting his reactivation. He made his way west on Route 66, the more populated areas of Northern Virginia well behind him, and turned south onto Skyline Drive in Front Royal. The two lane winding road climbed and descended and climbed again to over three thousand feet through the Shenandoah National Park. Landmarks had changed after so many years and at first he missed the turnoff. When he was operational the side road turnoff leading to Ultra Light Depot was marked with a sign announcing *Restricted Access* and initially secured by a long chain stretched between two metal posts. He turned around in a visitor parking area adjacent to a beautiful view of the valley below and made a second attempt. The chain was gone but the metal posts remained. He continued upwards on a gradual grade until he reached a plateau and a point he remembered well.

He passed the secluded secondary entrance which was once secured by a long swinging metal gate obstruction. He slowly drove past its former location, the gate now laying rusted and disconnected from its vertical post. He inched his vehicle forward, remembering the security personnel once posted to intercept curious trespassers or persons with harsher intent. Like concealed spiders their purpose had been to stop the uninvited or the curious with harsh words or harsher methods. He took a breath and accelerated forward.

Unlike Whoosh, the Ultra Light Depot had not aged well. It was a narrow plateau running along the upper southeastern part of the elevated landscape, eventually dropping off sharply. Whoosh drove onto the compound and stopped. He stepped from his vehicle and took a deep breath. The smell was like an open field of grass with a touch of decaying hay. Weeds protruded through cracks in the cement parking area and shifting earth unlevelled the outstretched sections of the landing strip running right to left. Long enough to accommodate a large supply aircraft, including the C-130 Hercules, the facility also hosted numerous helicopters and specialty aircraft. Whoosh remembered being able to see for miles, but today the view was obscured by clouds and a misty drizzle impacted his face. He began to think operationally.

*Well, a plane landing was impossible however a plane could still land, so to speak, its wheels would be stripped away by the jagged cement sections but it could belly flop. Cargo and personnel could be off loaded. The plane would be a total loss but it could be done and the objective achieved. A helicopter would have no problem as there was still ample space to operate.....*

The wind picked up and he heard flapping. He looked to his left away from the strip and eyed the rusted deteriorated hangar, its door partially open, yet due to the distance he could not see inside. A deep blue flag mounted on the center section above the large hanger doors was used to indicate wind direction and flapped in the growing breeze. It was old school, but still effective. He heard the rotation of a newer wind speed monitor as the outward cupped spokes caught the wind and rotated on a center pole attached to the hangar roof. The wind thrust against him and rippled his jacket as well as creating a whistling noise against everything it touched. It was a lonely sound and it howled in his ears as if spirits sensed his presence and issued a warning.

*The rotating wind speed mechanism must be sending signals to someone...Is someone in the hanger?* He returned to his vehicle, drove closer and parked in a direction helpful if a quick escape was needed. He stood and squinted, his eyes looking through the open hangar doors to see inside. *Is that...?* He began to walk towards the hangar. *Oh, yah.* He walked faster, the “Old Man” disguise falling away with each step. *A Huey.* He entered the hangar and just looked at the UH-1 helicopter. He was flooded with memories. He approached the Huey and ran his hand along the tail walking forward. He thought of Korea, his other helicopters, and his CIA time flying Hueys in Vietnam. Without looking at the serial number he couldn’t tell the exact date of construction but this one looked like it just rolled off of the factory floor. He pulled back his hand from its tail and stepped back. He flew many of these under CIA orders and they became a good friend, however he hadn’t been near on in over fifteen years. He saw plenty of them on-screen, as they were prominent in almost every film made about Vietnam. For the military they played multiple roles, but the most prominent was as a troop transport seen landing, depositing troops, and departing. The noise of their rotor blades signaled rescue

for many soldiers under siege as well as flying ambulances taking the wounded to medical facilities.

Whoosh was overcome with emotion and stood leaning replacing his hand against his old friend. *Good men and their bravery* he thought. He leaned his head forward and recalled their just cause in opposing communism in both Korea and Vietnam, and how they were let down by the politicians who wouldn't let them win. He composed himself and continued his inspection moving forward past the open sliding door, peered in as if looking for those lost friends, and stopped to look into the cockpit.

"You remember how to fly her?"

Whoosh heard the question from behind, along with boots impacting the cement hangar floor. He caught movement and turned toward a man walking out of the shadows. Whoosh pulled back his jacket with his right hand and placed his palm on his holstered weapon affixed to his right hip. The man stopped and placed his hands up, parallel to his head with palms facing Whoosh.

"Whoa, Kimosabe...stand down. No need for that. Me friend."

He smiled. Whoosh's tensed body slowly relaxed and he removed his hand from under his jacket as the man lowered his. He was fortyish, dark hair, standing just over six feet, disarming smile, very white teeth, and not overly muscular but thick. He wore a military style jump suit with a Special Actions Group patch that Whoosh knew was never to be displayed outside of CIA controlled space. He was surprised to see it, and after so many years he still recognized it.

"Well, could you still fly her?" the man repeated.

"I'd forget how to fuck, before I'd forget how to fly," Whoosh firmly responded.

"I'll take that as a yes. I'm The Briefer." He extended his hand, Whoosh cautiously accepted. Tensions diminished as they toured the Huey together. Both men discussed their association with the Special Actions Group although they limited the disclosure of details due to lingering suspicions. Within the covert world suspicions had a long afterlife. A few years earlier The Briefer was flying a modified AH 64A Apache attack helicopter over Kuwait and Iraq in Desert Storm for the CIA Special Actions Group. He both collected intelligence and completed specific search and destroy missions. Interrogations were quick and brutal. Many men did what they had to do, but some did what they loved to do. He overflowed strategic areas obliterating perceived command posts and calling in the Special Actions Group ground contingent. Afterward he landed the Apache and assisted in collecting intelligence and interrogating whatever living, whole or part, humans remained.

Whoosh felt more at ease when he was ushered into a medium sized office converted into a temporary command center. For what purpose, Whoosh was not yet aware. They sat across from each other, a dark brown folding laminate conference table sitting between them. A computer monitor was illuminated at the far table end. For an abandoned facility the room was as clean and as organized as it could be. A small tape recorder sat on the table and once initiated the voice was familiar to Whoosh, even after so many years.

*"Whoosh, my friend, it's been too long."* Donner Bly's voice transcended time. *"I hope the years have been kind to you. Finding you was a God-send and elicited the same feeling of rescue that your helicopter arrivals harkened on many, many occasions during our years of service together. You've already sacrificed and provided dedicated service,*

*far beyond what most citizens contribute, and if you decline this assignment, you'll not be less of a patriot in my eyes. My associate will brief you on the mission and a date and time for its execution is already in play. I look forward to one final exfiltration amidst dire circumstances."*

Whoosh took a few moments to absorb the comments and the situation. He asked to listen to Bly again. He was then briefed on mission details and asked for a few moments. He pushed away from the table and took a walk to the Huey. He sat in the cockpit for a time, handled the stick, put on the helmet, closed his eyes and thought. He then removed the helmet, got out, walked around his girl, placed his hand against her skin, rubbed her with his palm, and again closed his eyes. He knew Bly's story, of his prosecution and incarceration. He also knew the man, and knew him to be a good man. After a few minutes he walked back into the command center and sat down.

"I'm in."

The Briefer smiled. "Oooooo...kay. He knew you would be."

He placed a silver metal briefcase on the table and opened it. A note read *Delayed compensation for jobs well done*. The note rested on top of neatly bound and stacked one hundred dollar bills.

"He wanted you to first accept out of your sense of duty and honor and not just for a payout."

Whoosh shoved the open briefcase away as if insulted.

"I don't want that."

"Too bad.....you get it. Those are my orders."

The Briefer snapped the case shut and placed it in the nearby safe.

"And my missions always get completed. Let's get up in the air and shake off any rust...more so yours than the helicopter." He said it with a smile. "The Huey's been totally refurbished, checked out, and certified."

"Right now?" Apprehension sparked through Whoosh's body. It had been many years. "Fly?...right now?"

"Sure, got something better to do?"

After a moment's quick thought, he shook his head, took a deep breath and replied, "Nothing.....nothing better."

"Alright. Let's first get you settled."

Whoosh retrieved his bag from his vehicle and The Briefer showed him to his room, previously serving as an office. A foldout camping cot and a small table as a nightstand would have to suffice. In an adjacent room there was a makeshift kitchen stocked with a coffee maker and other cooking equipment more suitable for a camping trip. A portable toilet and makeshift shower sat out back. All in all, Whoosh certainly survived worse conditions.

They flew for the remainder of the day. Whoosh was shaky at first and ruffled the tops of several trees as he practiced landings. The main focus that day, as it would be for the next three days, was low-level flying at fast speed. The Huey hugged the terrain at its maximum speed of one hundred and forty eight miles per hour.

"That a girl...that...a.....girl, yeeehaaaaa!!!!" Whoosh yelled in appreciation of the Huey's performance. Whoosh loved his new girlfriend. The engines purred and he was convinced there must have been a complete overhaul. Both men yelled like school-kids out on the playground. Whoosh was exhilarated and relieved his skills never left

him. He executed maneuvers even The Briefer didn't realize the Huey could do. Regional flight control caught their radar picture and radioed for identification. The Briefer provided a codeword and for the duration of the flights they were unmolested. By the end of several days of training Whoosh totally shed the CIA "Old Man" disguise and emerged, refreshed and youthful.

On the last landing, Whoosh set her down on a raised platform allowing access to the bottom center. He assisted The Briefer in connecting a long hook rigged to a motorized winch system set in place by the side door. A bit of welding, some bolts and rivets, connection into the electrical system, and she was ready. Tomorrow would be a long day. He was glad to be a part of the operation. Although initially he balked at the briefcase filled with cash, in hindsight he decided he could use the money for sure. The Briefer assisted Whoosh in refueling the Huey and conducting pre-flight maintenance. Once completed, The Briefer announced it was time for him to leave and handed Whoosh a bank safe deposit box key from which his briefcase, post-operation, would be retrieved. Whoosh was then left alone at the abandoned facility with his thoughts, his girl, and the mission ahead.