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STORM RISING

By Robert D Miller

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Robert D Miller

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CHAPTER 2

Former Sergeant Stephen Broderick, U. S. Marine Corps, sat on the wild grass, leaning against a large outcropping rock, watching the nearby stream as it moved along its soft babbling but deliberate course. He mused it was like the work ahead for the organization. It surely had an origin but that was soon lost in the winding downward course.

Broderick's organization was a militant-minded, self-proclaimed group with the moniker, Retribution for Immoral Acts (RIA). The work of the organization was moving in a steady, non-detering path toward its goals and objectives in achieving success with the early stages of the plan. The brilliant sun sparkled in the cloudless ether blue sky as a shining orb.

In Broderick's mind however, thoughts were of more than just the stream, the sky or even the songbirds as they flew among the trees. His thoughts were of the plans he and the Supreme Council leadership had developed. Earlier plans had been met to the smallest detail. Because of the turmoil and obvious ignoring of the societal needs, the plans were intended to take advantage of the confusion, division, and disruptive situations within the United States and the world. The desire of the RIA was to use the organization's plans to be reached with spectacular success in the very near future.

It was time for the RIA leaders to discuss the details in carrying out plans. Broderick rose from his place on the grass and made his way up the slight incline to the rough appearing building at the top of the small hill. Possessing a six-foot, muscular body that had served his once-loved country as an experienced combat Marine officer, the uphill trek was a minor challenge for him. Though he had successfully completed his military duties, he walked with a significant limp. He had severely injured his right leg during a protest in St. Louis during the summer of protests. The injury most likely should have received medical treatment, but Broderick had chosen to simply leave the scene rather than risk being identified or being detained by law enforcement through his entry and treatment at a medical facility. His beloved country had, in his mind, not only caused his injury but had cost him the love of his life. He had married his high school sweetheart right out of high school just before

he enlisted in the military. While serving in Afghanistan during his second tour there, he had received that letter all too many soldiers receive when overseas. His wife had simply said she had tired of trying to pretend they were married because of his constant absence and had found she was still attractive to other men. She was filing for divorce immediately because she had found someone who really cared for her and wanted to provide for her. This breakup struck Broderick like a knife thrust into his chest. He did not fight it, he grudgingly accepted it but twisted the rationale to fit his blaming the government of the United States.

Eluding confrontation with law enforcement had been aided by another protester, Angela Morris. Their chance meeting resulted in a solid friendship. Morris was drawn to his idea of confronting the government but not for the same reasons. Her own experience as an active member in an anti-racism organization had been quite satisfying and the experiences made her hungry to do more. When she was overlooked for any leadership role in the group, she began searching for another avenue to pursue.

As he continued his slightly halting gait up the trail, Broderick's thoughts reflected upon what had occurred and what plans had been successfully met because of careful planning down to the smallest detail. Selection of each individual and to which team each was placed had gone smoothly and without any apparent discovery by legal entities. Everything had gone exactly according to the master plan. Now it was time to move ahead, but it was the ease of reaching the current status that continued to cause him to smile.

The members of the RIA's Supreme Council had made their way to the remote building located in southwest Colorado, secluded in the LaPlata mountains near Durango. The mountainous region was spider-webbed by old, rarely used mining roads. Some areas had been semi-developed for a getaway resort to allow wealthy city folk to temporarily escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. Broderick and his leadership team had obtained access to large rustic building, remodeled for group retreats or resorts and rented out for vacationing or retreats.

Privacy, remoteness and accessible only by four-wheeled vehicles made the location perfect for the Supreme Council. Broderick glanced back to the stream and beautiful landscape. It was time to discuss the goals of the

organization, the available options, strategic locations, and the timeline to be followed in carrying out the plans. It was time, in his mind, to dish out some pay back to the government that not only ignored the needy citizens in its own border, but willingly was over running communities with illegal immigrants from Central and South America as well as the Middle East. And then, he thought that also included the government's disregard for its current veterans, with or without significant situations resulting from armed combat, and for the families of those who had served and sacrificed their lives serving their country.

CHAPTER 12

It was a typical work day at the FBI office in downtown Topeka, Kansas. One of the 56 offices located throughout the United States. Each of the offices was referred to as a regional office. This was convenient because it allowed for quicker response to emergency situations that might arise. However, on this day, nothing seemed out of the ordinary and no alerts were being sent or called in from national headquarters in Washington, D. C.

Jefferey Scott, Agent-in-Charge, was conversing with his immediate assistant, Harry Sykes when the receptionist walked in and handed Scott a message. Quickly scanning the contents, Scott rose from the visitor's chair he had been seated in and handed the piece of paper to Sykes.

"Looks like there is a break in the Ness case, Harry," Scott commented.

"You are right, Jeff," replied the junior agent as he read through the message. "Appears that the ME has reached a conclusion for the C.O.D. She is saying it is her opinion that all four of the victims were killed by same way, by strychnine poisoning. Not a great way to go but it is pretty darn effective."

"That is a helpful piece of information," said Scott. "I think I need to reach out to Sheriff Green and check in with him. Maybe there is something else he can add."

With that, Scott took the message form back, turned and walked out of Sykes' office. It was only a few feet down the carpeted hallway to his own office, which he entered. As he walked around his desk, the message was placed on the desk pad in front of the dark brown, leather swivel chair in which he sat.

Picking up the handset of the desk phone, he alerted the receptionist and requested she call the Ness Sheriff's office and get Tom Green on the phone. He then hung up his phone, picked up the message again and reread it. In reality he was killing time waiting for the call from the front office to inform him that the person to whom he wished to speak was, in fact, on the phone. The wait did not take long. The phone on Scott's desk buzzed. He picked up the handset, pressed the flashing light indicating the call was from the receptionist desk. "Hi Mary, did you reach Green?"

“Yessir,” responded the receptionist. “Sheriff Green is on the line and I will connect you to him.”

“Thanks, Mary,” Scott acknowledged.

There was a brief pause and then an audible click and the call was connected. “Hello, Tom. Jeff Scott here. How are you today?”

“Hi Jeff,” the sheriff said. “Things have moved a little since you were out our way a few days ago. As you know from the message the Medical Examiner gave your receptionist, the four vics all died from the same cause. All four died an agonizing death as a result of strychnine poisoning. She mentioned to me that part of the conclusion was based on the fact that all four had evidences of the poison in their tissue and that all four bodies showed signs of extreme convulsing, again, a symptom found with strychnine ingestion.”

“Absolutely. I’m aware of the indicators for that type of poisoning and you are right, it is anything but a quick death. Have you been able to identify any potential source of the poison that was used?”

“As a matter of fact, Jeff, it appears that it was simply a high dosage of ordinary rat poison that must have been dissolved and then incorporated in one of the foods. I know that stomach contents revealed all four had eaten a pretty full meal of tacos, refried beans, Mexican beer, salsa, tortilla chips, guacamole, queso, and what appears to be flan. Because all four had components of all these, it seems that the poison was introduced in the flan as that more than likely was the last thing the four consumed.”

Agent Scott had been listening attentively and jotting notes on the pad of paper in front of him. He set the pencil down on the paper and leaned back in his chair, rubbing his forehead with his free hand. “Let’s go with that COD, Tom. Can your folks contact the stores where rat poison is sold? I don’t think we’re talking about just a small amount when we are looking at four grown adults.”

“Already on that, Jeff,” came the quick reply. “There are a couple of stores in Ness and several in Hill that carry the product. Some of them have CCTV in their locations and our deputies are working with local police in Hill as well as some of the nearby communities. Up until yesterday we were having to do this blind but we just may have found the who behind this.”

Hearing this, Jefferey Scott quickly sat upright. “What have you come up with, Tom?”

“Sometimes, as you know, Jeff, investigation is aided by just lady luck and that is kind of what we had happen. We knew from the tire tracks at the scene that the tires appeared to be from a longer vehicle which we concluded might well be a van. Beginning with that premise, we began going door to door of local businesses that served Hispanic food take away. We asked if they had any recollection of anyone picking up a rather large order of food on the day the ME gives as the probable time of death.

“Finally, after striking out for two days, we might have hit a winner. A local restaurant employee said he had been working the drive through window when an order was made for quite a large order that included everything the ME identified from stomach contents. When asked for any identification of the driver, he said that the person was driving a white Dodge van. The order was paid for in cash and, curiously to the employee, the driver was wearing blue latex gloves, a long sleeve shirt, large dark sunglasses, and a baseball cap that was pulled down snugly. The employee recalled this because, not only the order was larger than any he had dealt with for many days, but the strange dress worn as it was a warm day and it just seemed out of place for someone to be wearing long sleeves, gloves, and the cap worn with the visor forward instead of being worn reversed. He also noted that all the windows of the van were dark so he was unable to see how many, if anyone, was inside other than the driver. No one was in the front passenger seat.”

“That is great news,” congratulated Scott. “It definitely is a step toward finding the answers we really need.”

Sheriff Green accepted the agent’s compliment and then continued, “Once we had the likelihood that the vehicle was a white Dodge van with dark windows, we got more serious about the CCTV and traffic cameras in Hill City and here in Ness. What we came up with was a traffic camera at Main and Locust here in Ness. The camera has a fairly wide lens so we could see not only the active traffic in the driving lanes, but we were able to look at the parking areas along the curbside. Using the time frame provided by the restaurant’s recorded receipt, we focused on the window of time immediately before and shortly after the order was picked up and paid for.

“Fifteen minutes after the purchase was made, a white van pulled up next to the curb and stopped. Two men who appear to be two of the victims, stood up from a bench on the sidewalk and walked to the side of the van. One of them slid the door panel open and both climbed inside. At this point lady luck helped us again. Because the sun was full and was in a position that it lit up the inside of the van through the open sliding panel. We were not able to positively identify them, but the lit interior showed two people already in the vehicle.”

“Lady luck really was dealing a good hand to you, Tom,” commented Scott. “Any chance you captured the plate number?”

“Yes, we did get that number, it was from Iowa and the vehicle it was one was reported stolen last week from a parking lot in Des Moines. The stolen vehicle was a Hyundai SUV. Obviously, the person knows enough to change plates to throw off easy identification by any legal cruiser looking for the Hyundai. Usually, the officers look first for the make and model of a stolen vehicle and rarely look at the plate until after the type of vehicle is identified. That’s the down side because we are left not knowing where the vehicle actually is from but we believe that it was most likely stolen somewhere. I am sure that the network will capture it as stolen at some point but if we can move a bit faster it would make me happy.”

“Any chance the vehicle was captured on CCTV after the time of death?” Asked Scott.

Chuckling over the phone, Green replied, “You’re a step ahead of me, Jeff. As a matter of fact, one of the police traffic cameras in Hill did catch the van. It was turning west out of Hill and the time on the camera displayed forty-five minutes after the TOD.”

“So, it was headed to Colorado,” interjected the FBI agent.

“Affirmative,” said Sheriff Green. “Hill sent out a squad to follow the direction but came up with nothing.”

“Any place the guy could be staying along that route?”

“There are several cabins and small homes out that way and they are still processing each of them. However, there is one more clue we may have found. The next day, after the news had hit the airways, that evening the white van was spotted again on the highway heading west toward Colorado. This time

there was a dark blue Dodge Durango that appeared to be following the van. We are going to be checking that out in the coming days.”

“Sounds like you have it handled, Tom,” concluded Scott. “Anything else to add from your position?”

“I think that’s it for now. I am hopeful we will get additional information about the four vics and about the van, its driver and if the Durango is involved how, where did it come from and where is it now. Whatever pops I will personally notify you, Jeff.”

“I’ll be waiting for your call, Tom. Stay safe and good luck hunting,” Scott said, ending his part of the conversation.

“Gotcha, Jeff,” replied Green. “Hopefully you will get a call within the next few days.”

With that the lines went dead. Scott rose from his chair and exited his office, walking directly to his associate’s office. Lightly knocking on the door jamb to secure the attention of Sykes, he stepped inside and took a seat in the visitor’s chair.

Thirty minutes past and the Agent-in-charge rose again, having shared the details of the call from Sheriff Tom Green. Both federal officers were happy at the results to date and as he exited the office, Scott said “Sometimes too much time passes between the act of violence and the catching of clues. Maybe in this case we will see positive results sooner rather than later. Based on what Tom has discovered so far though, it does not appear that the deaths of the four are attributable to ethnic or race or to a hate crime.”

“Right, you are boss,” smiled Sykes at the exiting remarks of his superior.

CHAPTER 28

Marilyn Snyder had her tablet in hand as she sat in a chair off to the side of the farmhouse where they were staying for the drone testing. Geraldo and Popov had overseen the assembly of the drones and the crafts were now ready for flight testing. Popov and Snyder would oversee the actual flying. Popov had many hours flying different sized drones so he was more than capable of instructing the others who had been brought onboard to gain necessary experience and to prepare them for the attacks planned for in the not-to-distant future.

For Snyder, on this morning it was not the flight instruction, nor even the upcoming attacks the RIA had in store for certain areas in the United States, that was commanding her thoughts. Her full attention was on the newspaper headline from the Gallup online newspaper she was staring at on her tablet. “DEATH IN DETENTION CENTER”

She felt several emotions all at once. She was extremely angered that someone had attempted to kill both of her teammates, succeeding in doing so with Fyorodov, and leaving her newly found friend, Cruz, in a coma that authorities did not know if she would ever come out of. Snyder had been promised by Geraldo, her host at the farm, twenty-four hours to make a decision of how to deal with the fact that the two of her own team had been picked up in a stolen vehicle and detained by the State Police in Gallup. Maybe anger was only a symptom of the deep betrayal she felt.

She was supposed to be the head of her team and that control had been ripped away by someone. Her mind revisited the hours following the arrest of the two Silver Salmon members. She had called the RIA leader, Stephen Broderick and told him what happened. When he arrived at the farm later the same day, he said nothing to her but instead went to Geraldo and the two had a lengthy but subdued conversation standing apart from any others. Did he know what had happened? If so, how did he know before it was even in the news? Who sent the two attorneys to visit Cruz and Fyorodov? She hadn't requested such a visit. She had not even told Geraldo of the arrest until she had arrived and the other two teammates were not following her to the farm.

Yet, less than twenty-four hours after sharing with Geraldo and Broderick, one was dead and the other near death. Snyder, rising from her chair, decided to seek out Broderick and complain to him about the decision being taken out of her hands.

“Steve,” she called out to the organization leader who was sitting at a picnic table by the house, drinking a Diet Coke, “Can I talk to you for a moment?”

“Sure thing, Marilyn, what’s up?” Broderick said.

“Steve, I am upset and I’m not sure who deserves my venting so I will vent to you.”

“Okay, shoot,” invited her leader.

“When Popov and I arrived here, I told Geraldo about Karla and Krill being arrested. He gave me the usual cartel response that members of his cartel would be eliminated rather than risk having them give vital information to authorities. I admit, his cold approach startled me. I know Karla and I am completely confident she would never give out compromising information. She and Krill had worked on their backstory and both had it down tight. I had called you right after I talked with Fyorodov. When Geraldo told me what his cartel would do, I would not agree. He promised me twenty-four hours to let him know what I wanted done. This morning I find out by reading the Gallup newspaper that Fyorodov and Cruz both had visits from attorneys and within hours after those visits, he is dead and she is in the hospital in a coma.”

Broderick leaned back in his chair while turning the soft drink can on the table with his hand. He did not say anything but it was obvious he was in thought about what Snyder was sharing with him.

“Do you know anything about what happened, Steve?” pursued Snyder.

“Well, sometimes hard decisions must be made for the good of the organization. Sometimes that means excluding people or eliminating them. When I was in the military, sometimes we were forced to leave assets behind, knowing it would probably cost them their life, in order to protect our task force or protect the plan of operation.”

“I understand, somewhat, about the military situation, Steve. This is not military. Those two are our friends, our comrades. There is no way they would

undergo the same type of interrogation that your military friends or assets would face, and you know that.”

Broderick continued turning his drink can and looking at Snyder. “Marilyn, I know you are disappointed but the success in carrying out of the goal and plan of the RIA is more important.”

“You’ve got to be kidding!” exclaimed Snyder, her frustration and anger beginning to show.

“Frankly, Marilyn, I’m more concerned about Cruz coming out of her coma, being told of Fyorodov’s death and that being used to weaken her resistance to questioning. Such an occurrence would possibly impede our plan, maybe even destroy it.”

Snyder sat in silence, staring at Broderick with eyes, that if they were capable of the act, would be shooting knives at her leader.

“I really cannot believe what you have said, Steve. I did not know you were so cold-hearted about people who supported you and were willing to risk imprisonment in that support of your grand plan.”

Broderick, removing his hand from the can, turned fully facing this irate, emotionally hurt, and shocked subordinate. He had personally chosen Snyder because of her intelligence, her leadership skills, and her desire to join the plan to punish the U. S. government.

“Marilyn, I understand your hurt and your anger. I made the decision. I reached out to Carlos, Geraldo’s cartel brother and asked him to take care of it. Karla made a call to the cartel’s legal team leader who told her that the two of them would receive a visit from cartel legal representatives. The final decision as to what, where, and how it would be dealt with was decided by Carlos, Geraldo, and the cartel legal leadership.”

“Yes, Steve, you have discreetly washed the problem from your hands and simply passed the buck to someone else. I never would have thought you were capable of that. I agreed to join your organization because we shared similar views. However, I have a greater respect for people close to me. I can kill people I do not know, but no way could I order close associates to be assassinated.”

Broderick nodded his head and leaned forward in his chair, closer to Snyder. Looking deep into her eyes he began to speak. “Marilyn, Marilyn,”

he began, “You have been one of my top people in the RIA. I know you are very upset, disappointed, and even angry. What I need to know is where are you now, as far as the RIA goes?”

Snyder heard the unspoken part of that question. There was a definite threat or promise disguised in his words. She knew now what Broderick’s position was in having to consider anyone’s displeasure or questioning the RIA’s plans.

“Of course, I am still completely committed to the plan. If I wasn’t, I would have jumped in my car and left instead of venting to you. I only needed some kind of answer as to who, what, and why this had to be done before I had an opportunity to give my decision to Geraldo. You don’t have to worry about my support, Steve.”

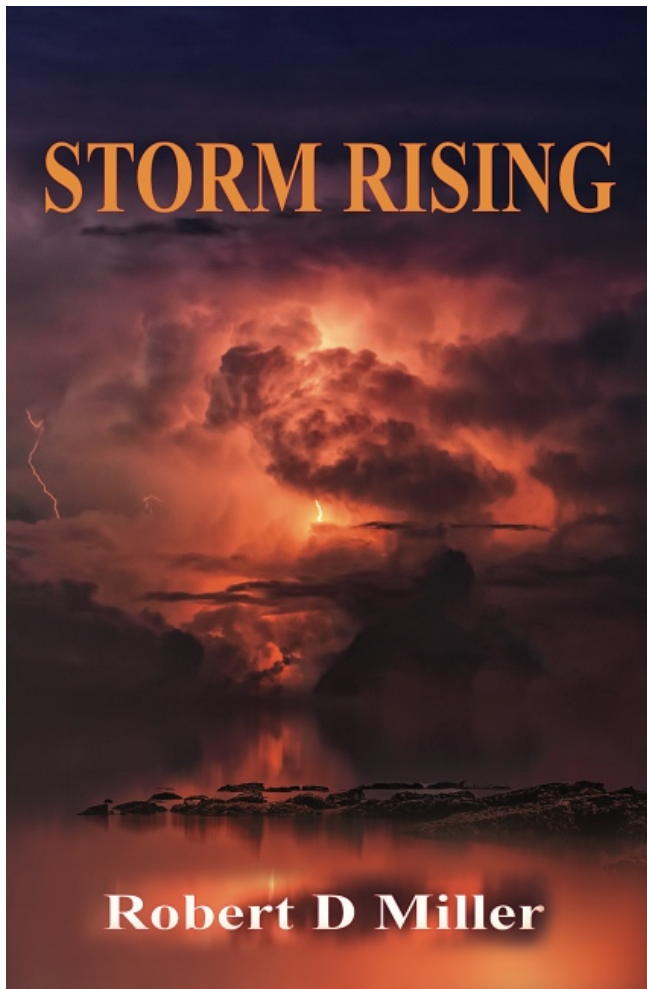
“That’s good to know, Marilyn. I was sure I could continue to count on you as we go forward. Thank you for your continued belief in the plan. I am also glad you felt close enough to come to me instead of letting it fester in you.”

The two rose from their respective chairs and gave each other a hug to seal their joint commitment to the RIA.

About the Author

Robert Miller served a career in public education as a teacher, athletic coach, district superintendent, and has always enjoyed writing. He and his wife both were born and raised in Montana.

Following his career in the educational field, they briefly lived in Texas and the state of Washington before returning to their home state to enjoy retirement.



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