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## By Break of Day (The Night Stalkers Book 7)

By M. L. Buchman



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**M. L. Buchman raises the stakes-and the heat-in the return of the acclaimed Night Stalkers series**

NAME: Kara Moretti

RANK: Captain of the Army's stealthiest remote piloted aircraft (Don't call it a drone)

MISSION: To be the eyes of the team

NAME: Justin "The Cowboy" Roberts

RANK: Captain of the Army's most powerful helicopter

MISSION: To redeem the past, at any cost

### **They Put Life, Limb, and Heart on the Line**

Two new captains join The Night Stalkers with two different strategies in life, love, and combat. When Brooklyn-raised Kara joins the crew, she knows one thing as an absolute truth: to stay safe, keep everything and everyone at a distance. Born in Texas, Justin knows only one honorable way to make up for losing his first crew to a suicide bomber: he flies with all his heart. When Kara and Justin collide on a top secret mission deep in the Israeli desert, then the battle truly begins.



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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Along with providing fascinating technical details and superb sex scenes, Buchman is a master of delivering romance that is as charming as plausible within a military setting. This will please his growing audience as well as fans of Suzanne Brockman, Maya Banks, Catherine Mann, and Kaylea Cross." - **Booklist**

"The Night Stalkers series continues in true Buchman style with high-octane action, perfect attention to technical details and sizzling-hot love scenes. Going one step beyond, Buchman pleases his readers with fan-favorite cameo appearances. Take note: A character cheat sheet might be needed. But if you are a fan of military romance and haven't tried a Night Stalkers book, what are you waiting for?" - **RT Book Reviews, 4 Stars**

"The Night Stalker series is one of my favorites and I hope he continues with it. Not only that but even though it's a new book he always finds a way for past characters to be a part of it even if they're only mentioned once. "By Break of Day" was a great read and I truly recommend it." - **Night Owl Reviews**

"Tense, technically detailed, and filled with nonstop action, this engrossing adventure highlights a heroine who needs to connect and belong. This exceptional, beautifully balanced example of military romance will appeal to fans of Suzanne Brockmann" - **Library Journal**

"This nonstop rollercoaster ride of military ops and danger is well balanced with a romance that's both steamy and sweet. With well-developed characters and fascinating details about flying, this novel is certain to gain Buchman many new readers and satisfy diehard fans." - **BookPage**

### About the Author

M. L. Buchman has over 35 novels and an ever-expanding flock of short stories in print. His military romantic suspense books have been named Barnes & Noble and NPR "Top 5 of the year," Booklist "Top 10 of the Year," and RT "Top 10 Romantic Suspense of the Year." In addition to romantic suspense, he also writes contemporaries, thrillers, and fantasy and science fiction.

In among his career as a corporate project manager he has: rebuilt and single-handed a fifty-foot sailboat, both flown and jumped out of airplanes, designed and built two houses, and bicycled solo around the world.

He is now a full-time writer, living on the Oregon Coast with his beloved wife. He is constantly amazed at what you can do with a degree in Geophysics. You may keep up with his writing at [www.mlbuchman.com](http://www.mlbuchman.com).

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## Chapter 1

U.S. Army Captain Kara Moretti sat in her coffin and flew. She had the best damn job in this woman's Army. The boys from back in the neighborhood would crap their pants if they could get a load of her right now. Her "coffin"-technically a GCS, ground control station-was a secure, air-conditioned cargo container.

Outside, it was a steel box, tucked away on the hangar deck in the belly of the helicopter carrier USS Peleliu

currently stationed off the coast of Turkey.

Inside was a whole other world, one bristling with technology. It was her kingdom and she loved it. One side wall inside had a rack supporting a pair of long, white transit containers that actually did look like coffins, big ones. One was empty, but inside the other eight-meter-long white box rested a disassembled General Atomics MQ-1C Gray Eagle worth a cool thirty million.

As remotely piloted aircraft went, it was about the hottest RPA flying anywhere in the world. The one normally in the empty box-she'd named it Tosca after a not very bright but very loyal opera heroine-was even now climbing up into her sweet spot just shy of the stratosphere. Twenty-nine thousand feet up and looking down, that's what she was good at-among so many other things. Tosca was a talented lady and Kara was the girl to fly her. She was the brains behind the RPA...or maybe the opera conductor...or... She'd think about that later.

At six miles up, the RPA would appear to be the same width as a single human hair held out at arm's length. And not a big thick hair like one of Kara's own long brunette ones, but rather like a fine blond one that belonged to Justin Roberts-not that she'd notice such things, especially not on him-presently flying his helicopter at the other end of this exercise's battlespace domain.

The orders for this training scenario had been simple: "Show them what we can do, but not how we do it."

U.S. Special Operations Forces held cooperative international training to serve one of two functions.

Usually it was to enhance an ally's skill while scaring the pee out of a nearby enemy. Under those conditions, the SOF worked patiently to transfer knowledge and skills. They'd recently run a major exercise with the Polish JW Grom counterterrorism unit. The three-day simulated fast-response invasion had been staged close to the Ukrainian border to put Russia on notice that U.S. and Polish forces were nearby and watching closely.

Other times-like this one-the goal was to humble the ally when they weren't trying hard enough. Sharing borders with Syria, Iraq, and Iran, the Turkish forces should not be playing favorites. Despite that, their attitude was, "We may hate the people doing the genocide and destabilizing the entire region, but we hate the people that they're killing even more. So we don't see a thing."

It was worse than the neighborhood rivalries that used to sweep through Kara's part of Brooklyn. Sometimes it was just gangs, but sometimes it was way worse. Just because she wasn't in one of the Five Families didn't mean she was stupid or something. The garbage cartel. The cheese cartel. Liquor cartel. Restaurants. The list went on, and that didn't even include the drugs, gambling, and prostitution. It was quieter now-the New York Mafia had mostly turned to the business of doing business-but that didn't mean the past was forgotten or that flare-ups didn't occur.

There were times when Kara wondered why she was out here fighting other people's wars rather than being a Brooklyn cop like two of her brothers and Papa.

'Cause then you wouldn't have the coolest job in the Army, that's why.

She and her assistant, Sergeant Santiago "Tago" Marquez, sat side by side in the coffin at the GCS stations. Two big, comfortable armchairs faced the flight and sensor controls of the MQ-1C. Ahead and to either side they each had three large screens that fed all of the visual and remote sensing data from the Gray Eagle. Below it was flight tracking and a full array of flight instruments and controls. A third chair, presently empty, sat close behind her when there was too much happening and they had to pull in a third operator.

She and Tago each held dual joysticks. Her controls included flight and weapons. He was the grand master of the sensor arrays, constantly twisting and tuning them to give her the information she needed before she knew she needed it.

"Hell of a team!"

She held up a hand for a moment and received a high five just as they did before every mission.

Tago didn't speak, of course. In a full year he'd probably spoken a dozen words during an actual operation, and two dozen out of one. But he didn't need to; he was that far inside her head. Sometimes it worried her a little, like what kinda muck was he gonna find in there that even she didn't know about? Never worried her for long though; he was too much fun to fly with.

The other great thing about Tago was that he was almost a foot taller and much wider than she was. The run-of-the-mill assholes would take one look at him, hovering close beside her like a big brother, and scoot for the hills.

There were a whole lot of suckers back at Cannon Air Force Base sittin' on their ever-widening butts with their McDonald's coffee and McGut Bomb breakfast. All doing their time in some godforsaken Clovis, New Mexico, suburbia-hell so they could fly a Predator RPA over Afghanistan or Yemen from Cannon AFB's deep bunkers. It was good work if you could get it and didn't mind cooking your ass in the Southwest desert.

Two years ago, she'd been one of a kajillion other flyboys and gals working the command consoles.

Then the Night Stalkers' recruiter had showed up and her life had changed.

"We fly for the U.S. Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment," the Captain had said. "We have been over-reliant on U.S. Air Force and NSA satellite intelligence assets."

A pretty ballsy statement in the middle of a USAF base. She liked that plenty for starters.

"We're going to be integrating a dozen Gray Eagle RPAs directly into our operations."

They had her right there.

First, SOAR was so seriously cool that they called themselves the Night Stalkers, which rocked. One of the best nicknames in the forces.

Second, they hadn't said "drone" or "UAV-unmanned aerial vehicle." She wasn't some lame-assed drone pilot. And her craft wasn't unmanned, or it wouldn't need a pilot. The pilot simply wasn't aboard the aircraft. The Gray Eagle was a remotely piloted aircraft, and, by God-

Third-she was the woman to fly them.

"We're seeking specialists for transfer from remote pilotage here in New Mexico to being embedded directly with our helicopter units. Would all those interested please-"

There'd been advantages to being five-foot-five and having three older brothers. You learned to be quick. She headed the sign-up queue before the guy even finished the briefing. Tago had been her shadow.

True to the captain's word, after two additional years of training, she was sitting on a warship in the Mediterranean and kicking baddie-guy ass-usually. That she was using her skills to spook an ally tonight was

one of those changeups that kept life interesting.

Interesting, hell. Super sweet!

"This is May. Ready for my run."

"Roger, May," Kara answered Trisha in her MH-6M Little Bird helicopter. Short for Mayhem, the name of the tiny, heavily armed attack helo was a perfect match for its petite female pilot. They were both hyperactive and both lethal.

The entire company was on hold five minutes to target awaiting Kara's "Go" signal.

It was weird that it was hers to give, but then a lot of things were in the 5th Battalion, D Company of SOAR. Everywhere else, an RPA pilot was just another pilot-and one often looked down on. The 5D was trying out having the RPA flier also be the AMC.

Archie Stevenson, the former Air Mission Commander, had just departed for the States with his wife and kid. Something about them all working at the White House, which had a coolness factor of its own. Turnover had been as odd as everything else in the 5D.

Rather than pulling someone else off the birds into the AMC role, they were dumping it on their new eye-in-the-sky person as a trial.

For seven days without break she'd sat at tactical displays as she and Archie tore apart every single mission he'd commanded-at least the ones she was authorized to see. With an unusual candor for an airjock, he'd spent the entire time showing her every single thing he'd done wrong.

"The things you do right will come from your instincts. Hopefully you can learn from my mistakes." He'd had crews shot down, good friends shot down-some recovered intact, others crucified by hostiles.

"Good luck," and he'd been gone.

Well, Kara sure liked the sound of being AMC. And she had no intention of letting such an opportunity slip out of her grasp now that it had fallen into it.

The other choppers reported in.

Merchant and Maven II flew with May.

Vengeance, the lethal DAP flown by Lola Maloney, hovered close behind. Where a Little Bird attacked, a DAP Black Hawk helicopter weapons platform demolished.

"Ah'm ready as can be, little lady." And that would be the big hammer for this operation, the massive twin-rotor MH-47G Chinook Calamity Jane. No need for Justin Roberts to identify himself-his Texan dripped off him like...

Like you're not going to be thinking about in the middle of your first solo mission as AMC, girl!

But she'd caught him working out in the weight room on the lower decks a few times, sweat sheening his face and arms, drenching his T-shirt until it clung to his muscled chest. Damn, but he was a handsome one.

Focus!

Kara had each of the helos located clearly on her screen. Not because they were visible, but rather because of their encrypted locator beacons. Except for the Chinook, they were stealth-modified helicopters so they didn't show up on her radar or, except for scattered moments, on her infrared imaging. Normal vision showed nothing at all either, since it was three in the morning in the Turkish wilderness and the helos were all painted black and running without lights.

The Turkish Special Forces, the OKK, on the other hand, showed up brilliantly to the advanced sensors aboard the RPA. Tago had them zeroed in both on infrared and through their radio transmissions as backup.

Kara didn't speak Turkish, which didn't really matter because their radios were encrypted. But they didn't have the American ability to distort a signal's transmission so that it looked like it was coming from somewhere else. Tosca wasn't smart, but she had Electronic Intelligence down.

The Turkish Special Forces would think they were well hidden-not!-and knew where the attack was coming from-wrong again!

Now to kick their heinies good and hard with a lesson in true stealth.

She leaned forward and whispered into the headset mic, not that it mattered how loud she spoke in the coffin. "Go!"

And like magic, two hundred kilometers away, the tiny indicators that were the Night Stalkers' 5th Battalion, D Company went.

\* \* \*

Captain Justin Roberts gave the collective control between his knees a little nudge forward. Fifteen tons of helicopter carrying a platoon of U.S. Rangers and their gear eased forward as smooth as a baby's behind.

Every single time he flew his big MH-47G "Golf" Chinook helicopter, it was a surprise-a surprise of how much fun it was. Like they were meant for each other since long before they met.

SOAR only flew three primary types of helos, all deeply modified to the 160th's specification. The Little Bird, the Black Hawk, and the Chinook Golf. His girl was the monster of the outfit. Calamity Jane was definitely a Texas-sized lady: big, powerful, and dangerous.

"I feel the need for a song."

"Oh God, spare us." Danny Corvo spoke up from the copilot seat. From there he was Justin's second set of eyes and the master of the helo's general health and well-being.

"Oh, give me a home," Carmen cut in from her position at the starboard gun close behind Justin's seat. Carmen Parker was hot shit with an M134 minigun that could unload four thousand rounds-a-minute of hell on anyone who messed with her. She was also king, er, queen of the bird-the absolute last word on maintenance and loading.

"Where the Chinook helos roam." Talbot George was always off-key at the side gun behind Danny's copilot position, but he sang with heart, even if with a distinctly British accent.

"And the flights are at night every day," the three of them sang together in splendidly awful harmony.

Danny groaned as if in the throes of death-by-torture agony.

As usual, Raymond Hines kept his own counsel at the rear ramp gunner's post. The Chinook was the size of a school bus inside. Tonight, in the cargo area between the cockpit and Ray's rear post, thirty U.S. Rangers and their three ATVs were counting on SOAR to sling them into position. On the outside, the Jane was half again as wide due to the long auxiliary fuel tanks hung low along the fuselage. They gave her a massive operational range, completely aside from the refueling probe that Justin could extend beyond the edge of the rotors for a midair tank up if needed.

The big rotors fore and aft let her lift her own weight in cargo; even in high-hot conditions the Chinook outperformed most everything around.

By the third chorus their harmonies were better, so Justin hit the transmit switch for the last of it. It got the answering transmission he was hoping for.

"Justin, honey?"

"Here for you, sweetheart." Kara Moretti just slayed him. From the first briefing where she'd moseyed in all dark and Italian and perfect, his head had been turned hard enough that he kept checking his neck for whiplash. Then when she opened her mouth and poured out thick Brooklyn... Two months later and he still didn't know what to do with that, not a bit of it. It was all...wrong, yet it was so right. Her voice should be some sweet bella signora, like the one he'd spent a week with while stationed at Camp Darby outside of Pisa on the Italian coast a couple years back.

Instead Kara was-

"You do that to me again and you're gonna be singing soprano the rest of your life. We clear, Cowboy?"

-a hundred percent, New York. "Y'all wouldn't do that to me now, would ya?" He laid it on thick.

"Castrate the bull calf? In a heartbeat. And I ain't your sweetheart."

"I'll hold him down while you trim 'em," Lola Maloney called in from the DAP Hawk.

He was about to say something about how it made the meat taste more luscious and tender-which was why they castrated most bull calves-but he couldn't figure out how to phrase it without it sounding crude and perhaps tempting her to start looking for some neutering shears when Trisha cut in.

"Roger that! We'll pin him, you chop and cauterize. Use a really hot iron."

Claudia Jean Gibson at the controls of the Maven II didn't speak much, but he could feel her out there agreeing with them.

Justin winced in imagined pain, as he was sure every man on the comm circuit did. He figured maybe it would be better if he kept his mouth shut. Once the women of the 5D got on a roll, wasn't no man on God's green earth who was safe.

At a dozen kilometers to target, the whole flight of five helos dropped from ten meters above the ground to three. No time to sing now.

The overlap imaging inside his helmet took serious concentration when flying true nap-of-earth. The NOE software suite fed him programmed satellite terrain models that let him see the big stuff up ahead. Live infrared from the nose camera told him when he was about to eat a tree or the side of a house. And Kara's feed from the Gray Eagle provided the tactical landscape to overlay on the other two. All of it projected on



the inside of his helmet's visor along with key engine and flight indicators-most of which he left up to Danny to manage as copilot.

They were doing what no other helicopter pilots anywhere could. Two hundred and fifty kilometers per hour and no higher off the dirt than a horse. They hugged mountainsides and deep valley bottoms like they were birds of prey on the hunt.

He loved slinging his helo over the low terrain.

Now they were getting down to it.

\* \* \*

Kara was briefly mesmerized by watching the helos fly across her display. The 5D pilots were the best, and everyone knew that, but, damn, they were fun to watch. She could pick out each pilot simply by how they flew across the terrain.

Trisha was the slick knife, straight slices from point A to point Z, skipping the twenty-four places in between as if they didn't exist. Claudia so smooth that she blended into the landscape, and Lola Maloney practically bebopped ten tons of gun platform across the sky. Dennis flew his Merchant of Death almost as aggressively as Trisha.

And then there was the cowboy.

In his massive Chinook, he should have lumbered; instead he soared. He SOARed. Hyuk! Hyuk! She could practically hear Justin and that deep laugh of his-the man was absolutely convinced he was the funniest thing around.

He flew as if he were settled back in his saddle loping over the prairie, not dodging through the rough and arid wasteland of central Turkey. That's assuming he was a real cowboy and didn't just have the hat and the drawl. Probably tried line dancing once at some Dallas cowboy bar and bought a hat in the gift shop.

Tago flashed the close-up tactical feed showing the Turkish OKK's positions onto Kara's side screen. She forced her attention away from watching the perfect harmony of Justin's lope over the wilderness.

The OKK still squatted right where they'd been all along, hunkered down in a valley like sitting ducks. She'd thought they were better than that.

They were better than that!

They were...

Right where they knew they'd be seen!

The SOAR flight was sixty seconds out.

Come on, girl. Think! Think! It's gotta be a trap.

Assume that it was. Then what did that tell her? It was...

Like the time the idiot boys had clambered out onto the roof of Keating Hall and decided to flour-bomb some random college girls as they trooped up the front steps. But they'd made a crucial tactical error. For their

initial target, they'd bombed the female cadre of the Fordham University Army ROTC program-Cadet Captain Kara Moretti in the lead.

The flour bombers had left two boys at ground level to engage and flag likely targets, slowing them down. The initial rooftop attack had worked all too well, leaving Kara and her cadre enveloped in a cloud of hot-pink-stained flour and raucous laughter. But not for long.

Kara had signaled Cadet Master Sergeant Merry to deal with the two lookouts on the ground. When it was Sergeant Merry, one girl versus two civilian boys was plenty.

Kara had led the rest of her team straight into the hall at a fast trot, leaving a long line of hot-pink dust up the marble stairways. Three hand signals and they'd split up and cut off all angles of escape. Ten minutes later, her entire cadre had headed for the showers, smiling.

The disorganized attackers were left dangling upside down-wearing very secure impromptu harnesses fabricated from handy fire hoses-off the edge of the roof four stories in the air.

They'd been rescued soon enough, though it had been hours before they'd thought to track down their two spotters on the ground. Those two were eventually unearthed in the bushes outside Keating Hall trussed with their own shoelaces and gagged with each other's dirty underwear. Kara had always liked the way Cadet Master Sergeant Merry thought things through.

That's what the group of OKK clustered in the Turkish valley was doing; they were the distraction. Slowing SOAR down and drawing their focus. They needed to be spanked, but the real threat would be ranged and ready somewhere nearby. The question was: How close?

Forty-five seconds out.

Once she thought it through, it was obvious.

"Little Birds, split and circle the hills." She rattled off helicopter names and target coordinates. "They have shooters placed high at these locations. Land on their heads."

"Vengeance," she called to Lola's gunship. "Climb to three thousand feet. Your primary targets will be..." She listed off more coordinates. "Make some noise and light once you're up there." It was against the unspoken rules to ask a stealth helicopter to make noise, but Lola didn't argue.

Chief Warrant Lola Maloney might command the 5D when they were on the ground; experience counted more than rank here-another thing to appreciate about the Night Stalkers. But during an operation the Air Mission Commander called the shots.

Kara could really get into this AMC role. She spoke, and the tactical map reflecting the team's actions shifted and morphed into seriously bad news for the OKK.

Not that she was power-trippin' or any such thing. But she could see it, like one big gestalt, right where the Turkish Special Forces had to have parked their butts if they were good without being truly great like the U.S. Special Ops Forces.

Key hideout positions would be tromped by the Little Birds coming up over the backs of ridges.

The DAP Hawk, well able to defend itself, would perch high to attract attention and draw simulated fire.

Now for the hammer blow.

"Texas," she called to Justin. "Come in fast and low. Fast-rope six Rangers down on top of the small hillock at the southwest corner to draw their attention." She circled the target hill on her screen so that it would transmit to the tactical display shining on the inside of his helmet's visor.

"Then fly and land here." She drew a line that circled behind a low ridge-cutting an arc around the OKK team sitting as bait-where she'd found him a small dip in the landscape that would provide cover while unloading the rest of the Rangers.

The OKK would be trying to follow his circling, which would draw the ground troops' attention away from the first Ranger team, who could then start taking potshots at the bad guys' backs to distract them from the main force.

"Let the rest of your Rangers loose here. Then climb to a thousand feet directly below the DAP Hawk to offer your gunners prime shooting."

Nobody responded.

They didn't need to. This was SOAR. All of the training in what could be reliably assumed had been taken care of during the two years of training in the 160th, which was after having a minimum of five years flight experience elsewhere in the armed forces.

She'd thought herself a real hotshot pilot of her RPA, until the first day of SOAR training. It had been a very humbling moment. She'd kicked ass ever since to make sure it didn't happen again. The SOAR instructors weren't just good; they were Night Stalker pilots themselves and knew shit that she'd never even dreamed of back in the 27th Special Operations Wing.

The SOAR fliers simply reacted to her commands. Once in the inner ring of the engagement, they only used radios for emergency communications like this last-moment change. Otherwise the Night Stalkers flew missions in absolute silence. Though she'd have to find a way to curb Mr. Texas during transit times. She'd just ignore the fact that his song had made her laugh so hard that Tago had offered to thump her back.

Kara had nosed the RPA over into a dive while handing out instructions. Tosca fell from six miles down to three in that thirty seconds of full-powered dive.

Fifteen seconds to first contact.

Tago had picked up on what she was doing and marked two areas of hillside. "Clean!" he said over the intercom just to emphasize that they were unoccupied sites. They wanted to spook the OKK, not kill them.

Kara targeted two of the simulated Hellfire missiles mounted on the Gray Eagle and let them loose. They went supersonic in seconds. Nine seconds and three miles later, the Hellfires slammed into either side of the valley wall high above the OKK encampment and blew up with a light-show blast from two hundred grams of R321 tracer powder that had replaced the usual warheads.

There would be a nice bright flash and a resounding Bang! that would echo through the valley.

At five seconds until the helos' arrivals, every OKK trooper was now looking at the two flashes and wondering what was going on up on the vacant hillsides.

More crucially, the blast was going to dazzle their night-vision gear and force them to blink at the wrong

moment.

Kara pulled Tosca back into level flight and circled above Lola's DAP Hawk to watch the Turks' downfall.

Just like Alexander the Great twenty-five hundred years earlier, the 160th SOAR and the U.S. Rangers swept across the land of the Turks with the ease of a Brooklyn gelato vendor selling cones on a scorching July day.

\* \* \*

Justin called over the intercom to Lieutenant Clint Barstowe, the leader of the U.S. Rangers, about the change in plans.

Raymond would be dropping the rear gate and rigging the two thick FRIES fast ropes to dangle off the stern. The forty-millimeter-diameter rope would allow the Rangers to slide down to the ground and deploy in seconds without having to land the helo. Because they'd be passing behind a low hill, the OKK might not even realize the helicopter had paused to let down troops.

To emphasize that, Justin floated up into the Turks' view for a moment, moving slow. Then he ducked down fast behind the hill, pausing only long enough to deliver the Rangers, and then raced to the far side and slowed again as he let himself float once more into brief view. It would look as if he'd simply done a slow cruise the whole way.

Now the trick was to stay completely out of sight.

Kara had found him a deep notch of dry arroyo just like back home in Amarillo where he'd learned to fly. He'd been dating a cattle rancher's daughter at the time, Francine of the long legs and not a single brain cell between her cheerleader ears.

One day her daddy had taken him up in his little R22 helicopter to search for some stray cattle and, more likely, to scare the crap out of Justin. Instead, Justin had earned his rotorcraft license as fast as he could and flown three seasons for Hank Freeman while Francine continued to work her way through the entire football squad.

Justin had the ball now, and like the All-State tailback he'd been, he was gonna stay fast and low.

He slid the body of the Chinook right down between the banks of the arroyo. From down here only the sixty-foot sweep of each of his front and rear twin rotors stuck out beyond the edges. He kept a close eye for any growth higher than the stubbly brush or any particularly tall boulders that might be wanting to clip off his rotor blades.

Danny also rode the controls. There was too much for one person to concentrate on. Per prior training, Justin watched the arroyo and the right-hand bank. Danny kept an eye on the arroyo, but mostly watched the left-hand bank. And they both watched the threat detector like hawks, just in case there were a couple bad buys stationed down in the arroyo.

Should have been; there weren't. Missed opportunity, guys!

They kept the Chinook moving along sharply, which meant the Rangers had better be hanging on as he bobbed and weaved twenty tons of helo like it weighed twenty kilos.

There was Kara's hill.

A good choice. Nice job, sweetheart! If it were up to him, he'd confirm her as the new permanent Air Mission Commander on this basis alone. She'd known exactly what he needed and made sure he'd received it.

He slewed the Chinook sideways as he bled speed.

"Unload in ten, nine..." He didn't have to continue his countdown over the intercom; everyone would have the count now.

At five he saw by the indicator light that the rear ramp was once again open and lowered.

At two he came to a stop.

Raymond began calling distance-to-contact as Justin lowered them into position. He was still in hover, none of his wheels on the ground. Justin's pilot seat was a dozen meters in the air over the dry arroyo. The middle of his helicopter was above the steep side of the carved riverbed. The Chinook's only point of contact with the earth was the trailing edge of the rear ramp twenty meters behind him, against a small flat spot he'd picked out as they slewed into place.

In ten seconds, the remaining twenty-five Rangers and their three heavily armed ATVs were out.

"Ramp clear," Raymond called.

Justin nosed down the face of the slope to gain some speed, rode the ground effect for a moment as momentum built, and then hammered skyward toward the firing position that Kara had identified.

Lola's DAP Hawk would have been invisible, except every ten seconds or so the crew was kicking out a decoy flare. It was a perfect solution to Kara's instruction to be visible. The flare was designed to burn bright and hot as it shot to the side so that any incoming missile would target the flare instead of the helo.

Rather than firing a large cluster in every direction as would normally be done, Lola Maloney was firing one here and one there. No way to pin down the exact location of the black-painted helo itself.

He slid in below her-tight, quiet, and dark.

Then he called to his crew.

"Remember, simulated rounds only. We don't want to be hurtin' their behinds any more than we already are. Weapons free."

It was strange not to hear the jarring buzz saw of the miniguns that usually penetrated the roar of the twin turbines mounted at the rear rotor. There was also no stench of cordite that often wound through the cabin when firing from a stable hover.

For this exercise, their weapons were firing light beams, not lead.

But that didn't mean the Turkish Special Forces stood a chance, not with SOAR on the scene.

\* \* \*

Kara checked her mission clock. It was all over in ninety-seven seconds.

Five helos and thirty U.S. Rangers had just taken down a hundred OKK spread across eight locations without breaking a sweat.

Kara knew that a report to that effect was going to go public, unless the Turkish military got its act together about actually helping in Syria and Iraq. Turkish pride was on the line; Kara didn't doubt that they'd cooperate.

"Bring them dogies on home, boys and girls."

"Yee-haw!" Justin called out over the radio and whirled down to gather his Rangers back aboard. The DAP Hawk remained on guard station above him even though they were in "friendly" territory.

Kara jolted at the sound of the cowboy's call and reviewed her own words. What in the world had she been thinking? Bring them dogies on home?

Captain Justin Roberts was six-two, built like, well, a cowboy, and had hair the color of wheat. He was also arrogant, as impressed with himself as a fresh-inducted benchwarmer parked in the Mets dugout, and from Texas-which all on its own was like eighteen strikes against the guy. That was two full innings worth of outs, just for one guy.

"Want some flight time, Tago?" Dumb question.

At his eager nod, she waved for him to take over flying the Gray Eagle Tosca back to the U.S. side of Incirlik Air Base a hundred kilometers south of the exercise area. A ground team awaited her there for a rearm and refuel. She needed twice the length of the warship for a runway, so a ground team made sure that her Tosca was always ready with whatever mission package Kara needed. It was nicer this way, not having the ground team always underfoot.

She climbed out of the deep armchair to stretch her legs and paced up and down the length of the coffin. She kept an eye on Tago. He had about half the flight hours he'd need before he'd have a chance at his own bird, but he was good and didn't need much of an eye. Once he was close enough, the software would take over for an automated landing.

"Don't just float along, Sergeant. You'll never get any better that way. Shake her out a bit."

He answered with a snap roll and a climb into a full loop that he didn't quite manage. She considered showing him the trick, but she remembered learning more from her failures than her successes, so she'd let him be for a couple more attempts.

The rest of her attention? She'd better be using that on herself.

Bring them dogies on home?

Damn.

No way was she going to be getting weak in the head for a handsome hunk of Texas meat.

Back home, Carlo was much more her style, though she wasn't stupid enough to fall for his constant pleading. He too was typically arrogant and male. At least he was Italian, from the neighborhood, and had a to-die-for tenor voice that was leading him to opera houses around the world. He'd been trying to get into her pants since they were both twelve, with no success.

But better him than Captain Justin Roberts.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Linda Davis:**

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have considerably more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity regarding spend your time. Any person spent their particular spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to the particular Mall. How about open as well as read a book called By Break of Day (The Night Stalkers Book 7)? Maybe it is to get best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time with your favorite's book, you can wiser than before. Do you agree with it is opinion or you have some other opinion?

#### **Shirley Raine:**

As people who live in the actual modest era should be update about what going on or data even knowledge to make these keep up with the era that is certainly always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe may update themselves by reading through books. It is a good choice for you but the problems coming to you is you don't know what one you should start with. This By Break of Day (The Night Stalkers Book 7) is our recommendation to help you keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and need in this era.

#### **Steven Connell:**

The book untitled By Break of Day (The Night Stalkers Book 7) contain a lot of information on the item. The writer explains the girl idea with easy technique. The language is very clear and understandable all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read this. The book was written by famous author. The author gives you in the new time of literary works. It is easy to read this book because you can read on your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book within anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can start their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice learn.

#### **Travis Berry:**

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