



***Buddy  
and  
Buffy***

***By  
Robert H Cherny***

Buddy and Buffy

By

Robert H. Cherny

All rights reserved

Copyright © 2018 by Robert H. Cherny

Free Ebooks Edition.

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part without written permission.  
This book is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This book may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you are reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Free Ebooks and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this and all authors.

How many secrets he has fought hard to keep will a teenaged boy expose to save the life of girl he only recently met especially since he knows that her capture was to provide bait for a trap for him?

Chapter One

Growing up these days is tough enough, but it's tougher if you're different. I'm big enough and strong enough that I don't get bullied, but you don't have to be bullied to be set apart. I don't get bullied online because I don't have an online presence in my real name. I know better than that. My real name is Tommy, but my online name is Buddy. I got held back in first grade, so I'm older than the others in my class. We'll graduate in a couple of months, and I don't have plans for college or the military. I don't have any plans for anything, and as things turned out, that's a good thing.

You see, the thing is I can fly. Yeah, Superman style. Fly. Yup. Jump into the air, point my arms forward and go. I realized I could when I was about six. I don't think anyone knows, but I can't be sure, so I have to be careful. That's not the only thing I can do. I can reach out my hand and look at something, and it'll jump into my hand if it's not too big. If I move my hand and think about it, things move the same as my hand moves. And my visual acuity is off the charts. My eye doc didn't understand why I had trouble reading the blackboard in first grade since I could see so well. When they switched to whiteboards and markers, I picked right up where I should have been and rocketed ahead. It doesn't bother me now, but it did for several years. Oh, and I'm really good at math, sort of. I can tell you where a baseball will hit the ground, but I can't hit the thing to save my life. I can snatch it from wherever it is and catch it, but I can't hit it. I can't balance a checkbook, but I can tell you where and when the moon will set on the horizon while it's still at its zenith.

It was this last part that started this whole mess. You see, there was this night launch at the Kennedy Space Center. It was the full moon, so I knew I had optimum lighting conditions for a great photo op. Oh, yeah, my hobby is photography. All kinds of photography, birds, buildings, landscapes, clothes, shoes, still life, artsy fartsy stuff, anything. I'd do nudes if I could get someone to pose for me. So, I hopped out my bedroom window with my cameras in the backpack. Getting out the window quietly without my parents knowing about it was awkward, but I had done it enough that it wasn't too bad. Flying with the backpack wasn't hard, but the tripods were a beast. Even though they were strapped in tightly, they moved around and made a lot of noise.

I knew that the only place I could get the shot I wanted was from the top of the Apollo memorial on Pad 34 at the Space Center. That presented several logistical problems. It's illegal to climb on the remnants of the monstrous concrete structure that is the monument in daylight let alone in the darkness. And you can't get there from here. There are no ladders. The only way to get to the top is with a big construction boom lift or a really really long extension ladder. Well, I was flying so even though there was no way to climb the monument, I was not worried. The other problem was that the memorial was inside the safety zone where you're not supposed to be during a launch. There was no way around that and security should be tight. Avoiding it could be difficult.

So, well, I know all this, but I really wanted this shot. I mean how many people could get this shot? No one, not even a NASA photog could get the shot because they wouldn't see it and by the time they did see the shot it would be gone. For a shot like that, you had to know it was coming to be in exactly the right place at exactly the right time. You have to anticipate the moment and catch it when it happens. I knew I could get a shot of the rocket as it lifted off with the VAB bathed in soft moonlight on the frame's left third line, the rocket like a giant phallus in the center and the remnants of the old shuttle pads on the right third line sitting ghost-like in the shadows. The shot needed to be taken from somewhere above the ground and where a tripod could be placed. No one else could get that shot, and I wanted to show that I could. Classic composition, very symbolic, very cool and impossible for a normal person to get. All of which is why I flew just above the waves to the Space Center under cover of darkness.

It took me less than an hour to get there. I took my time. I didn't want to get there too early

because the longer I hung out, the better chance I had of being spotted by security. I figured if I got there about T-minus fifteen I would have plenty of time to set up my tripods, cameras and take some test exposures. It was a good plan, not foolproof, but good. I dodged a couple of boats along the way, but the route over the Intracoastal Waterway was mostly clear.

What I did not count on was someone else being there when I arrived. That was a shock. I was so intent on avoiding the sensors and cameras, I did not notice the person on top of the concrete arches until I touched down. The only way she could have gotten there was to fly, and that did not make much sense. Although, it had occurred to me that I was not the Lone Ranger and someone else might, indeed, have at least one of my special skills, seeing her was unexpected.

She did not look surprised to see me. Her expression was like politely amused. She looked like finding someone else who could fly was not a big deal. "Who are you and what are you doing here?" She made no attempt to speak quietly.

"Hush, do you want them to hear you?"

"Don't worry, I disabled the sensors. So, Superman, who are you?"

"I go by Buddy."

Like I said, Buddy is my screen name. I can't use my real name because some of the pictures that I posted could cause a problem if anyone figured out who really shot them. This would be one of those. Besides, being "different" at school is a ticket to be a target, and since the school social scene extended to the online media, I wanted no part of it.

She smiled. "I go by Buffy."

"Nice to meet you." How's that for a lame first line? I wasn't getting anywhere with her that way.

"You come here often?"

"No, the first time." It was the truth.

"I've watched a lot of launches from here."

"How do you get here?"

"Same as you Superman, only I come from the south along the coast."

"I came in over the Intracoastal."

"Not as windy that way."

"Exactly."

She had taken the corner of the monument where I had intended to stand, so I set up on the adjacent corner. I set up my two still cameras on tripods and hand held my video camera.

"Hey, Buddy, you shoot a lot of this kind of stuff?"

"Yeah, when I can. I do a lot of air shows, but I hang out in gardens too. I like a garden on a soft cloudy day. The tones are more subtle that way."

"And the exposures are long. Do you have a problem with the wind?"

"Yeah, sometimes. It's not like the flower is going anywhere, so I shoot until I get the shot I want."

"You got a girlfriend?"

"Nosy aren't you?"

"Just passing the time."

"No, broke up a couple of months ago. There's plenty of time."

"You look like a guy who would be good to a lady."

"I try. It doesn't always work out like I planned."

"Almost nothing does."

We only had a few minutes to wait before the rocket launched at the very beginning of the launch window. I tripped one remote at T minus ten seconds so it would catch a wide shot of the launch at roughly three frames a second. I tripped the second remote at T minus one second so it would catch the tight shot of the launch at roughly three frames a second and I followed the launch with my video camera. The shot I came for was the one I framed in the first camera. The others were afterthoughts because the probability of having that confluence of opportunity again was improbable and since gear

left behind takes no pictures, I brought it all.

As soon as the rocket had disappeared into the clouds, I whipped out my little point-and-shoot camera and took a half dozen candid shots of Buffy before she realized what I was doing and turned her back on me. We packed up in silence. She slung her backpack on her back and checked the straps at the same time as I checked mine. We secured our tripods, and we were ready to go.

“Hey, Buddy, that’s not your real name is it?”

“No, and I don’t think your real name is Buffy either.”

“You’re right. Look, I have to take a crap, and I don’t want to leave my gear unattended.”

“We’re in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night, and you’re worried about your gear?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, the swamp is right over there. A little fertilizer won’t hurt it. I’ll stay here.”

“Euww. There’s gators and snakes and frogs and mosquitoes and chiggers and leaches in that swamp.”

“So?”

“I don’t want to go there, and I have a long flight home.”

“So?”

“There’s a tracking station at the north end of Playalinda Beach. There’s a restroom for the beach they leave open for the camera and tracking crews that monitor the launch. The crews should be gone by now, and we can go there. We can go home from there.”

“Sure. Parking Lot 13?”

“You know it?”

“Same as you.”

She smiled an evil grin as she dove off the edge of the concrete monument and neatly arced into the air skimming the beach as she headed north. I dropped through the hole where the Apollo’s rocket engines had been, bounced off the wall like a distance swimmer in a long race and scooted after her. She traveled north along the beach until she was directly opposite the restroom building and hooked a sharp left. She touched down as lightly as a ballerina in the vegetation behind the building. I landed somewhat less gracefully.

She poked her head around the building. “They’re gone. We can go around front. It’s safe.”

I followed her. She put her gear down in front of the restroom building before going inside. She emerged a few minutes later wiping her hands on a scented hand sanitizer paper. “Your turn.”

“What?”

“Didn’t your parents tell you always to go before a long trip?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Take these.” She handed me a fist full of foil-wrapped scented hand sanitizer papers. “Go. I’ll watch your gear.”

As soon as I came out, she said, “Buddy, you’re probably a really nice guy, but I can’t hang around to find out. Take care of yourself and be extra cautious around strangers. I doubt we’ll ever see each other again.”

“Goodbye, Buffy. You take care, too.”

She levitated around the corner of the building and took off, skimmed the vegetation and dropped behind the dune where I could not see which way she went. I knew that by the time I put on my backpack and secured my tripods, she would be long gone. I knew better than to pursue a woman that did not want to be pursued.

I flew home and reviewed my pictures. I found the exact frame I had envisioned when I set up the shot. I only had to make minor adjustments to the exposure of a few parts of the frame and posted it online under my private online identity. I had to balance my fear of bullying against my hope that someday someone like me would contact me without revealing my true identity and we could compare notes if nothing else. Ideally, we would meet and figure out how to live in a society with our

challenges. To date, other than a bunch of people who loved my photography, there had been no contacts.

A search of the social networks I frequented revealed several named “Buffy” with letters or numbers after the name. There was one that had more numbers before and after her name than the others. I checked her timeline and saw that she had posted a picture very similar to mine. This had to be the girl I met on the Apollo structure. She had posted in her caption that she had met a new buddy on the shoot and was sorry that she could never see him again. She used a baby picture for her profile picture, and other than being the right hair color, there was no way to know for sure if that was the woman I met on top of the Apollo monument. I sent her a private message that I was glad to have met her and liked her picture. I knew in my heart it was her and reconciled myself to never seeing her again.

I was perfectly prepared for it to have ended right there.

Chapter Two

Did I tell you I was an insomniac? I am. It's really annoying. So, a couple of days after I took the launch picture, I was sitting at my desk in my bedroom doing homework I should have done last night when I saw this NASA staff car pull up in front of my house. This was not a good thing. There was no reason a NASA staff car should have been anywhere near my neighborhood. My dad was in the kitchen making coffee for himself and my mom, but even though they were out of bed, it was early, and they weren't really awake yet. They were in the kitchen talking about some problem Mom was having at work. I live in a two story house a couple of blocks off the water in a little community adjacent to the Intracoastal Waterway in Florida. It's a small town, and all the permanent residents know each other. Only the snowbirds are strangers. My room looks out over the porch, the street and in a gap between the houses across the street where there is a vacant lot, I can actually see the ships in the waterway. If I go out on the roof, I can see them quite well. I noticed a light blue cargo van move between the houses on the road beyond the row in front of me, the only one between me and the water. I knew every car on that street, and this one did not belong.

So, these two women got out of the car. One wore an Air Force uniform, and the other wore a NASA blazer with a gray skirt. They were kind of cute in a military sort of way. Not someone you generally wanted to mess with judging by the dynamics of their stride. They each carried a manila file folder.

The women came up on the porch and rang the bell. My dad answered it.

"May I help you ladies?"

"Yes sir, is your son, Tommy, in?"

Tommy is my real name, Tommy Baker.

"Is he in trouble?"

"No, sir, we need his help. We need to ask him a few questions."

"I am sure that whatever it is, there is a logical explanation."

"We doubt that, sir."

By this time I was standing behind my father.

"Are you Buddy?" the NASA woman asked.

"That depends on who is asking."

The woman pulled a print of the photo I had posted online. "We need to ask you about this photograph."

My father looked at the picture through the screen door. "Did you take that?"

"Yes, I did."

"When?"

"A couple of nights ago."

"It's spectacular."

"Thank you, Dad. It was not an easy shot to get."

Dad may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but he figured out that something very uncomfortable was going on.

"Where did you take this picture from?"

The NASA lady pulled out another photograph. "From here."

The photograph showed Buffy and me on top of the concrete structure that had once held the rocket where the Apollo astronauts had died. We were recognizable in the shot, but only just barely.

"How did you get that?" I asked.

"A range security officer with an infra-red camera, a long lens, and a sturdy tripod."

I swore softly under my breath. "That doesn't look like me. You have the wrong guy."

The NASA woman blinked, but the Air Force woman did not. "Perhaps this might jog your memory." She produced a photograph of me with Buffy at the restroom building. I was quickly recognizable in the shot made with available light and not infra-red.

"Perhaps you should come inside," my father suggested.

"With all due respect, sir," the Air Force woman answered. "We would rather interview him out here on the porch, alone, sir, if you don't mind. What we need to discuss with him is classified, and you are not cleared."

"Is he?"

"No, but we will not be telling him anything classified he does not already know. He has information that we are not able to divulge to you or your wife. Sir, I understand the sensitivity of this request, but it is a matter of national security."

Sometimes my Dad makes me really proud. He's a good guy, but I'm a bit more than he can handle. "That's bullshit. I'll play along with you for now, but if you so much as harm a hair on his head, I will kill the pair of you."

"Dad, don't say things like that. They're wired."

"Really?"

"Yeah, look." I opened the door and approached the Air Force lady and removed her cap. I showed Dad the microphone hidden in the brim. I carefully held the microphone and shouted into it. "Hello in there."

I pictured some poor guy in a surveillance van ripping off his headset. I gave her back her cap and said, "I always wanted to do that. That was fun." I pointed to the chairs on the porch. "Go sit and tell Gunny she can put away the rifle."

The women looked at each other. "We don't know what you're talking about."

I sighed. "Ladies, please sit down so we can talk."

They sat. I stood on the top step up to the porch and held out my hand. "Give me the rifle."

I didn't need the words. They were for dramatic effect. An assault rifle flew from behind the bushes in the vacant lot across the street and landed in my hand with a loud snap. I ejected the magazine, cleared the chamber and put the rifle on the floor. "Now, please tell Gunny to come here and ask nicely for her rifle back for without her rifle a Marine is nothing. I get it."

A battle-hardened woman in fatigues walked across the street. "May I have my rifle back?"

I was surprised that she was not angry. She was wary, but I would have been too under the circumstances. I handed her the rifle without the ammunition. I pointed to a vacant chair. "Sit there."

She sat as directed. "Yes, sir. How did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Clear the weapon so fast?"

"Lots of television specials that I can stream on my computer. Do you want to know how I took your weapon?"

The woman shuddered. "No."

"But we do," the NASA woman said.

"That's not why you came, so that's not part of today's conversation. From now on you need to level with me, or I will undress the bunch of you right here on the porch in plain sight faster than you know what happened. You might as well remove the pistols from your holsters in your back. I can tell they're uncomfortable. We should talk to each other like reasonable people. You do not need to threaten me. So, what did you come to ask?"

The Air Force lady pulled out a photo of Buffy that looked like it had been taken in a portrait studio. "How well do you know her?"

I pointed to the picture she had given me of us on the top of the Apollo monument and said, "This is the first time I had ever seen her."

"You didn't know her before this?"

“Nope.”

The women looked at each other.

“We don’t believe you.”

“Fine, see if I care.” I stood and turned to go back inside.

“Wait.”

I turned back around.

“After you took the pictures, what did you do?”

“We packed up and made a pit stop at the restroom building at parking lot thirteen. Then we went home our separate ways.”

“And you haven’t seen her since?”

“Nope, although I would like to. She seemed interesting in an odd sort of way.”

“She’s gone missing. Her parents filed a missing person report last night.”

“Do you think I did something to her?”

“No, she uploaded the pictures from an ISP in South Florida about the same time you uploaded yours, so we know you were not together.”

“If you don’t think I had anything to do with it, why are you here?”

“So you can help us find her.”

“Seriously?”

“Is everything you know about her in those folders?”

“Yes.”

“Is your contact information in those folders?”

“Yes.”

“You should go now.”

“But...”

“I will take your information, and I will think about it.”

“We are to bring you with us so you can start the search right away.”

“No.”

“You are to come with us.”

“I will take your information and contact you if I think I can help. In the meantime, I am going to school.”

“That is not smart, and we know you are smarter than that.”

“Smarter than you think. Please go before I snatch the rifle again.”

“You will come with us.” They advanced toward me.

“No.” I dropped their panties around their ankles, and they tripped falling on their faces.

I had forgotten that my parents were watching the entire episode through the screen door. They laughed as the women tried in vain to regain their composure and dignity. Neither woman wore what would be considered military issue undies.

“I don’t need to hurt you to disable you,” I said. “I don’t want to hurt you. Please go away, and if I have anything for you, I will contact you.”

I went in into the house and closed the door. My dad put his hand on my shoulder and said, “That was cool, but we need to talk.”

“Can I have breakfast first?”

“Yes.”

## Code Name: Buddy and Buffy

### Chapter Three

Like I said, my dad is a great guy, and he loves me with all his heart, so it pains me to say something negative about him, but he is not the brightest person you've ever met. Still, he takes the time to think things through, and while other people will get there faster, he does get there eventually. I ate my breakfast while I waited for the questions as he and my mother looked through the folders. The first question was not a question at all. It was a statement.

"They weren't who they said they were."

"I agree," I said.

"How did you know that one was a Marine?"

"The tattoo on her forearm, eagle, ball, the anchor and the corps."

"There's something huge going on here. How much danger are you in?" He paused. "And what are we going to do about it?"

I love my dad. Did I tell you that? I love my mom too, but not the way I love my dad. "I think we go about our lives as normal and see what happens."

"I'll drive you to school."

"Thanks, Dad. I'd like that."

"Tommy, we've known about your flying for a long time, but the rest of this stuff, that's new. I think it's time you told us the whole story. I'll cover for you if it makes you late to school."

I choked on my cereal. They knew? My mind raced with questions.

My mother refilled my orange juice and sat down next to my dad. "We worry about you," she said. "There's so much going on we don't understand, but we were afraid to talk to you about it. I guess now we have to talk about it. Please don't be angry with us."

I took one of my mother's hands with both of mine. "I love you, Mom and I love Dad. I could never be angry with you because I know you love me with all your hearts. It's one of the few things I know that I can trust."

My mother's smile was tentative, but she tenderly put her other hand on top of mine. "Please tell us the whole thing. We need to know how we can help."

I told them about when I was six I jumped off the swing set like the other kids did at the top of the arc expecting to drop down to the ground like they did, but I didn't go down, I went up. I told them about stepping off our porch and expecting to break my ankle on the pavement but instead floating gently out to the street. I told them about how it took me years to learn to fly, one small step at a time. I told them how I learned about my skills and how I took the time to develop them. They knew about my trouble sleeping, so they weren't surprised when I told them that much of that learning had been at night or how much I had learned from spy movies and military specials I streamed on my computer.

When I was done, my mother said, "We knew about some of this, but we were afraid if we talked about it, we'd drive you away, and we would never forgive ourselves."

"I think it's better that we didn't talk about it," I said. "I was afraid that knowing your only child was so weird might be a problem for you."

"It was," my father said. "Until today, we weren't sure about you. We didn't know how you would turn out. Would you be a good guy or a bad guy? We didn't know. Now we know that you will be fine. We need to get you to school."

"I hope you know how much I love you," I said.

"We do. When you come home from school, we should talk about what we need to do about this girl. Do you like her?"

"I barely know her."

"But she flies like you."

“Yes.”

“We need to find her and help her. Her parents may not be as accepting as yours.”

Did I tell you how much I love my parents?

I missed homeroom, but I got to school in time for the first period. I have math first period. I am in the most advanced math class my school offers and my math teacher is absolutely the coolest teacher I have ever had. Ms. Schwartz knows that I am way more advanced than the rest of the class, so she gives me college level stuff to work on. I love it. It doesn't hurt that she's also the best-looking teacher I've ever had. She grew up in Cocoa Beach and was a surfing champion until she decided to settle down and get married. They stayed together until they finished grad school when he dumped her for a fancy lawyer in Orlando. She killed him in the divorce settlement and now she only works because she wants to. Whenever she's not teaching, she's surfing and still looks every bit as hot as she did when she was a champion. I'm surprised that some gnarly surfer dude hasn't swept her off her feet and carried her away. I would if I was twenty years older.

You know, I don't understand why anyone would name a kid Archibald Poindexter, but that was the name of the school's principal. One of his student couriers was waiting for me when I left math class. “Mr. Poindexter wants to see you in his office.”

“For why?”

“Some college recruiter he said.”

“I'm not going to college. I'm taking a year off to travel.”

“Whatever, please come with me.”

Three enormous men who had once been muscular, but now had mostly gone to flab, and the city's chief of police waited for me in Mr. Poindexter's office. As soon as I saw them, I understood why I had known the three women were not who they said they were. These men were wearing Air Force uniforms and had nameplates above the breast pockets of their jackets. The women had not had nameplates. So, in the spirit of the best defense is a good offense I spoke first.

“Good morning, Chief Johnson, gentlemen. I assume you are here to see me. May I see ID please?”

The darkest of the three strangers laughed as he pulled out his wallet. “Excellent.” He handed me his ID. “Hello, Buddy, it is good to meet you. Captain Richard Thomson, at your service. I have been following your photo posts for a year. You're terrific.”

I gave him back his ID. “Thank you, Captain. I appreciate the compliment.” The lieutenants showed me their ID's without comment.

“Chief Johnson, for the record, I did not break up with your daughter. She broke up with me, and the idiot she's going with is not worthy of her.”

The man who I had hoped would one day be my father-in-law laughed. “I know. I've told Beth Anne that a dozen times. She is a wild one. She'll dump him, too.”

“Sir, can you vouch for these gentlemen?”

“Yes, I can. They are all personally known to me.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Chief Johnson stood. “This matter is not in my jurisdiction, and the only reason I am here is to tell you that you should trust these men. When your father gets off work, I would like to come over and chat with you. I know you have special skills and don't trust people easily, but you should trust them. I am leaving so you can discuss what you need to discuss in private. I would offer to put in a good word with Beth Anne, but I think your special skills scare her.”

“Thank you, sir.” I was beginning to wonder how many people knew I could fly and what else they might know about me. I had thought I was so careful.

Chief Johnson saw the look in my eyes. “Tommy, it's a small town. Hiding in a small town is hard. I'll see you tonight. I know you will need my help and I am here for you.”

After Chief Johnson had left, Mr. Poindexter excused himself leaving me alone with the three

burly guys in Air Force uniforms.

The captain spoke after he heard the door latch. "For the purposes of this endeavor and all written correspondence, we will refer to you as Buddy and not your real name. We do not wish to compromise your identity any more than it already is. What do you know about this lady?"

He produced the same picture of Buffy the ladies had shown me this morning on my porch. "Not much. I only met her the other evening. We haven't seen her since."

I handed him back the picture. "And my real identity has already been compromised. I had a most interesting visit to my house this morning."

These guys were simply not poker players. The men turned a whiter shade of pale.

"Who visited you?"

"A woman in an Air Force uniform, a woman in a NASA jacket and a former Marine sharpshooter. There was also surveillance of some kind going on."

The captain pulled up a picture on his smartphone. "Was this one of them?"

"She wore the Air Force uniform."

"Did this one wear the NASA jacket?"

"Yes."

"And this one was the Marine?"

"No. Someone else."

The captain scowled and thumbed up another picture. "How about her?"

"That's her."

"I assure you this other woman was there. You only saw one sharpshooter, but the other must just have been better hidden. They never travel alone."

"Who are they?"

"Extortionists."

"As in pay me, so your barn doesn't burn down. That kind of extortionists?"

"Exactly."

"Linked to organized crime perhaps?"

"We believe so."

"And I stumbled into something they did not want me to see?"

"Yes."

"And this has something to do with an upcoming launch?"

"Yes."

"Who is the target, the people who own the rocket or the people who own the payload?"

"Both. The payload has a nuclear electric generator. If it were to have an 'accident' at precisely the right time on launch, it could disable the entire space center."

"And take out the port?"

"Yes, and the city of Titusville."

"Do you really think they are capable of shooting down a rocket being launched from the space center?" I started to work the math in my head.

"We don't know. We have to assume that they can. We can't afford to think otherwise."

"That's pretty accurate shooting" I said, but I already realized that it might not be all that tough.

"They would have to hit the rocket a few thousand feet over the pad, and it's not moving that quickly at that point. Actually, now that I think about it, the math isn't that bad. The flight path is predictable. Control of the projectile is the issue at that speed. Still a good surface to air heat-seeker could do it if you were close enough. If you mount it correctly, you don't even have to aim, you merely have to launch at the right time."

"Our thinking exactly."

"Given the available worldwide inventory of such missiles and their known flight characteristics, it should not be too difficult to calculate the potential launch points and guard them."

“We did all that.”

“So, what do you need me for?”

“You and Buffy got through our security.”

“So?”

“We didn’t know you were there until after the launch. Where you were standing is one of the best launch points for such a missile. If you had wanted to, you could have shot down the rocket with a shoulder-mounted missile, and we could not have stopped you.”

“That would make a guy nervous.”

“Yes, exactly. Buffy has friends. One who posts frequently goes by the name of ‘Willow’ and one by ‘Angel.’”

“Is there a friend called ‘Watcher’ by chance?”

“I think so.”

“They watch way too much television.”

“We don’t know who her other friends are and we don’t know the real identity of either Willow or Angel. They would see us coming a mile away, but you should be able to contact them and enlist them to help find Buffy before the extortionists use her to take down the rocket.”

“When is the next launch?”

“A week from Saturday at 4:00 AM.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“That’s all I can ask. I have taken the liberty of sending you a text with my sat phone number. Call me if you need anything.”

“Thanks.”

I left the office deep in thought. Other than the dirty looks I always got every time I was called to the principal’s office, which happened more often than I liked to admit, the rest of the day was uneventful, kind of hazy actually.

Ms. Schwartz was waiting for me after school.

“Tommy?”

“Oh, hi Ms. Schwartz, sorry I wasn’t really attentive in class today.”

“Are you in trouble?”

“Maybe a little.”

“Those men coming out of the principal’s office didn’t look like it’s a little trouble. They look like it’s a lot of trouble. What have you done? Tommy, you are a great guy, but even great guys get in trouble and sometimes they can’t get themselves out. Call me if I can help.”

“Ms. Schwartz, I don’t know the half of it yet. It’s a big puzzle, and there are lots of pieces.”

“Tommy, you’re shaking. Are you afraid?”

“Yes.”

“Use your fear. It will make you strong if you take control of it and not let it take control of you.”

“Thank you.”

## Code Name: Buffy and Buddy

### Chapter Four

Mom was in my room on my computer when I got home. What I forgot was that today was her day off. She works the reception desk at one of the local car dealerships and alternates weekends with one of the other women, so she has weekdays off when she works the weekends.

“Um, Mom, what are you doing?”

“I found Buffy’s profile. Buffy has friends. Angel, Willow, Watcher, and Cordelia have left frantic messages for her to contact them, but she has not responded. How was your day?”

I told her about my visit with the Air Force guys. “What other names were in her timeline that did not contact her since she disappeared?”

“I wrote them down. Here’s the list.”

I was not surprised to see Xander, Spike, Oz, Caleb and Anya as frequent contributors among the more familiar names. I was surprised that there was no Giles.

“So what do you want to do?”

“We’ll discuss the logistics with Dad when he gets home from work, but I think I need to arrange a meeting away from peeping eyes.”

“With all those spy movies Dad watches, I am sure he will have some idea.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Mom had dinner ready when dad came home. Over dinner I showed him the list of names Mom had written down and told him where she had found the list. He noticed the same names I noticed. “A little obvious don’t you think?”

“A little too obvious if you ask me,” I replied. “But it’s all we have.”

“So what’s the plan?”

The front doorbell rang. I stood. “That would probably be Chief Johnson. He knows that I can fly.” My parents stared at me. “He never said anything to us,” my mother gasped.

“I wonder how he found out,” my father said.

“Let’s ask him,” I said.

I went to the door and let Chief Johnson in. Beth Anne was with him. Mom offered them soft drinks which they accepted. We sat around the kitchen table.

My dad cut to the meat of the discussion. “How did you know Tommy could fly?”

“Little League tryouts. He hit the ball, and he was so excited he ran to first without his feet touching the ground. He did that three times. I wasn’t sure I saw what I thought I saw, so I put him in the outfield. I watched him pull a ball that should have gone over the fence into his glove. I watched that ball curve in a way it should not have curved. Scared the shit out of me to tell you the truth. I cut him from the team for his own safety.”

“Who else knows?” I asked.

“Some of the patrol officers know. We’ve seen you leave through your window and return in the middle of the night. We don’t talk about it much, but it’s there.”

“Beth Anne, how did you find out?” I asked.

“The first time we kissed you were so excited we floated off the ground. We were a couple of feet in the air, just hanging there. I thought I could deal with it, but I was afraid that one time we’d float too high and you’d forget I can’t fly and drop me.”

“I would never have hurt you on purpose,” I said.

“I know that, but accidents do happen to the best-intentioned people.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“I know, and I can’t help but think how lonely you must feel.”

“Sometimes,” I said.

“So,” Chief Johnson said. “We have a young lady to find. Tommy, tell us everything you know about her. We know what she looks like from the photographs, and we have a few details from the missing person report, but we don’t know much else. Does she have an accent? Does she walk with a limp? Did you recognize her perfume?”

“Typical Florida accent, but that’s no help because she told me she flew in from the south.”

“The missing person report is from Ft Lauderdale. That matches.”

“She had the same Case Logic camera backpack I have.”

“That’s a start. We can see how many of those backpacks were shipped to South Florida.”

“Assuming that’s where she bought it. It had a bunch of miles on it. She’s had it a long time. It could have been a gift from someone up north.”

“Still, I’ve seen your backpack, and there aren’t too many like it around.”

“What about the camera gear? Anything special?”

“Same stuff you could find in any good camera shop anywhere or online. That’s not much help.”

“Did you get close enough to smell her perfume?”

“No.”

“Not even at the pit stop?”

“No, but she had these paper wipe things. Hang on.”

I went to my room and dug out the extra packs Buffy had shoved in my hand when I used the restroom.

“She had a whole box of these,” I said when I returned.

“That’s a hospital wipe,” my mother said. “You can’t buy those in a store. They have powerful disinfectants. What would she be doing with those?”

“Her mother is a nurse,” Chief Johnson said. “It’s in the missing person report.”

We stared at the wipe hoping that somehow it would give us a clue.

As I turned the pack over in my hand, I stared at the words on the back. “Mom, do you have any like these?”

“Not exactly. I have others.”

“Could you get them? I don’t think I know how to find her, but I think I know how to call for help without running afoul of the extortionists.”

“Extortionists?” Beth Anne gasped.

“Yeah, that’s what the Air Force guys said.”

“Do you trust them?” Beth Anne asked.

“The only people I trust are sitting in this room, and as far as I know, someone has a listening device focused on that window and can hear everything we say.”

“Really?” Beth Anne exclaimed.

“I would if it were me. Mom, please get the wipes. Chief Johnson, I know you eat barbecue when you’re on the job. I’ll bet you have a bunch of wipes in your car from the barbecue place. Could you get them and perhaps a bunch from your evidence kit? Take a look around while you’re out there.”

We sat in silence until Chief Johnson returned. He stood with his back to the window. “Parabolic dish pointed at the window from a telescoping tower two blocks over.”

“Nobody says a word,” I whispered. “Game on.”

I wrote a message on a napkin. “Mom, log into my Buddy account from my computer.”

She gave me the evil eye.

“I know you can,” I wrote. “You did it this afternoon.”

She nodded.

“Wait two hours and post this on Buffy’s timeline. ‘Buddy wants to meet the Slayers and Friends at moonrise where Buffy and I crapped. Treasure hunt.’”

“That’s crude,” my mother wrote back.

“I know, but I seriously need to take a crap, and I have a long night,” I said aloud.

“Where are you going?” My mother asked aloud.

“To take a crap,” I shouted.

I shoved the several different brands of wipes into my pockets as I stood from the table. I snatched the GPS out of the drawer and some pens off the table as I walked to the bathroom. I did what I said I would do and opened the bathroom window. I pushed out the screen. I leaned out to look around. Within a minute I had collected two pairs of binoculars, two pistols, and an assault rifle. I placed these gently on the floor. I was beginning to have serious trust issues. Before I jumped through the window, I tied the laces on two massive pairs of combat boots together so that the occupants of those boots could not run without falling.

I jumped through the window and flew just over the hedgerow as fast as I could. I smacked my feet into the parabolic dish as I passed and snapped the mast in half. I turned and headed north. I needed a set of coordinates.

\* \* \* \* \*

I stood at the southern base of the Dames Point Bridge and wrote down the coordinates. I flew to Castillo San Marcos in St. Augustine and wrote down the coordinates. I flew to Disappearing Island in Ponce Inlet and wrote down the coordinates. I had hit two dozen parks and wildlife refuges by the time I needed to be at Parking Lot Thirteen on Playlinda Beach. I approached from Mosquito Lagoon coming in low over the water. I touched down lightly behind the tracking station so that the tracking station was between me and the restroom building. I had an hour to moonrise. Mom had posted the message an hour ago. It showed up on my cell phone when it was posted. Unless they were flying, it would take at least an hour for anyone to get here from my house and they would have to negotiate some closed gates along the way.

I scattered two dozen wipes on the ground between the entrance to the male restroom and the female restroom. I had written the coordinates of the places I had stopped on the wrappers. The hospital brand Buffy had used had the correct coordinates for where I would actually be. The rest were diversions. The right coordinates pointed to an observation platform, North Platform Four, in the northern part of the park seventeen miles away with no roads in between. Driving time from Parking Lot Thirteen to North Platform Four around the lagoon would be over an hour. Flying time would be much less than that.

One unfortunate characteristic of the Parking Lot Thirteen was that it had no cover. I guess I should not have been surprised when I heard the helicopter approach. Of course, the Air Force would have helicopters. But if the Air Force had the helicopter, who had the drone? I had noticed the drone earlier. A drone with infra-red cameras, which I had to assume it had, could make my life difficult. I quickly slid under the northernmost boardwalk that crossed the dunes to the beach. It was further from the bathroom building than I would have liked, but it gave me a better view than from the closer one which was more behind the building.

Given that I had at least one helicopter and one drone to deal with, part of my plan was in jeopardy. I had assumed that the only people who could fly were the people I needed to meet. The rest would drive. The advent of the helicopter meant that the people I needed to meet could be walking into a trap. Serious trust issues here.

The fact was that I did not know who were the good guys and who were the bad guys. I could not distinguish between the two by the direction in which each was shooting. It would not be that clearly defined. In spite of Chief Johnson’s assurances, the Air Force guys were just a little too smooth. They were too quick to call the people who had visited with me that morning extortionists.

The helicopter made a slow run over the site. I could see rifles in the hands of the occupants

through the open side doors. They were searching the ground. I assumed they were looking for me. The wood of the boardwalk would offer little protection if they started shooting. The drone sped through right behind the helicopter. The drone had Air Force markings, but I was not sure that meant much. The helicopter had markings of a private security service. It was not Air Force. The helicopter's occupants pointed their weapons at the drone but did not fire. The helicopter touched down on the road in front of me, and two people in combat fatigues jumped out. The helicopter throttled up and flew away. The two people ran up the hill to the tracking station and took positions on either side of the station on the ground where they could see the entrance to the restroom building. I recognized one as the woman whose rifle I had taken this morning, and the other could be the friend I saw in the picture the Captain had shown me. I stayed quiet until I was sure their attention was fixed on the restroom building in front of them and not on me well off to their right.

The sand dunes are infested with fire ants. Finding a fire ant colony only took a minute. I scooped the colony up and dumped it on the closer of the two sharpshooters. I have to give her credit for the length of time she withstood the onslaught before running screaming for the water shucking her clothes as she ran. The second ant hill took a little longer to find, but the result was the same. After the second sharpshooter ran screaming for the water, I picked up the dropped weapons and unloaded them. I tossed the ammo over the fence protecting the tracking station. I knew the drone could see me, but that was the least of my concerns. I still had to disable the two sharpshooters and deal with the helicopter. I took their clothes to the beach where the sharpshooters were trying to drown the ants in the salt water. That water must have stung on those bites. What I had done to them was seriously nasty. I felt terrible about it, but they had guns, and I did not.

I can't claim credit for what happened next, but I saw it coming, and I was ready for it. A giant wave rolled in and knocked them off their feet. While they were struggling against the undertow, I lifted them out of the water one at a time as quickly as I had stolen the rifle this morning and deposited them gasping and wheezing on the beach next to the boardwalk. I used their pants to tie their arms to the boardwalk's handrail and their shirts to bind their feet. I placed their weapons just out of reach. The ranger would find them in the morning. This was a nude beach so their lack of clothing would not be a problem, but the weapons would be.

I could not hear the helicopter as I walked back to my hiding place, but it had to be close by. The drone whizzed by close overhead, and I grabbed it. I didn't actually catch it. Well, I sort of did. I threw a large stick into the propeller. When the engine failed, I guided it to a safe landing down the road.

It was not hard to imagine the chaos that must have ensued in the control suite for that drone. I tried not to laugh, but it was hard. Even so, I felt sorry for the pilot whose drone I had abducted.

I found a hiding place on the rise inside the fence around the tracking station. The overhang blocked me from view overhead, and the building blocked me from view in three directions. The fence offered some protection, but not much.

The moon peeked over the horizon, and in my wildest dreams, I could not have imagined what happened next. A military armored personnel carrier raced down the only access road and flattened the drone where I had so neatly parked it off the road in the parking area designated for people who on a beautiful day would be using the beach. Four heavily armed men jumped out. An unmarked helicopter flew in from the north, and four men rappelled down to the ground to face the four already on the ground. An amphibious landing craft hit the beach, and four more men raced up the beach and over the boardwalk. They chased by the two women trussed to the boardwalk they ran along. The helicopter I had seen earlier landed and the two women I had seen on my porch jumped out. They immediately began shouting orders which the men ignored.

A shouting match ensued which turned into a shoving match with lots of shouting and cursing. Fists flew and soon the entire thing devolved into a scene from a bad martial arts movie. I couldn't tell who was beating up on whom and I lost track of even who had arrived with whom. It was a mess. In the fight, none of them got close enough to the restroom building to see the wipes on the ground.

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

