



LOVE  HONOR

WORD OF HONOR



HALLEE BRIDGEMAN

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LOVE  HONOR
BOOK 2

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Glossary of Military Terms and Acronyms

BAU: Behavior Analysis Unit (FBI)

CASH: combat support hospital

CHU: containerized housing unit (a small, climate-controlled trailer)

DHS: Department of Homeland Security

DOD: Department of Defense

EPX: a type of high-performance plastic explosive

HQ: headquarters

HRT: hostage rescue tactics

MIKE: minute

MRE: meal ready to eat

NATO: The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NSA: National Security Agency

ODA: Operational Detachment Alpha (aka “A-Team”)

PT: physical training

RDX: the explosive agent in some plastic explosives and C-4

RECON: reconnaissance

Word of Honor

ROGER: understood and acknowledged

RP: recovery point

SF: Special Forces

WILCO: will comply

CHAPTER



ONE

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

MAY 27

Even in the late-spring night with the hint of light still in the sky, the headlights did little to cut through the fog. Lynda Culter used a penlight to try to read the paper map, something she hadn't had to do since field-training exercises at Quantico. The mobile signal had disappeared about two miles back, so the GPS offered no help.

"You turned the wrong way back there," she said.

"Nope. Turned right like you said," her partner, Jack, said.

"No, I said turn left. You asked left, and I confirmed."

"With the word 'right!'" Jack pulled over to the side of the mountain road. "Give me that," he said as he snatched the map out of her hands.

Frustrated, she tossed the penlight at him. It hit the steering wheel and bounced, dinging him above his right eye.

She slapped her hand over her mouth. “Jack!” she said on a breath. “I’m so sorry.”

He hit the overhead light, then rubbed his eyebrow and turned to glare at her. Soon, though, the glare turned to mirth, and he beckoned her with the crook of his finger. “Come here,” he said.

She slipped her seat belt off and shifted her body.

“Kiss it better.”

“Jack!” she said again, laughing, then pressed her lips to his eyebrow. She breathed in the familiar scent of his after-shave and then sat back, running her fingers through his soft brown hair. “All better?”

“For now.” He reached down and retrieved the penlight from the floorboard, then held it out to her. “I should keep this. Spoils of war and all.”

With a grin, she took it from him. She admired his profile as he studied the map. He had a thin face with a long nose, and his sharp cheekbones were offset with a thin beard. His features had helped him blend in during the five years he worked in deep cover with the Russian mafia. He came to her FBI branch in Anchorage just months after finishing his assignment. It didn’t take her long to fall head over heels for the charismatic, charming man from Philadelphia. So far, they’d kept their relationship quiet. Neither one of them wanted to be separated. Jack had convinced her to wait until after this weekend to make it official.

She glanced at her phone. She’d just put the picture on her lock screen of the two of them in a café that afternoon. In a clearly intimate pose, they leaned against each other, heads touching. Her dark auburn hair caught the lights of

the restaurant, highlighting her lighter red streaks, making her brown eyes shine. His smile brought the dimples out in his cheeks. They looked happy.

“Too bad that warrant came through,” she said, thinking of the Memorial Day weekend in front of them. “Who knew a judge would sign a warrant tonight?”

She worked as an analyst, so serving warrants didn’t typically fall under her purview. However, she and Jack had been nearby, about to check in to a mountain retreat. Waiting for another agent to come from Anchorage would have taken a couple more hours out of their weekend.

“I told you to wait until Tuesday to submit it.” He set the map on the seat between them. “I’m going back,” he said, putting the car in reverse.

“Probably wise,” she replied, giving a sweet smile. “Since you made a wrong turn.”

He turned the light off, but not before she saw the clench of his jaw a split second before he smiled. After backtracking to the intersection, he made the correct turn and they continued forward about four miles before they saw the marker that indicated the turn onto the dirt road.

As Jack slowly navigated the terrain to avoid kicking up dust, she said, “I wonder if we should have arranged for backup. No signal out here.”

“These people aren’t killers,” he said. “They’re just protesting the oil pipeline. The threat they made isn’t even proven.”

“Allegedly.” She glanced at her phone again as if willing the signal to give her just one bar, enough to complete a call.

Jack slowed the car down and turned off the headlights. They came around a corner and saw the shadow of a house

through the fog. Light glowed from two windows. An all-terrain vehicle sat parked next to two pickup trucks. Jack slowly came to a stop, then killed the engine. Lynda glanced at her watch. It was already ten thirty. They didn't have a lot of daylight left.

They got out of the car and met at the trunk. The temperature had dropped into the midforties. It felt good to put on their FBI ballistic vests and jackets. Jack slipped on his cap and held hers out. She shook her head, then pulled her hair back into a ponytail. She hated anything on her head. Jack tossed it back into the trunk, then quietly closed it. Lynda made sure her 9mm pistol had a full magazine. She bent and secured her knife in her ankle sheath.

As they walked toward the house, Lynda mentally prepared herself for a long night ahead. After they apprehended the leader of this organization, they would have to question him. Once he was in custody, they had only twenty-four hours before they had to bring formal charges. So much for the romantic weekend. Of course, even after twenty-four hours, they could still get a day or two at the spa.

"I probably should call for backup," Jack said, pulling out his phone.

"Wise." She didn't add "like I said," because he wouldn't find that funny. She bit her lip to stop herself from smiling.

Stepping carefully, they walked up onto the wooden porch. Lynda ducked under the window to the other side, and they both peeked through the window. She could make out two men sitting at a table—a blond man and a black-haired man. She held up two fingers, and Jack nodded. He stayed where he could see them while she knocked on the door. He lifted his chin in her direction, communicating

that someone inside was approaching the door. She stepped back slightly.

The door opened, and the tall blond man who had sat at the head of the table asked, “May I help you?”

Lynda pulled her leather wallet out and flashed her gold badge and ID. “FBI. We’re looking for Damien Cisco.”

His face relaxed, and he smiled. “Ah, I figured you must be lost. This is not exactly the place where we normally have people come to the door.” He came out onto the porch, and she moved back to keep an arm’s distance away from him. “Damien lives on down the road about a quarter mile.” He took a step and lifted his arm northward. Lynda took another step back and looked in the direction he pointed. “His driveway is hard to see.”

Before she could reply, pain exploded in her left ear. Her vision closed down to a pinpoint of light, then nothing at all.



Lynda’s head pounded. Nausea rolled in her stomach. Why did she feel so terrible? She tried to roll over, to get more comfortable, but couldn’t move her arms. What in the world? Some of the fog lifted, and she realized she wasn’t in her bed. Instead, she sat on a hard chair.

In little flashes, she started to remember. Driving up to the house. Asking the man who answered the door about Damien Cisco. The flash of pain. Then . . . nothing. Her heart beat faster. Sweat beaded on her upper lip. With a rush of adrenaline, she pushed the grogginess to the background and every sense heightened. What to do now?

She kept her eyes closed and tried to assess anything that she could in her environment. The smell of damp earth in

the cold air assaulted her nostrils. Something sharp and unyielding cut into the delicate skin of her wrists, keeping her hands clasped behind her. Maybe a zip tie? Her shoulders ached from the position of her arms. Shuffling noises came from her left, the click of a switch a split second before a flood of heat. Behind her eyelids, she could see a bright light.

Footsteps. Low voices coming from her right.

Movement behind her, against her.

Her arms were tied to someone else. Jack? It must be Jack. Relief almost made her cry out. She wasn't alone. Praying desperately for courage and wisdom, she tried to listen to the low voices, tried to make out words. Jack started struggling, making her bindings dig deeper into her wrists. She fought back the discomfort and worked against the tight restraints to turn her hand, pressing her palm against his. He stilled at her touch.

Digging into her reserves for courage she didn't know for certain she possessed, she finally lifted her head and opened her eyes. It looked like they sat in the middle of a barn. She could see bales of hay in a loft, wooden beams, a concrete floor. The doors stood slightly open to the dark night outside. How long had she been out?

"Well, that took a while. I was starting to get bored."

The man who had opened the house door sat in front of her. He smiled. "I wonder how many training procedures you ignored tonight. No backup, turning your back on the men in my house. Tsk, tsk, tsk. It seems like the Federal Bureau of Investigation should train their agents better than that."

"You're wrong about the backup," she said. "We called them." She could hear movement behind her but kept her eyes on him. "Damien Cisco, I presume?"

He raised an eyebrow. “So you know my name. You get the prize.” He gestured at the tall black-haired man who had come into her line of sight and carried a camera on a tripod. She had seen him inside the house. “You’re going to read a statement from Green War.” He walked over to the wall and picked up a foam board leaning against it. Words were written on it in black marker, but from this distance she couldn’t tell what they said.

Jack’s muscles bunched behind her. He must have just come awake. He gave a small moan, and then his body stiffened.

Cisco walked around to face him. “Well, Agent Haynes. Good to see you. I wondered if maybe Antoine had hit you too hard.”

“This is a mistake,” Jack said, his voice hoarse. “You need to let us go right now.”

He chuckled. “I love how the fascist agent of our government just hands down orders to private citizens as if they’re going to be obeyed.” The humor left his voice. “Right now, you do what I say. I don’t do what you say. You might do well to remember that.”

“We have backup on the way. I called them before you attacked us.”

“Yeah. There’s no signal out here and you know it.” Cisco walked back into Lynda’s line of sight. She tilted her head to look up at him. “You’re going to read this statement on behalf of Green War.”

“We are federal agents. You need to let us go.” She tried to keep the fear out of her voice. “This will only end badly for you.”

He leaned down and put his nose close enough to hers

that she could feel his breath. “You really need to quit worrying about my well-being and start worrying about you.”

Terror flowed through her limbs. She could barely breathe. Nausea swirled in her stomach. Her wrists hurt and her shoulders ached, and to her humiliation, her eyes filled with tears. She looked down, hoping Cisco wouldn’t see her distress.

“Leave her alone!” The chair rocked as Jack struggled against his restraints.

She wanted to cry out to him to stop moving because of the pain. To her relief, Cisco moved out of her sight and said to Jack, “Fine. Let’s focus on you, Special Agent Jackson Haynes of the Fascist Bureau of Investigation.”

A man with wire-framed glasses that shone against his dark skin came from behind her. She didn’t recognize him from the house. He picked up the light stand next to her and moved it. Suddenly, the light no longer blinded her, the heat no longer made her feel like she couldn’t breathe. She closed her eyes, a hated tear slipping down her cheek, and tried to figure out what to do next.

“Now, I have a statement here that you’re going to read,” Cisco said to Jack. “Only, don’t call yourself Lynda Culter, because that would be embarrassing. Just replace that with Jackson where appropriate.”

“Jack,” she said. “Don’t—”

He leaned back as if communicating with her, telling her he could handle it. “Fine. I’ll read your statement.”

“Jack!” she said again.

“Shut up, Lynda.”

“Yeah, Lynda, shut up or I’ll shut you up,” Cisco said.

She looked all around, desperately searching for . . . what?

She sat with her hands tied behind her. So far, she'd identified three men in this room besides Jack. What did she think she could possibly do?

The light when cast onto Jack created a strange contorted shadow of the two of them tied to the chairs. "I am Jack Haynes, an agent of the United States government. I'm here under that authority, and you can all bite my—"

The sound of a hard hit and cracking bones came a split second before Jack's howl of pain. Lynda sobbed, wishing she could see what was happening.

"You really shouldn't improvise," Cisco said. "Shall we go again? You have another kneecap."

Lynda thought she had felt fear before, but it didn't compare to what she felt now. When Jack responded with an expletive and they hit him again, little white dots appeared in front of her eyes and her mouth went completely dry. Then she heard a splash, smelled the undeniable odor of gasoline. Some of it landed against the back of her hand. When she realized they'd doused Jack with gasoline, she started struggling against the restraints, ignoring the cutting pain in her wrists.

"Read the statement. Word for word."

Another expletive from Jack brought a scuffle behind her.

"No! Not in here," Cisco said.

Something cold and metal bit against her skin seconds before her hands fell free. With relief, she brought them forward, rubbing her wrists one at a time. The other two men dragged Jack past her line of sight.

He looked at her as they went by. "Don't give in, Lynda!" he yelled.

They went through a door into another room. Cisco

followed. He paused near the doorway and picked up the shotgun leaning against the wall. The men who carried Jack threw him to the ground. He tried to get up but fell again, likely from his busted kneecap.

Cisco stood in front of the open door and lifted his gun. “You’re going to read a statement on behalf of Green War.”

“Make me.”

Lynda struggled, but they had secured her ankles to the chair. Sobbing, she bent over, fumbling to access the knife sheathed against her ankle. She could barely feel her numb fingers, and she couldn’t lift her pants leg because of the zip tie securing it. “Jack!”

Cisco chambered a round in the shotgun. Somehow, she could hear the sound through the roaring in her ears. “Last chance. You will read a statement on behalf of Green War.”

“Here’s my statement, you dirty—”

The room exploded with the sound of the shotgun blast. Lynda froze, unable to believe what had just happened. Cisco turned back toward her. Jack lay just outside the door, unmoving. She could see only his legs and feet. One of the other men lit a match, fired up a hand-rolled cigarette, and tossed the match on Jack. His body went up in flames.

A sound came from Lynda—a scream, a yell, a guttural moan.

Cisco strode across the room toward her, aiming the shotgun at her face. He stopped close enough that she could see the wild look in his eyes. “Now, Agent Culter. Let’s have a conversation.”

Red-and-white lights strobed from her right. Through the open barn door, she spotted police cars coming their way. A sob of relief had her close her eyes and bow her head. She

didn't know if the man would kill her before help arrived, but at least she and Jack wouldn't die out here where no one would know what had happened to them.

A sharp whistle from the black-haired man made everyone scramble. A thick, bound stack of papers landed at her feet.

"That's our manifesto," Cisco said. "Goodbye for now, Agent Lynda Culter. We'll meet again."

As two police cars pulled into the yard, a door slammed behind her. Sobs tore through her, feeling like they'd rip her body in half. The smell of gasoline-laced smoke filled her nose, burned her eyes, became all she could taste.

"Jack!" she screamed.