

# CAMP RESURRECTION

By  
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## CHAPTER ONE

Jack Mason followed their trail through the woods. These poachers were sloppy. A broken twig here, a boot print there. Jack could've followed this trail in the dark. Clearly, this pair had eluded authorities this long due to plenty of luck as they'd yet to leave any hints of skill or intelligence.

He kept his pace slow, careful to not betray his presence to the poachers. He'd been through these particular woods only a handful of times, but he'd been in woods like these much of his life. His presence out here was as natural as the trees.

Jack heard the poachers before he saw them. Two male voices conversing in hushed tones as though their elephant-like clamoring hadn't already scared off anything worth hunting in a hundred-meter radius. They finally came into view after Jack pushed through low-hung branches. One tall and thin, the other short and stocky, bringing to mind the image of a young Laurel and Hardy in camouflage... with one big exception. This pair carried high-powered rifles.

Fortunately, Jack didn't come empty-handed. He checked the safety on his own rifle and unsnapped his pistol holster. Outnumbered two to one, he stepped out from his cover and right in front of the two men. Both men swung their rifles around at the exact same moment. The shorter man caught on first and yanked his rifle back. "Jesus, man!" Hardy said in a breathless rush. "We could've killed you!"

Laurel had lowered his rifle, but Jack didn't miss the fact the man kept his finger on the trigger. That made Laurel either a novice or dangerous. Jack settled on the former with how the man was gripping the barrel like he was choking a chicken.

Jack took a prudent step back and leaned against the tree in a non-confrontational stance. "I didn't mean to sneak up on you like that. I just wasn't expecting to come across anyone. Rumor was there are some bear in this area." He held up the small camera he carried with him. "I've been out here all morning trying to get a decent shot of a bear, but I haven't even seen a hint of a black tail. You having any luck?"

Laurel jerked. "What makes you think we're out here hunting? We're just out for a hike."

Jack smirked. "Not many hikers carry hardware like yours."

Hardy jumped in with a flurry of words. "Everyone knows hunting season doesn't start for another three weeks. We wouldn't be doing anything illegal now."

Laurel motioned to the west. "Hey, mister. How about you head on over to Eel's ridge. That way we don't mistake you for a dangerous animal and shoot you by accident."

Jack's lips thinned. "Fair enough. I'll be on my way." Just as he turned to go, he paused. "I've never gotten close to a bear before. I figured this year would be the year."

Hardy gleaned with pride. "Hope you get your chance. It's a hell of a rush, man. Just last week—"

"Terry, zip it," Laurel cut in.

Hardy swallowed and went silent.

"I bet it was a rush." Jack slid the camera into a pocket and inconspicuously moved his right hand to his holster. "Posting that video of you shooting that 400-pound boar off-season?" He unzipped his jacket to reveal his uniform and badge. "Not very bright."

Their eyes grew wide, and they tossed a look at each other in almost perfect comedic Laurel and Hardy fashion.

*Ah, shit.*

Just as Jack expected, the idiots rabbited, each heading in a different direction. Grimacing, Jack took off after the stocky one. His prey bolted through the woods, tearing through shrubs, shoving through branches and pretty much making a hell of a racket. Jack dodged a branch that had come snapping back, only to get nailed across the forehead by the next one. "*Son of a bitch.*"

Jack sped up. A few long strides later, he tackled Hardy, using his full weight to barrel into the man. The poacher's air flew from his lungs with a grunt, and he hit the ground with a pleasantly brutal thud. Jack kneeled on Hardy's back. "You know what else wasn't very bright, asshole? Making me chase you down."

"*I'm sorry, I'm sorry,*" Hardy whimpered out impressively given Jack's full weight was on his chest.

Jack sighed as he disarmed and zip-tied the man's wrists. "I'm special agent Mason. If you haven't figured it out by now, I'm with the United States Fish and Game Service. You're under arrest for hunting without license and for the unlawful killing of big game. And, now you can add evading an officer to your list of charges."

"But, you're not a cop," Hardy whined when Jack yanked him to his feet.

Jack grinned and shoved his detainee forward. "I'm worse. I'm a game warden."

Hardy's breaths echoed through the woods as they walked. After a minute or so, Hardy stopped. "Listen," he pleaded. "We didn't mean any harm. We were just having fun. We didn't hurt anyone."

"Keep walking," Jack ordered. "And, no talking. Or else I'll tie you to that tree over there, and let the bears hunt you for a change."

Hardy's mouth clamped shut.

They walked in silence for ten minutes, though with Hardy's elephant-like footsteps and nasally breaths, the racket distracted Jack from savoring any part of the hike.

"Why did you let Dave go?" Hardy's asked out of the blue.

"I didn't," Jack replied, and he sent off a quick text as they kept walking.

Jack didn't rush Hardy. The man struggled walking on uneven terrain the way it was. But, at least he wasn't a chatterbox.

They walked for nearly an hour before the trees grew sparse, and Hardy became noticeably fidgety.

"Oh, so you thought you hid your shiny SUV really good, huh," Jack said and then shrugged. "You didn't do half bad, but I've seen a hell of a lot better. With how fast your buddy Dave was running, I bet by the time he circled the gully, he got here about fifteen minutes ago." Jack paused. "Too bad for Dave, my partner got here twenty minutes ago."

Hardy jerked his gaze back to Jack for a second. The hope in his eyes fell. He turned away with slumped shoulders.

When Jack and Hardy stepped out into the clearing, the white SUV came into view. A man sitting on the hood gave a wide wave. Jack grinned and waved back. Laurel AKA Dave sat on the ground in front of the SUV, his hands behind his back.

Jack's partner glared and slid off the hood. He crossed his arms over his chest as Jack and his detainee approached.

Jack motioned to the poacher on the ground. "This guy give you any trouble?"

Wash shook his head. "Nothing I couldn't handle."

Jack nudged Hardy toward Laurel. "Sit."

Jack turned toward his partner. "Glad you could make it."

"You should've called me," Wash said.

"I did," Jack replied.

"You should've called me *this morning*," Wash countered. "Before you got a wild hair up your ass to go after two armed, mentally deficient delinquents on your own."

Jack shrugged. "I checked in with Margaret. She said you were deep into a very important case. Something about a missing poodle."

"You're an asshole. It was a Shih Tzu." Wash grimaced. "And a hawk grabbed it before I got to it."

Jack cringed. "Ouch."

"These weekend campers from the city have no concept of what it means to be out in nature and surrounded by wildlife," Wash said. "I swear, they think the worst things out here are mosquitoes. They bring along Little Fluffy, and their biggest worry is that their dog gets a tick. The thought doesn't even cross their mind that Little Fluffy just so happens to look exactly like a hawk's dinner."

Jack's brow rose. "You tell the owner that?"

"Hell, no," Wash replied quickly before giving a long sigh. "I consoled her. Then she gave me her number."

Jack chuckled. "How many does that make this week?"

Before Wash answered, Jack's phone vibrated. He checked the caller ID and frowned. He answered because not answering Margaret's calls meant he'd get punished with shitty assignments for the next two weeks. "What's up, Maggie?"

*"You know I hate it when you call me that," Margaret said before continuing. "I have a big one for you and Wash. Our friends DEA called us this morning. They got wind of some high-dollar animal fights happening in our region. They said that the Angel Corporation is involved, so this isn't some small-fry operation, Mason. The DEA's leads on a drug trafficking case dried up with regards to this corporation. They're desperate to nail Angel Corp., so they're tossing the ball to us to see what we can do. They've also reached out to the IRS, but I want to get to these guys first. You know how I feel about animal cruelty, Mason. These people deserve jail time, not fines. You and Wash get your butts down here, and I'll fill you in."*

Jack threw a knowing glance at Wash, who returned a quick nod.

"We're on it."

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**Camp Resurrection comes out everywhere December 2015.**

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