

DOC DOM

Chapter One

Iraq 2009

The concussion from the exploding warhead violently slammed the jeep and its passengers backwards. There was little warning besides the whine of the missile seconds before impact. The night sky erupted in bright orange and white light. The air was sucked from Dom's lungs; there was chaos, there was screaming and there was death.

It was later days for the U.S. military occupation of Iraq. The Army was in the last stages of pulling out. Major Dominic Tavano and his intern Derek Webb accompanied a British led, U.N. mission through the northern suburbs of Mosul, which was seeing an upswing of dissident activity over the past few weeks. The company was on alert, as was protocol. Mosul was considered an active theater, however, no amount of awareness can account for a hand held RPG-18 Mukha, fired from the second floor of an abandoned building.

Dom lay on the ground, thrown from the backseat, the troop carrier in front had taken the direct hit from the bomb. He laid still for a short time, his ears ringing, the dust filled air making him cough. He closed his eyes, rubbing dirt from his lids. *Screaming men!* He methodically felt his body, making sure that he wasn't in shock, that there wasn't a limb missing or shrapnel protruding. He'd seen it hundreds of times. He was okay... He opened his eyes as the air cleared. He prodded the ground, looking for something to lean on to help himself up. His right hand found a quivering body, he reached for the neck to check for a pulse. There was no neck, only a gaping hole where the head had once been- blood, bone and tissue. *Dammit!*

Men were still yelling, he could hear footsteps, men running.

"Medic!"

He searched for his field kit... he realized it was still slung over his shoulder. Things became clearer as he moved from behind the wreck of the Jeep. The Brits were returning fire, hunkered down behind a low stone wall and what was left of the troop carrier. The incoming

fire came from an abandoned building at the other side of the square. He moved towards the screams. It didn't take him long to find their source as he cautiously reconnoitered and crouched down behind what was left of the troop carrier. A soldier was on one knee hovering over the distressed man. Dom could see others that had been wounded; his quick assessment told him to see to the screamer. The stooped over soldier looked up.

"Bloody good thing your here Major. This is a shit show. Donoghue here ain't doing well."

"Move over soldier." Dom said in his distinct Brooklyn accent as he crouched down handing a flashlight to him. "Hold this, but shield it. We don't need any more fire."

"Aye Major."

He examined Donoghue's wounds. A large piece of metal protruded through the upper chest area, just under the shoulder blade. It had been red hot on entry, the patient had grabbed the metal, searing the skin on his hands. His lower left leg had been blown off below the knee. He put his face close to the screaming man, placing his hand over his mouth, muffling the sound. "Son, you'll have to stop that. You'll draw fire. I'm a Doctor. You're badly hurt, but I'm going to make sure that you live. Okay - got that?"

He nodded.

Dom jabbed him in the arm with a disposable morphine injection from his field pack. "This will make you feel better. It'll hit you quick." Dom could see relief in the wounded man's face almost instantly. He turned to the soldier standing at his side. "Were not going to be able to take that out here. I'm going to immobilize the site. Tie this just below the knee. Tightly- got it." The soldier nodded as Dom handed him a tourniquet from his pack. He handed the soldier another dose of morphine. "I want you to stay with him until we can get some backup. Just stab and squeeze, but not for another two - three hours."

"Aye sir."

Dom put his face close to the wounded man. "Donoghue, Lance Corporal Lee is going to look after you. You'll be ok if you don't move, and that means screaming. I'll be back to check on you in a bit. There are some other's that need my help."

He nodded.

Dom shouted. "Webb!" Corporal Derek Webb was his resident in training. He'd been sitting beside him when the explosion hit the jeep. He did a quick scan and couldn't see him. Webb wasn't the one whose head had been removed, that one had been a Brit. He moved to the next man. A hot piece of metal had hit him in the stomach. The soldier sat stoically,

obviously in pain. Dom cut away his shirt. Closer inspection revealed that the shrapnel had turned having deflected off his belt.

He looked at the man's name tag. "Foster, you're one lucky son of a bitch." He jabbed him with some morphine. That metal turned at the last second. It's not as deep as I first thought." He prodded the wound with his fingers. "I'm gonna pull it out."

Foster grabbed his arm.

"Foster, be a man and let me get this out. There are more out there needing my attention." Dom put a gauze pack around the metal and pressed as he pulled out the thin object. He dropped it to the ground and dabbed some iodine on a cloth and cleaned the wound. He handed a gauze pad to the man." Hold this here until someone tells you not to. A nurse or a doctor".

Dom did a quick count; there were 10 dead and 6 wounded. He took care of the remaining wounded men and was pleased to see that Webb was one of them. He'd been knocked cold on impact having been thrown 20 feet from the jeep. He was fortunate

Reinforcement troops arrived as he was finishing up. Three armored trucks and a troop carrier. He released a deep sigh, sinking down to his knees.

Dom finished his rounds, pulling the latex surgical gloves off his hands, tossing them in a waste bin. He'd taken the metal piece of shrapnel from the young soldier Donoghue's shoulder. It would heal up nicely, but he would miss the leg, the stump was sewn up and he was given a heavy dose of antibiotic. The rest of the wounded had suffered superficial scrapes, bumps and bruises. He could do nothing for the dead.

He went to the officer's mess and sat down with a shot of whiskey and a pint of English ale. He hadn't finished two sips when he heard the incipient voice of Colonel Gregory Fields coming up behind him talking to a couple of other British officers. Dom could feel his blood boiling before Fields reached where he was sitting. He was a pompous asshole and a bully. Dom made no bones about how he felt about the man.

Fields was in command of the British 6th Regiment and as he was stationed with the 6th, fell under the man's command. The fact was, Fields had it out for him and Dom would not back down from the confrontations that arose from the antagonism. "Major Tavano. I hear you made a balls up today. Beckham here says that if you'd acted quicker, some of my men would still be alive. For the life of me I can't understand why the U.N. insists upon the cross pollination our recourses."

Dom smiled, his Brooklyn accent a foil for Fields put on snobby English drawl. "They do it so that assholes like you can't run rough shot over a situation that's basically under control. You are a corrupt bastard and I wouldn't put it past you to take advantage. I'm here to keep an eye on you, and you know it. That's why you don't like it. If that aint the reason, then I'm making it the fucking reason."

Fields sat down beside Dom, the other two remained standing, their faces uncomfortable with the ensuing exchange. "You see the problem with you Yanks is that you think that you know everything, especially you Major Tavano. I don't think you could change a diaper in an old folk's home. You're a hazard to our company and I want you out."

"How long have I been here, 5 weeks? You've been busting my balls since day one. You are a pompous prick and you give the Brits a bad fucking name." Dom downed half his beer in one swallow. "I'm not going to play your game Fields. You're just yanking my chain to get a reaction out of me... To get rid of me. I am not going to do it. I'll say one thing though, you better not be third in line at a triage." He downed his whiskey and stood up.

Fields stood up at the same time and faced him toe to toe. They stared at each other for what seemed a minute, neither wanting to back down. Fields shoved Dom backwards. It took every ounce of resolve for Dom not to split open the man's nose. Instead he wisely turned and left the mess. "Prick." He said loud enough to be heard.

"Watch your back Tavano."

Chapter Two

Maddie Chamber's Diary

School this week was extra tough. Mr. Baxter, our coach. He likes us to call him Ron, but somehow it doesn't seem right. He's a nice man but drives us hard. He's like my grandfather. I can't bring myself to call someone in their sixties by their first name. Our crew made the decision last year to call him Mr. Baxter. He has finally given in and appears to be happy with Baxter. Not Mr. Baxter. LOL!

We have been doing two a days in preparation for the NCAA's next month. Thank goodness Mom hired the Math tutor back in high school. I'd be fried. The rest of the crew are struggling. Patty especially. I've been trying to help her as much as I can. I think that some people are just not good at math.

I don't know what it is, but I feel as if I have a lead weight tied on my ass. Normally I can get through the workouts no problem. This year seems different. By this time last year I was a machine, I could do 7 minutes 30 no problem for 2000 on the ERG. This year I'm fighting to break 8 mins. Baxter's seen me do it with my eyes closed but has threatened that I need to get the time down or I'm benched. I think that I would slit my wrists.

The Universities nutritionist has me on some special drinks. Amino acids for pre-workout and a bunch of other recovery crap.

Dad keeps asking if there are any boys. I say no and it's the truth. No time for boys. I can tell he likes that.

More later, Maddie.

Chapter Three

Metlatonoc Region Mexico – Present day

Rosa Rosales looked up into her son Carlos's lean face as he prepared to leave their small, low ceilinged hut. Her heart was heavy, she'd seen the young men from their town and from the towns around them leave, never to come back. The promise of work in the big cities, too enticing. There was nothing to keep them in such devastating poverty.

"Momma, I'll send money. Hector and Ramón say that I'll be making lots in no time at the resorts. Acapulco is less than a day away. I weell' come back soon. Look after my sisters."

Carlos knew that his sisters didn't need looking after, they were hard working and his eldest was heavy with child; her husband would be responsible for her now. He worried about his mother. Southwest Mexico was poor, more so than most places in the country, or in Latin America. There was no future for him here. The gangs ruled the area, and they needed young men and women. Carlos was strong smart and good looking, and was told he had a bright future. He looked around the crude building. They didn't have any modern conveniences like he'd seen on television. He would bring his family from this hell hole to Guadalajara, once he had enough money.

"You won't come back." Rosa said with tears in her eyes. "No one ever does. You will die fighting for them. Drugs, eet's just drugs. They evil Carlos."

Carlos hugged his mother, holding her head to his chest. "You know Momma, I'm gonna do thees. You know I need to; there's no future here. This is a hell hole, you know it. I will come back for you. I am strong, no one can hurt me." He backed up flexing his biceps.

"You are. That's why I worry."

Carlos kissed his mother's forehead and threw his satchel over his shoulder and walked out the door. The day was hot, it was always hot. Carlos had heard that the temperature was cooler in the mountains. He walked away from his home, not once looking back.

He strode quickly his head down deep in thought towards the center of the town. The place wasn't much, a ragtag conglomeration of ratty huts, covered with signs advertising coca cola, Marlboro cigarettes etcetera, and it was always dusty. Carlos saw the men he had come to meet, smoking by the town's central well. The two men waved at him as he approached. His friend Hector was with them. They'd agreed to take them to meet the bosses on the coast.

The one man Abel, greeted him, extending his right hand, clasping Carlos's hand enthusiastically. "You no regret thees Carlos. Jour' future ees' ahead of you."

The two men had been around the town for the past couple of weeks looking for young men to work for the bosses. They offered good pay for a one year contract, at least that's what they said.

Carlos was impressed that the men had their own Jeep. Hector and he jumped into the back of the vehicle. Ramon didn't show up and the men became tense, their eyes looking this way and that. He had always been a momma's boy and was a year younger. It didn't surprise him that he was a no show. The driver, whose name was Henry, pronounced "Ehnry", yelled over the sound of the road and the roaring engine. Can't wait any longer. We must take you for a medical first. The bosses no want to take responsibility for you without knowing if you are healthy. We go see the doctor now."

Hector nodded. He'd ever seen a doctor. The thought of it seemed a luxury. Carlos wasn't so sure. He yelled back. "You said nothing about a doctor the other day. I'm not sick, I don't need no effin' doctor."

Ehnry turned back his lips tight across his half rotten teeth. "You don't seem to fuckeen' understand, you go see doctor or you can get out right now!" He pulled a rusty looking handgun out of the glove box, resting it on his lap.

Hector jabbed him in the ribs with his elbow. "You not sick, no worries man, besides, I'll shoot you if you bail on me." He smiled.

Carlos didn't like the sound of it but gestured for him to move the jeep forward.

They traveled down the winding dirt road, leaving the confines of the shanty town they had called home. Within an hour and a bit they reached one of the larger towns. Carlos had been to Nueva a few times with his uncle, but didn't recognize where the driver was going once they left the main road. The Jeep pulled into a side street where two and three story buildings pinched in on the road, making it passable for no more than one vehicle, following the lane for a few hundred yards. The driver abruptly put on the brakes, pulling to a screechy stop in front of an old brick and stucco building. "We're here yelled Able," over the roar of the engine.

The two young men were escorted into the interior of a surprisingly modern building. The floors had polished marble and the walls recently painted. There was an antiseptic smell. Carlos recognized the scent from when his uncle would pour the clear liquid on the wounds of the family's meager livestock and the children's feet after stepping on the broken glass that littered the streets of their village. Able took them to a room which was fairly devoid of much besides a row of wooden chairs and a picture of Christ on the wall. They were offered a couple of Corona's and told to strip down to their underwear. Both Carlos and Hector complied, nervous tight mouthed looks on their faces. Carlos felt a bit funny sitting in such a place... in his underwear. "Mother Mary, I no like thees' Hector."

The door to the room opened and a man in a green pajama like outfit motioned for Hector to follow him. Carlos assumed that he was the doctor. Hector gave Carlos one last look as he left the room with the man. After an hour, Carlos started to fidget, how long could a simple medical examination take? He brushed his hands through his hair and started to rhythmically tap his foot to a song that had been running through his head all day. Just as he was wondering if he'd been forgotten, the man in the green outfit opened the door to the room and beckoned him to follow. He didn't seem like a happy man; he didn't look Carlos in the eye and his walk was stiff...urgent. He was lead down a long sterile hallway, with dim lights in the ceiling. The man stopped in front of a door and pushed it open. The man motioned towards Carlos to enter, which he did with some hesitancy.

The room beyond was bright. In the middle was a large table with medical equipment flayed out around it. Somehow, Carlos figured that a doctor's office might have a higher degree of organization. The room smelled of metal and again, disinfectant only much stronger now. Standing in front of the table was another man, dressed in similar pajamas, a mask tucked under his chin."

"Please lay down on the table", the new man said. Carlos assumed that he was the doctor.

"Where is Hector?" asked Carlos.

"He's resting. This won't take a minute if you are a good boy."

Carlos felt the hair stand up on the back of his neck- *good boy?* "Why did it take so long with Hector?"

"There were others." The man motioned for Carlos to lay down.

The Doctor moved him to the middle of the table and hooked his arm up to a monitor.

"I am Dr. Mendez, your name is?" he said expectantly, his eyebrows raised waiting for an answer."

"Carlos Rosales."

Mendez wrote his name down on a piece of paper and attached it to a clipboard on the bottom of the table. "I'll need to do some blood work. It's required by the insurers." He motioned to the other man standing beside the table. "The nurse is going to attach a drip."

Carlos didn't know what a drip was. He nodded.

The male nurse held his arm down on the table and took a long metal needle out of a package. "This won't hurt for more than a second." His voice had a terse edge to it.

Carlos flinched as the needle was stuck into a large vein on his forearm, it burned slightly. The nurse quickly attached a long coiled tube to the needle and taped the apparatus to his arm.

The doctor inserted a needle into the tube that lead to his arm. "Have you had good health Carlos?"

He tried to respond, but his mouth refused to move, in fact, his whole body seemed numb. He couldn't move.

"There's a good boy. You won't feel a thing. Just try to relax and this will be all over in a few minutes. Roll him onto his side."

Carlos couldn't stop the nurse from fulfilling the doctor's command. Mendez slipped on a pair of plastic gloves. "Scalpel."

The nurse handed him a small pen like instrument with a thin blade on its end. Carlos couldn't see what was happening, but he could feel a tugging sensation on his side, below his ribcage. The procedure continued for no more than a couple of minutes.

"Ice ... Here... Hemostat, he's hemorrhaging."

"I have it. Is he going to survive? He's losing a lot of blood."

Carlos was helpless, his vision began to blur. Kidney... losing blood. This was supposed to be a checkup... what were they doing to him?"

Carlos closed his eyes slowly and drifted into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter Four

Sunlight streamed in through California shutters, creating a golden glow throughout the well-appointed bedroom. Dom Tavano rolled to his right, waking from a restless sleep. His nose brushed up against a furry tail. He frowned, pushing his girlfriend's dog Lucky away from his face. The Jack Russell, promptly moved to the foot of the bed, staring at him indignantly.

Dom rolled over the other way, unwrapping himself from the twisted sheet that had managed to wrap itself around his torso. He ran his hand down the sleeping naked form of his much younger bed partner Jasmine. She stirred slightly. He couldn't resist the softness of her body, its feminine perfection, the curve of her hip...

She must have been pretending to sleep. "I'm cold Dom. Can you get me a glass of water?" Jasmine said, turning to face him, staring him in the eye, her lips unconsciously parting.

"Are you thirstier than you're cold?" He said with his distinct Brooklyn accent, rubbing his foot along her instep.

Jasmine hesitated for a moment. "I'm cold."

Dom wrapped his arm around her, fondling her breast. "I promise to get you a glass of water, I might even make you breakfast in bed."

Jasmine cooed, turning into him biting his neck lightly. She whispered in his ear. "Can you keep up with me old man? ...after last night? It's a good thing you're very handsome."

Dominic felt the blood rising in his groin, his penis a bit rough if he was to be honest with himself. "I think I might manage."

Jasmine turned over offering her perfect backside. "I'm not going to kiss you on the mouth until you've brushed your teeth."

He resisted the opportunity for sarcasm and there was no response than to succumb to the charms of the young woman.

Dom flipped the two eggs over in the frying pan. He wasn't the best cook, but he could manage a good bacon and eggs. The toaster popped. He shuffled the eggs out of the pan onto a plate, threw on a couple pieces of bacon, then the toast and walked towards the bedroom. Jasmine sat with a smile on her face, pimping up the pillows waiting for the food. Dom flourished with his free hand. "Madam." He placed the plate on the fluffy pillow she had placed on her lap.

"You're a gentleman."

"I have to make up for being an older man by being chivalrous."

"Ohhh." She cooed.

Dom watched her eat. "I've been called in to see Tom Williams this morning. 10 o'clock. He says it's urgent."

"Tom Williams, didn't we have dinner at his house a few months back?"

"Yep. We go a long way back; we served together in Iraq and Afghanistan."

"I hope they're not going to ship you off somewhere? I thought army Doctors... once they got to your age were... more settled?"

"On the contrary. If I could, I'd be back in the field, not stuck shuffling papers around my desk. I told you when we first met that it wasn't my dream job here in Bethesda. Hey most

military doctors dream of this position. I was put here because they knew it would be purgatory for me."

"I see." She said, stuffing egg and toast into her mouth, her eyes downcast. "What..."

Dom put his index finger to his lips. "I told you not to ask, let's not spoil the morning. I have a lecture later in the day and I'll miss dinner. You might have to fend for yourself."

Dom looked in the mirror, straightening his tie. It felt good putting on a uniform. It was proper... clinical; pants were pressed, shoes polished. There were a lot of doctors trained in the military that couldn't wait to get out of the system; seven in and done. Dom wasn't one of them. He' enjoyed the armed forces. He couldn't stand the thought of becoming a GP, he'd sooner climb under a rock and rot. He was a surgeon, he loved the heat of combat.

He kissed Jasmine on the forehead. She didn't look up at him. "What," he responded sternly?

"I have a bad feeling Dom. Why are you getting called to The Pentagon? We've been together nearly 2 years and you've never been called there. You're going to be shipped off somewhere. You plan on taking me with you?"

Dom looked down at her. He didn't know how to answer. He didn't want any baggage if he was going to be asked to move on, yet he was forming a deep affection for Jasmine... yes, affection, but not love.

"Darlin', let's worry about that when the time comes. It might be a routine debriefing. You never know with the military."

He kissed her again, this time on the top of her head as he passed the bed. The smell of her set off a reaction that he didn't need to be feeling before a big meeting. He shook his head and walked sternly to the door.

"You look good in a uniform." She said placing her index finger on her bottom lip.

Dom grimaced and kept walking. She didn't see him in dress very often, his green scrubs standard attire most days. "Hold that though sweetheart." He grabbed his car keys and exited the house through the side door into the garage, relieved to have some distance between them.

He unlocked his black Jeep Cherokee and slid into the driver's seat. Civilian pay might afford him a fancy Mercedes, but he didn't have a problem with that. He was a down to earth guy and enjoyed the anonymity that the more pedestrian vehicle provided.

He made his way through the streets of Bethesda, passing the Uniformed Services University Hospital a few blocks from his house. There was some satisfaction in being a teaching doctor. He was granted many privileges that most military officers were not, stability being one. He thought about Jasmine. Was the temptation of the girl and her young body enough to keep him at his current post? Would he bring her with him if the call came? His ass was planted in Bethesda since his return from active duty 7 years ago. Had enough time passed to wash away his transgressions? In the back of his mind he hoped that the meeting had something to do with his stationing.

Dom turned onto the 495 beltway which was busy no matter what time of day. Within 10 minutes he merged onto the George Washington Memorial Parkway which would take him to Pentagon City. Washington in the spring was beautiful. The trees had sprung leaves and the blossoms were just starting to form. What was it in him that wanted to tear him from this cozy posting to the hell hole of a combat zone? Adrenalin, or was it the fear of commitment and middle age?

He pulled off the parkway and made his way into the maze of parking lots and roadways that circled the vast edifice and its subsidiary buildings. He pulled into a security checkpoint. The armed guard checked his ID. "Good afternoon Major." Dom acknowledged the man with a short nod and accelerated, looking for a spot to park as he neared the complex designated to the Army. He passed another checkpoint holding his ID card up to the scanning plate. The armed guard waved him through. Security since 9/11 had become extremely rigid and he would have to pass a couple more checks including a bomb and retina scanner before he reached General Williams office.

General Tom Williams sat at the end of a long wooden table, his build much like an NFL lineman, an imposing figure. There were no windows in the room which created a closed in feeling to its inhabitants. Four other people shared the room sitting along the length of the table.

Major Colonel Dr. John Burrows, Under Secretary to the Surgeon General, broke the silence that had grown uncomfortable. "Sir, before Major Tavano arrives, we need to discuss whether or not he's the correct choice. I have my concerns as you well know. Dominic Tavano is not fit mentally to perform surgery, let alone medicine. He's crossed the line too many times, and the incident in IRAQ put us all under some serious heat. You sat on the board 7 years ago with me when we revoked his license."

Tom furrowed his brow and folded his hands on top of the table. "Yes I did, and at the time I agreed with the decision. Dom needed some time to step back, time to debrief. He's a fantastic field surgeon, perhaps one of the best to come out of the military system in some time. 150 years ago they would be calling him a hero. Today, everything is put under a god damned microscope."

"For Christ sake Tom, he shot 2 British officers in the head."

Tom hesitated for a brief moment, looking to the ceiling. "Euthanized is the correct word John, not shot."

"That's open for debate."

"I'd have him in my corner Colonel. He thinks outside the box. That's why I recommended him for the posting. He's been rotting in the University hospital for 7 years. He's still with the corps, and he's looking for a chance to get back in the game. We have something he wants, a chance to get his medical license back. He knows that if he leaves the Army, he's got no chance. We can give him the opportunity for clemency. Look, he saved my life back in Iraq, I owe him one. I've seen him perform an appendectomy under enemy fire. He's a damn good at what he does and on top of that he speaks fluent Spanish."

Sitting next to Burrows was a woman in her early sixties, with sun wrinkled skin. She was dressed casually, her long grey hair pulled back into a pony tail. She spoke with an air of authority. "We understand his credentials as an excellent surgeon in the field General Williams. Will Dr. Tavano be able to negotiate and deal with the Mexican mob, and the medical conglomerate which we think is the link into the US?"

Tom turned to the woman. "Dr. DeRosnay, we're placing a failsafe into the equation. Should Tavano cross the line and start any trouble, we'll have him removed. His field nurse is the Canadian equivalent to an American Navy Seal. She's a trained killer and has been given orders to take him out." He turned back to Burrows. "I don't know what you're worried about Colonel. If Tavano is successful, mission accomplished, if he fails..."

There was a light knock on the door and General Williams secretary stepped in. "Sir, Major Tavano is here."

"Show him in Wendy."

Dom was not normally a nervous person, but he instinctively knew that the meeting ahead of him was important. You didn't get called into the Pentagon to be given your marching papers. He refused to speculate, such thought only led to anxiety. He cleared his mind and pushing away any negative thoughts.

"Major Tavano, the General will see you now."

"Thank you." Dom rose from the uncomfortable chair he'd been sitting on and followed her to the door. He opened it and stepped in. He'd been in Tom William's office a few times and recognized the long wooden table that ran nearly the length of the room. Tom didn't like desks. He preferred a table so that he could spread his work out in front of him. He saluted. General Williams, then looked over to John Burrows. He shared no love for the man. He'd been instrumental in stripping him of his license. But this was the Army and he saluted him. "Colonel Burrows." They locked eyes for the briefest of moments. He looked to the other three people who sat at the table. He didn't recognize any of them and none wore uniform.

"At ease Major." Said Williams. "Please take a seat." He motioned towards the one at the opposite end of the table.

Once Dom was seated, the General stood. "Major, let me introduce you to my colleagues. He motioned to his left. "You know Colonel Burrows from the department of the Surgeon General."

Dom nodded, resisting the urge to make a snide comment.

Williams gestured to the grey haired woman. "Dr. Joanna DeRosnay, professor and anthropologist from Georgetown University."

Dom nodded towards her in acknowledgment. She returned the gesture, but with a slight frown to her brow.

Williams gestured to the other side of the table, flourishing his hand towards a 40 odd year old woman dressed sternly in a blue pant suit. "Christine Pendergast from the Department of State, undersecretary for civilian security, democracy and human rights."

"And finally, Agent Chris Bachman from the FBI." The man looked pretty much like most of the FBI agents he'd met over the years, 6 foot, dark hair, blue suit and a stern look upon his face.

"Dominic, if I might use your first name?"

Dom gestured his okay.

"I brought your name forward to lead a task force."

Dom's heart skipped a beat.

"What do you know about human trafficking?"

Dom took a moment to gather his thoughts. "Sir, as it pertains to the sex trade and slavery or to the trade in human organs?"

Williams wasn't surprised that Dom might know something about the topic. The man was renowned to have a photographic memory. "The organ trade. Professor DeRosnay has spent most of her life following it in Latin America and has published a couple of books and dozens of papers on the subject. She has seen the process from the bottom up." He gestured to DeRosnay.

"Thank you General." She turned to Dom, standing, she motioned to a digital display which filled most of the wall behind her. It depicted a map of Central America, Mexico and the United States.

"Dr. Tavano, please tell us what you know of the organ trade."

Dom smiled. "Which article of yours would you like me to cite, I haven't read them all but I did particularly like your book on Human Traffic in the African Sub-continent."

DeRosnay hesitated, caught slightly off guard. "What do you know about Mexico?"

Dom gazed at the ceiling for a few moments. "As far as the organ trade is concerned, not a lot, except the fact that some regions rival the poverty found in Bangladesh, Haiti and Somalia. Hard to believe with the country being so close to the U.S. So I would surmise that the trade in human flesh is alive and well."

"It is and the proximity to the U.S. border makes the illegal transport of harvested body parts much more alluring to those involved. The recipients want organs that are fresh, and they pay big bucks for them."

DeRosnay motioned towards Pendergast. "I have been fighting for the poor in impoverished countries for over 20 years. Finally the State Department has seen fit to do something about the problem, though it's due to pressure from the UN more than anything."

Pendergast interrupted, her brows drawn down, her cheeks reddening. Her voice had an edge to it. "Dr. DeRosnay. Let's be clear. This is an initiative drawn up by the Secretary. This objective has been initiated with no connection to your ministrations. You are here as an advisor... let's be clear on this point."

DeRosnay nodded her head, her eyes looking down at the floor. "The list of potential organ recipients in the western world is large. Slightly less than 80% will receive an organ through conventional means. There is a huge black market throughout the world, including the United States for the 20% that cannot find a donor. The West has the money, the impoverished states have the organs, be they from willing or non-willing donors."

She walked over to the screen depicting a map of the world. She pointed at Iran, expanding the image with her fingers. "The Iranians are the only nation to embrace the organ trade openly. The rest of the world cries foul and have laws in place which have no backbone. The problem is, it has become big money, and big money is a strong lobby. People's lives are saved in the recipient countries. Public officials are bribed, doctors make lots of money, the list goes on. The sad thing is, there are no international laws in place which bear any clarity, and everyone turns a blind eye. The poor are exploited."

Dom leaned back in his chair, placing his hands behind his head. "So how do I fit into this?"

Williams spoke. "You will be operating as a disgraced Canadian doctor who lost his license for performing illegal euthanasia."

Burrows cleared his throat.

"You haven't been licensed in 7 years and should fly under the radar. You'll meet with one of our operatives in Acapulco Mexico. Your team will be hired as roving transplant operatives. Dom, you'll have to do things that may go against your morals."

"Extractions?"

"Yes, and possibly transplants. We need you to become dependable to the Pacifica Cartel. They have strong affiliations within Southern California and L.A's La Eme."

"I've heard of La Eme, a gang right?"

"They are the US link to the cross border traffic. We know this, but can't prove it. What's more important is that we find out where the organs are going in the U.S. Dom, and it will take some time. Your goal is to find out who is facilitating the organ traffic within the U.S. We want to bust whoever is behind the American side of the picture."

"That sounds like a tall order. Why me? This doesn't sound like the Armies jurisdiction."

"Find us a civilian doctor trained in combat and willing to put his life at risk for the money you make. The State Department came to us, not the other way around. You're smart Dom, too smart for your own good. You were the only possible candidate that spoke Spanish as well as being a damned good field surgeon."

Dom smiled. "Was I the only one that you could dangle a Medical license in front of?"

Williams grinned. "The only one who speaks Spanish. Take some time to mull it over."

Dom smiled. "General, if I was to say no?..."

Williams shrugged his shoulders. "I know you Dom, you want back in the game too badly. Your license is valuable. There are others, but no one with your credentials and ability in the field."

Dom sat for a few moments. "General, I don't need the time."

"I knew you wouldn't