



## CHAPTER 1

You can't drink all day unless you start in the morning.

It was 11 A.M. on a sunny June day, and I was sitting with a cold Bud in a deep wicker chair on the back porch of my uncle Harry's big Victorian house overlooking the Great Peconic Bay. The uniform of the day—every day—was shorts and T-shirt. My bare feet were propped on the porch rail, and on my lap were a pair of old binoculars and the *New York Times* crossword puzzle.

I'd been chilling here for about three weeks, and as I'd said the last time I was borrowing Harry's summer house, the problem with doing nothing is not knowing when you're finished.

I put my beer down on a side table next to my 9mm Glock.

It was a cool day with a nice salty breeze coming off the water. I'm a city boy, but I can get used to nature in small doses. I focused my binocs on a cabin cruiser out in the bay, a few hundred feet from shore. The boat was not running, but neither was it at anchor. It was drifting, and the incoming tide and wind were taking it toward the rocky beach at the end of the sloping lawn. No one was visible in the wheelhouse or on deck. Odd. I put the Glock on my lap.

If they were coming for me, they'd probably come at night. But a surprise daytime attack was also possible. For all I knew, the hit team was already inside the empty house, in cell phone contact with the boat, which had fixed my position. My cell phone, unfortunately, was sitting on the kitchen counter, charging.

My only escape would be to grab my gun, vault over the porch rail, and sprint across the lawn to the bay, then start swimming along the shoreline, where the water was too shallow for the cabin cruiser to get close. The hit team in my kitchen would not have anticipated my dash to the sea, and

they'd be frantically trying to figure out what to do as they charged out of the house onto the porch and saw me swimming, then coming ashore and disappearing into the thick bulrushes.

And then what? Make my way to safety? Or execute a flanking maneuver to come around their rear and take them out one by one? They wouldn't expect that. But they should know that John Corey does the unexpected.

After the hit team were all dead on the back lawn, I'd flip the bird to their backup team on the boat, then go in the house and call the police and the town dump. Why the dump? Because, as we used to say in the NYPD: A single death is a tragedy; multiple deaths are a sanitation problem.

Clearly, I was going nuts. In fact, people often ask me, "Are you crazy?" I was glad there was still some doubt.

Anyway, as I said, I'm John Corey, former NYPD Homicide detective. After I left the job on a line-of-duty three-quarter disability—the result of three bullet wounds—I took a job as a contract agent with the Federal Anti-Terrorist Task Force. I left the ATTF under unusual circumstances and landed another Federal gig, this one with the Diplomatic Surveillance Group, which terminated last month—also under unusual circumstances. I was also once an adjunct professor at JJC—John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan. Now I am NYU—New York Unemployed.

I put my Glock back on the side table, took a swig of beer, and glanced at the newspaper on my lap. Today was June 21, the summer solstice and the longest day of the year. The sun was still in the eastern sky and the migrating birds were mostly settled in, as were the odd ducks from the city who had weekend homes around here.

I noticed the cabin cruiser was now at anchor, and two couples were fishing. That's what assassins do before they strike.

I'm not totally nuts, by the way, or unreasonably paranoid. I have acquired a number of enemies over the years, including my former FBI bosses in the ATTF, and also my former colleagues in the CIA. Most recently, I have pissed off my superiors in the Diplomatic Surveillance Group. Going way back, I guess I also pissed off some of my NYPD bosses. But I didn't think any of those people actually wanted me dead . . . well, maybe the CIA did. I know too much.

Aside from my former colleagues, I have some real enemies, starting with the perps who I'd put behind bars in my NYPD days. Then there were the Islamic terrorists whose pals I had capped or captured when I was with ATTF. Those A-holes definitely wanted my head separated from my body. But perps and terrorists are mostly stupid, and I didn't lose any sleep worrying about them. The real pros were the guys I tangled with when I was with the Diplomatic Surveillance Group—the guys from SVR, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, the equivalent of our CIA, and the successors of the Soviet KGB. Those bastards are tough and they're good at what they do. And what they do is kill people. Which a few of them tried to do to yours truly. I'm still here. They're not. The SVR would like to settle that score. And I'd like to see them try it.

Also on my enemies list are two unknown gentlemen who pumped fourteen or fifteen rounds at me on West 102nd Street seven years ago, when I was an NYPD detective working a homicide case. Those myopic A-holes managed only three hits at thirty feet and would not have qualified at the Police Academy pistol range. Not that I'm complaining. Anyway, I spent a month at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital and a few weeks at my Manhattan condo before I accepted Uncle Harry's kind offer to convalesce here at his waterfront summer house, which he rarely uses. And here I am again, not convalescing this time but decompressing, which is a lot better than decomposing.

In the category of my frenemies are my ex-wife, Robin, and my future ex-wife, Kate Mayfield.

Robin, a successful criminal defense attorney, came to visit me when I was at Columbia-Pres, even though we were then separated. She once stepped on my oxygen hose, but I'm sure that was an accident. The second time I'm not so sure. FYI, Robin has reclaimed her maiden name, which is Paine, and which is so her. Robin has never remarried, but every time I run into her in New York, she has a new guy, making me think she's had more fresh mounts than a Pony Express rider.

As for FBI Special Agent Kate Mayfield, my estranged wife, I haven't seen her since last October, when she transferred from the Anti-Terrorist Task Force office at 26 Federal Plaza in New York to FBI Headquarters in DC. But we keep in touch by text and e-mail, and even phone now and then.

Neither of us has actually filed for divorce, meaning, I guess, that a reconciliation is possible, though not probable, given that she's probably fucking Tom Walsh, our former FBI boss at ATTF, who has also conveniently transferred to DC.

I should have had Walsh brought up on misconduct charges, but that would have hurt Kate's career, so I didn't. I will, however, settle with Mr. Walsh at the first opportunity. Or should I thank him?

Also regarding my love life, there is Tess Faraday, who was my partner when I was working what turned out to be my last assignment with the Diplomatic Surveillance Group: the case of the killer Russians. Tess, who was undercover for State Department Intel, got under the covers for John Corey, but unfortunately, our relationship has transitioned from romantic to platonic. Not sure how that happened, but it happens, though she sometimes hints that benefits are still available if I were divorced or in the process thereof. Meanwhile, I haven't had sex in so long I can't remember who brings the handcuffs.

I worked on the *Times* crossword awhile—a seven-letter word starting with “u” that means ointment . . . “Up yours”? No, “unguent.” I finished my beer and contemplated lunch. Or did I just drink lunch?

I looked south, out at the bay, sparkling in the sunlight. Uncle Harry's summer house is located in the hamlet of Mattituck, Town of Southold, which is on the North Fork of Long Island, about a hundred road miles east of Manhattan. Across the bay is the South Fork, the trendy Hamptons, populated every summer by A-listers, many of whom are actually A-holes. Here on the North Fork, the full-time residents are fairly normal people—farmers, fishermen, butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers. Also, in recent years, vineyards have sprung up on what were once potato farms. The wineries attract tourists who like to talk about wine. I mean, do I talk about beer? It's beer. Drink it and shut up.

Anyway, property values have skyrocketed here, so Uncle Harry's house and land are worth about a million bucks. Harry had actually sold this place after my convalescent stay here, but the deal fell through, and he took that as a sign that he should keep the house. Good move. It's now worth double what it was then. He keeps offering to sell it to me, like I have a million bucks. He wants to “keep it in the family.” Wrong family, Harry.

Harry lives in the city, Upper East Side, not far from my condo. If you ask him what he does for a living, he says, "I'm in organized crime," then adds, "Wall Street." Gets a laugh every time.

When I was a kid, Uncle Harry, who is my mother's brother, and Harry's late wife, June, would invite his poor city relatives out here for two weeks every summer—me, my parents, and my brother and sister. This was a nice break from our tenement on the Lower East Side. I have a lot of good memories here, and lots of great photos of those summers with my cousins, Harry Jr. and Barbara. As for me buying this place, I recall what the local Southold police chief, Sylvester Maxwell, once advised: "If it flies, floats, or fucks, rent it."

Max, as he's called by his friends, gave me this good advice right here on this back porch when I was convalescing from my gunshot wounds. He'd stopped by to see if the legendary John Corey was interested in helping him on a double homicide that had just landed in his lap. I wasn't. But the victims were Tom and Judy Gordon, an attractive married couple who I knew and liked. The Gordons were PhDs, biologists who worked at nearby Plum Island, a.k.a. Anthrax Island, where the Department of Agriculture does research on animal diseases. It's also a place where people say that biological warfare research is on the secret agenda. So that got my attention.

Anyway, I had agreed to go with Chief Maxwell to the Gordons' house, which was the scene of the crime. And before I knew it, I was up to my Glock in some strange and dangerous stuff. No good deed goes unpunished. But, on the plus side, the Plum Island case gave me the opportunity to meet two nice women—Emma Whitestone, a local girl, and Detective Beth Penrose of the Suffolk County Homicide Squad. But that's another story. A complicated story.

Flash-forward seven years and Uncle Harry had just informed me that he'd rented this house to another Wall Street guy and his wife for July and August—for sixty large. I would have liked to stay for the summer, but I couldn't match that offer, so it was time to move on. Maybe back to my condo on East 72nd. Summer in the city.

Now I had to make an important decision. Should I get up and grab another beer? Or sit here until I have to pee?

The decision was made for me when I heard a noise through the open kitchen window behind me. I grabbed my Glock as I stood and faced the door, my butt on the porch rail in case I had to do a backflip into the rosebushes and come up firing. My adrenaline pump kicked in and I was ready for action.

