

“Packed with intense, hard-hitting action, *Out for Blood* reaffirms Ryan Steck’s prowess in the thriller genre. . . . This one’s coming in hot!”

— JACK CARR —

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

RYAN STECK OUT FOR BLOOD

A MATTHEW REDD THRILLER



Praise for Ryan Steck

Set in Montana's breathtaking Big Sky Country and packed with intense, hard-hitting action, *Out for Blood* reaffirms Ryan Steck's prowess in the thriller genre, demonstrating once again why his character, former Marine Raider Matthew Redd, is a force to be reckoned with. If you're looking for action, this one's coming in hot!

JACK CARR, former Navy SEAL sniper and #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the James Reece Terminal List series

Matthew Redd, introduced in Ryan Steck's debut novel *Fields of Fire*, is back and ready for trouble. Redd, a former Marine Raider turned Montana rancher, takes on a gang of outlaw bikers where the buffalo roam. The Wild West has never been wilder. Intense, brutal, and faster on the draw than a gunslinger; *Lethal Range* delivers a fresh take on your grandpa's Western.

NELSON DEMILLE, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Maze*

Intense, riveting, and ultimately wild escapist fun, *Lethal Range* is a powerful modern Western. It's *Sons of Anarchy* crashing into *Yellowstone*. Steck is a talented cinematic writer and has created a character in Matthew Redd that is both larger than life and remarkably relatable. Buy this book!

DON WINSLOW, #1 bestselling author of *The Force* and *The Border*

A white-knuckle ride from start to finish, *Lethal Range* takes off with one of the most intense scenes I've ever read, then builds to a thunderous crescendo. It's one of this summer's hottest thrillers. Like the best kind of roller coaster, the tension rises to an incredible climax.

T. J. NEWMAN, two-time *New York Times* bestselling author of *Falling* and *Drowning: The Rescue of Flight 1421*

Ryan Steck's latest *Lethal Range* is a high-stakes thriller that starts at a run and races faster with every flip of the page. The mix of spy tradecraft, gutsy action, and nonstop mayhem is what I love in a book. Pair that up with the return of Matthew Redd, a hero as ballsy as Jack Ryan and as street-smart as Jack Reacher, what's not to love? I can't wait to see what trouble Redd must tackle next!

JAMES ROLLINS, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Kingdom of Bones*

Matthew Redd is a hero many readers will find comfortingly familiar while refreshingly different, and Steck wields him with precision in *Lethal Range*—a spectacular follow-up to his stellar debut. If you're a skeptic who thinks Ryan Steck can only write *about* thrillers, you're missing out on one of the hottest new authors in the genre. You'll be far from disappointed in this installment and eager for more.

JACK STEWART, author of *Unknown Rider*

[*Lethal Range*] contains all the danger, treachery, and intrigue that a thriller reader could hope for. It's a gritty tale, with tangled threads, full of action and drama. More than enough angst and adventure to keep you reading long into the night.

STEVE BERRY, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Kingdom*

Steck and Redd are back! Crisply written and beautifully researched, *Lethal Range* rips the reader from Majorca to Big Sky Country. Packed with twists and cliff-hangers, this classic thriller from world-class thriller expert The Real Book Spy roars like a beast.

GREGG HURWITZ, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Orphan*

Full of fists and fury, Ryan Steck's *Lethal Range* is a masterfully plotted battle of good versus evil. With unforgettable characters, lightning pace, and a story frighteningly similar to today's headlines, this book entertains and educates. If you like C. J. Box or Vince Flynn, you will *love* this book!

LARRY LOFTIS, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Watchmaker's Daughter*

OUT FOR BLOOD



**RYAN
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A MATTHEW REDD THRILLER



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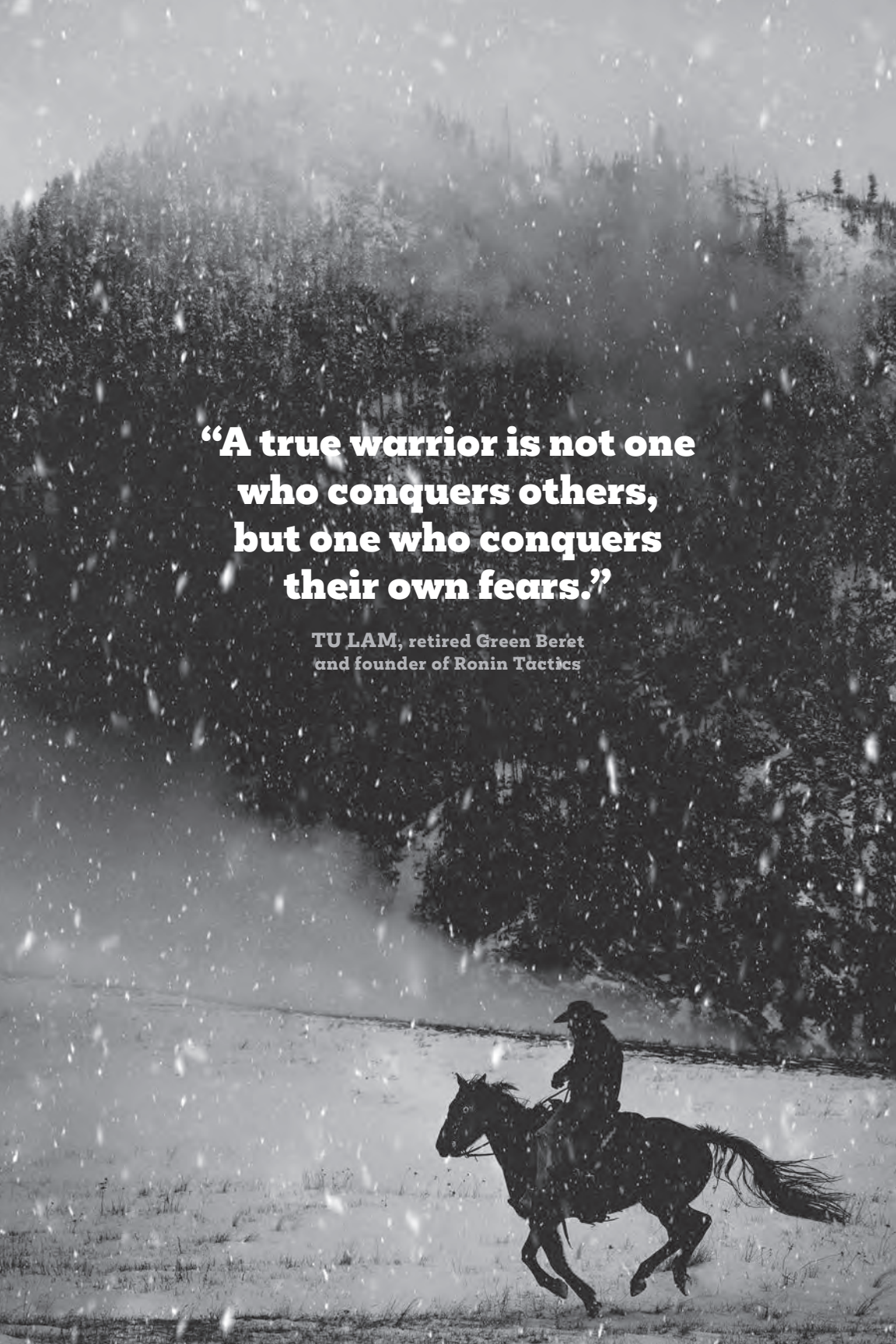
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*For my mother, Rhonda Steck,
who I love beyond words. You have no idea
just how proud I am to be your son, Mom.
Thank you . . . for everything.*



**“A true warrior is not one
who conquers others,
but one who conquers
their own fears.”**

TU LAM, retired Green Beret
and founder of Ronin Tactics

Prologue

MONTANA

Winters in Montana can be deadly, but it wasn't the cold that was killing Matthew Redd.

Only eighteen hours earlier, one of the worst storms the state had ever seen had begun sweeping across Big Sky Country. Forecasts predicted two feet of snow, subzero temperatures, and winds in excess of fifty miles per hour. When he first heard about the forthcoming blizzard, Redd had been worried about practical things, like making sure they had enough gas for the generator, plenty of bottled water in case the pump went out or a pipe burst, and enough food and baby formula in case they were stuck at the ranch for a few days.

Now he was on his back, lying in eighteen inches of fresh powder, bleeding profusely, and only minutes away from certain death.

With the little energy he had left, Redd tipped his head up and turned it slightly to the side. The snow around him was stained a dark shade of crimson. The blood had cooled enough that the falling flakes had ceased melting away upon contact. Evidently, the spreading pool was no longer being refreshed from the source. For a moment, he thought maybe the bleeding had slowed, perhaps due to the frigid temperatures slowing the beating of his heart.

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That, he thought, or I'm almost out of blood.

His eyes grew heavy, and Redd fought to keep them open.

He was no longer cold. That wave had already come and passed. Now Redd was numb. Numb to the bone-chilling temperatures. Numb to the wetness of the snow melting under him. Numb to the pain of the knife wounds that had spilled his blood.

Snow was still falling at a rate of several inches per hour. Laying his head back down, Redd looked to the sky. All around him, snowflakes fell from the heavens—brilliant ice crystals, no two the same. It was beautiful, he thought. Peaceful, even.

He could feel the life draining out of him, and in his final moments, his thoughts turned to his wife and son.

Emily . . . Junior . . .

They were safe, and that's all that mattered. But Redd found himself wishing he could hold them one last time. Tell them he loved them.

Moments after he got the phone call that kicked off the chain of events leading to him clinging to life on the mountain, he'd promised Emily that he'd come back to her.

I'm sorry, Em. I'm so sorry . . .

Through the howling wind, Redd heard voices. But he knew the men after him weren't coming to rescue him. Quite the opposite.

They were there to finish the job.

Too injured to move from the spot he'd collapsed into, Redd accepted his fate. And he had no regrets. From a hard childhood in Michigan, to the death of his mother, to then growing up on the ranch in Montana with his adopted father, Jim Bob Thompson, before joining the Marines, Redd, against the odds, had made something of himself. There had been heartache along the way—losing his whole team during an ambush, losing Jim Bob, and almost losing his ranch. But Redd had had a full life, far more than he'd ever expected. It wasn't easy, and ranching was hard work, but he had a wife he adored who loved him back and a son who was his whole world.

The voices grew louder.

This is going to be hard on Junior, he thought.

"Over here!" someone shouted. "We've got him now!"

Please, Redd prayed, keep my family safe.

He tried to look at the man coming to finish the job, but dark circles filled his vision. Almost like a smoky haze, the circumference of clarity getting smaller by the second. He sensed the man's presence now more than he saw him. He was close.

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“Found him!” the voice called to someone else. “He might already be dead.”

“Make sure of it,” said another voice. This one deeper than the first.

Redd blinked heavily, fighting to open his eyes one last time. He could see the outline of both men now, one holding a gun that was pointed at his head.

This is it, he told himself.

Redd was determined to look his killer in the eyes, but he couldn't find them. Then he realized the man with the gun had turned away and was facing the opposite direction, focused on another target.

On what?

Redd couldn't see anything.

The haze grew thicker. His eyelids were heavier than ever. He squinted, trying to focus. The gunman was now aiming at something else. Redd looked past him.

There!

He caught sight of something but couldn't tell what it was. Redd squinted again but couldn't make out the figure. It looked like a black blob moving through the snow. It was coming toward him. No, toward the man with the gun. And it was moving fast.

Realizing what was about to happen, Redd felt a thin smile form across his face.

A moment later, everything went dark.

ONE

WELLINGTON, MONTANA TWELVE HOURS EARLIER

As he closed the rear cargo door of the Chevy Tahoe, Matthew Redd caught a glimpse of his reflection in the window and barely recognized himself.

It wasn't anything physical. Save for a scattering of snowflakes in his dark hair and beard, giving him a salt-and-pepper look that aged him beyond his twenty-eight years, his appearance mostly matched his mental image of himself. No, the difference was something else, something much harder to pin down. Something under the skin.

Then his gaze dropped to the foil-wrapped baking dish he held in both hands, and he realized what it was.

I'm not the man I used to be.

This was not exactly news to Redd. In the last two years, his sense of who he was and what he wanted out of life had undergone a tectonic shift. He was no longer *just* Matthew Redd, former Marine Raider. Not anymore. He was Matthew Redd, husband of Emily, father of Matthew Jr., owner and operator of Thompson Ranch. That was how he thought of himself now, and it didn't bother him one bit.

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Honestly, he didn't miss his former life.

"Hey, cowboy, are you going to bring that ham in here sometime today?" Emily said playfully.

Redd looked away from his reflection and grinned back at the vision of beauty presently leaning out the door of the twenty-two-foot travel trailer that was, for the time being at least, home sweet home.

"Coming now."

"What you thinking about over there, Matty Redd?"

Emily could always read him. And in a lot of ways, she knew him better than he knew himself. When nobody else could get through to him—Redd had a notorious stubborn streak that hadn't cooled much as he approached his thirties—Emily could.

"Uh," said Redd, embarrassed he'd been caught looking at himself, "nothing."

"Just get it in here before it gets cold." As if to emphasize the point, she swiped a hand in front of her face, sweeping away the snowflakes that were drifting lazily down from the silver-gray sky.

It had been threatening to snow for the better part of a week, but that was nothing special in Big Sky Country.

Still, according to the Weather Channel, a snowstorm this deep into winter was said to be "record-breaking" in terms of volume and intensity. A note from the governor, courtesy of the statewide messaging system, advised everyone to stay put, as traveling would be "near impossible." Power outages were likely too. But they were ready for it, or as ready as one could be. Redd had made all the necessary preparations. Now it was a waiting game, with only a brief window before most of the state would grind to a halt.

Thankfully, the full fury of the storm wasn't supposed to hit until later that evening, but the snowfall seemed to have picked up just since they'd gotten back from Emily's parents' house. And it was already sticking.

Getting used to winter again had been a challenge. Redd remembered growing up with Montana winters, which sometimes started in October and could last until May, but when he'd gone off to join the Marines at eighteen, he'd lost the tempo of the seasons. He had been stationed in perpetually sunny Southern California, and even though deployments and training cycles sometimes took him to places where the temperatures dropped precipitously in winter, he had only ever looked at the weather as a challenge to be overcome in the moment. Here, with a ranch to run and cattle to tend, it was just a fact of life.

He hurried over to the trailer door, balancing the baking dish in one hand while he worked the doorknob. As the door swung open, a dark shape—specifically a

dark shape that was 130 pounds of purebred juvenile rottweiler—erupted from the trailer like a torpedo blasting out of a launch tube and shot past him, barely avoiding a collision.

“Whoa there, buddy,” he shouted over his shoulder. “Slow it down. This is a residential zone.”

The dog, who was now zipping back and forth across the open ground, seemed not to have heard.

Forgot one, he thought. Matthew Redd, Rubble’s human.

Rubble was the most recent member of the family, acquired after the untimely death of his former owner, Redd’s attorney and friend, Duke Blanton. Blanton had been savagely murdered by members of an outlaw biker gang. The same gang had menaced Redd and his family, and ultimately burned down the ranch house where Redd had not only grown up but begun his new life with Emily, which was why they were now living in an old travel trailer.

As tragic as it was, losing the house marked the final transition between the old Matthew Redd and the new one. Prior to that, he’d been living a divided life—keeping one foot in the world of special operations by working as an FBI contractor, leading a paramilitary “fly team” on a worldwide search for an international terrorist, while still trying to have that “normal” life with Emily and Junior.

The fire itself hadn’t been a wake-up call or anything like that. It had simply coincided with the successful completion of his mission for the FBI, freeing him up to focus on the things that he now realized mattered the most to him.

Building a new house was of course the first step on that path. Redd had already begun the process of clearing the site, and with the first part of the insurance settlement in hand, he hoped to be in their new home before the end of summer. Until then, they would just have to put up with living in close quarters.

He stepped inside and placed the dish on the tiny counter between the tiny sink and the even smaller two-burner stove. Emily was setting the table, crowding the place settings around an assortment of foil-covered pots and pans that contained various side dishes to accompany the ten-pound spiral-sliced ham Redd had just brought in.

Emily had spent the better part of the day preparing the meal, which they would soon be sharing with their friends Mikey and Elizabeth Derhammer. Rather than attempt such an undertaking in the trailer’s woefully inadequate kitchen space, she had done the work at her parents’ house, in a more suitable kitchen. Redd still wasn’t clear on why they couldn’t just take the prepared meal

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over to the Derhammers' home, where there was an actual dining room, and he'd said as much when Emily proposed the idea of having Mikey and Liz out to the ranch for dinner.

"Because, Matty, having them over for dinner at their house wouldn't make much sense, would it?"

"It makes more sense than trying to cram four adults and two babies into this shoebox," Redd had replied.

Emily shook her head. "It's our turn to host dinner. Liz and Mikey have had us over more times than I can count."

That was certainly true. Since the fire . . . since they had lost almost every personal possession, they had eaten more meals at the Derhammers' place or with Emily's parents, Elijah and Dora Lawrence, than they had at home. So Redd could understand why Emily might feel compelled to repay their kindness. For his part, he treasured their friendship with the Derhammers. He just couldn't quite wrap his head around the symbolic significance of hosting the meal inside their little temporary abode.

Outside the trailer, Rubble's insistent barking signaled that something had changed. It could have been anything from a racoon trying to sneak up on the garbage can to one of the cattle wandering too close to the fence, but Redd was pretty sure he knew what it was. He tugged aside the curtain over the little window in the door and looked out to see Mikey Derhammer's Billet Silver Dodge Ram 3500 dually rolling up the drive. It was, according to Mikey, "more tank than truck." Redd didn't disagree.

As boys, Redd and Mikey had been the best of friends. Now they were more like brothers, and Redd considered him family. Liz too.

Working the ranch with his adoptive father, J. B. Thompson, hadn't left a lot of time for extracurricular activities. As a result, Redd had cultivated few childhood friends. Nevertheless, two people had managed to break through his self-imposed social shield—Emily Lawrence, his first and only love, and Mikey.

When J. B. had been badly injured in a fall, Redd had secretly blamed himself. Maybe if he hadn't been wasting time with his friends, J. B. wouldn't have gotten hurt in the first place. To atone for this perceived failing, he'd dropped out of high school and out of his friends' lives and managed the ranch single-handedly until J. B.'s recovery was complete.

J. B. hadn't been able to stop him from quitting school, but he had insisted that Redd get his GED, a necessary step if Redd was going to realize his lifelong dream of enlisting in the Marines. When Redd had told him that he was done

with that dream and that he was going to stay and work the ranch, J. B.—a former Marine himself—had put his foot down.

“I can’t make you take the oath,” he’d told Redd. “But don’t you use me as an excuse.”

J. B.’s particular brand of tough love and encouragement was exactly the kick in the pants Redd had needed. The only problem was that in leaving Montana he’d permanently closed the door on his relationships with Emily and Mikey. Or at least it had seemed that way at the time.

Nearly two years prior, when J. B.’s death had brought him back to Stillwater County and the ranch just outside the little town of Wellington, he’d been both surprised and humbled to discover that those relationships had not died, but merely gone fallow. It had taken a little effort to rekindle his romance with Emily, a fiercely independent and successful nurse practitioner working at the county health clinic, but with Mikey, it was like not a single day had passed.

Matthew Redd, friend of Mikey.

“They’re here,” Redd called out.

“Rubble beat you to it,” retorted Emily. “Don’t shout. You’ll wake Matty.”

He looked at her sidelong. “You think Matty won’t wake up the second Luke walks in the door?”

Lucas, Mikey and Liz’s son, was about two years older than Matthew Jr., and the two boys were frequent playmates. Like fathers, like sons.

Emily sighed. “I suppose you’re right.” She gave the table a final inspection. “Well, I guess this is as good as we’re going to get it.”

Redd opened the door, careful to keep Rubble out, and went to greet their guests. Mikey, who had already stepped out from behind the wheel, took Redd’s proffered hand but then pulled him into a fierce bro hug. Though he definitely wasn’t a hugger, Redd, who was a good six inches taller than Mikey, couldn’t resist a smile as he stared out over the top of his friend’s head.

“All right,” he murmured, gently pushing Mikey away. “Go help your wife bring the kid in out of the cold.”

Liz picked Luke up out of his safety seat and laid him down alongside Matthew Jr. The adults used the brief respite to enjoy the appetizer course Emily had prepared, along with the chardonnay Liz had brought.

“So, tell me all about your plans for this place,” said Mikey after emptying both glass and plate.

Redd laughed. “You should ask Em. I’m letting her take point on the design.”

“Matty would have been happy with a one-room log cabin,” interjected Emily.

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“And what would be wrong with that?” he said playfully. He was only half joking.

“Come on, Matt,” said Mikey. “It’s the twenty-first century. You’ve at least got to have a man cave.”

“I’ll let him have his man cave,” replied Emily. “But I put my foot down when he wanted to put in a panic room.”

Redd’s easy smile wilted a little. Although Emily was making light of it, Redd was not at all pleased with his wife’s resistance to the idea.

During his time as a Marine Raider and then subsequently working with the FBI, he’d made more than his share of enemies—enemies every bit as dangerous as the outlaw bikers who had destroyed their home and murdered Duke Blanton. As much as Redd wanted to believe that he had left all that behind, some of those enemies were still out there, just waiting for a chance to settle the score. If . . . *when* the day of reckoning came, Redd would do whatever it took to protect his family. And the best way to do that was to make sure they had a safe place to go when the bad guys rolled up without warning.

Emily, who chose to believe in the fundamental goodness of humanity, had dismissed his precautionary thinking as paranoia. Contrary to what she was telling Mikey and Liz, the matter was far from resolved.

“It’s not a *panic* room,” Redd insisted. “It’s a *safe* room. Think of it as a refuge. Like a big fancy storm shelter.”

Emily rolled her eyes. “More like a bomb shelter.”

Mikey scratched his chin. “I don’t know, Em. I think I’m with Matt on this one.”

“What a surprise,” Liz remarked dryly. “You two taking the same side. Who’d have predicted that?”

“It’s just common sense,” Mikey went on. “It’s like the Boy Scout motto—be prepared.”

Redd flashed a triumphant grin at Emily and offered an open-hand *see what I mean* gesture toward Mikey.

“Like either of you were ever Boy Scouts.”

“I wanted to be one,” countered Mikey and then in a small voice added, “Mom wouldn’t let me join. She didn’t get along with the den mother. Said she was a drunk—well, you know. A word she probably shouldn’t have said in front of kids.”

“Den mother?” said Liz. “Isn’t that just for Cub Scouts?”

“Same thing,” Mikey said defensively.

“I’m sure it’s not,” said his wife, laughing.

“Well, after Mom put the kibosh on it, I kind of lost interest.” He waved his hand as if to preempt further discussion. “All I’m saying is, it doesn’t hurt to plan ahead.”

“I don’t disagree,” said Emily. “I just think there are better uses for our limited resources. We’re not exactly made of money.”

Mikey inclined his head to cede the point, then turned to Redd. “Well, she did say you could have a man cave, bro. Now we’ll have a sweet spot to watch football. Take the win.”

Redd opened his mouth to reply, but before he could say another word, his phone rang. His brows creased in consternation as he took the device from his pocket and looked at the screen. “It’s Gavin,” he muttered, frowning.

Emily gave him a distressed look. “Be nice, Matty. He’s trying.”

Redd shook his head. “I’m sure it’s a work thing.” He stared at the display a moment longer, debating whether or not to let it go to voicemail. “I should probably take this,” he said, tapping the screen to accept the call.

In an instant, everything changed.