

*Tommy Morris was discharged from the US Air Force snipers and takes a clandestine job as a Finisher for the Harris County DA's office. Adrenaline and fantastic money lead him directly into the dark folds of Houston's human trafficking world.*

## **The Finisher**

By Bert Marshall

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# THE FINISHER



*a novel by*

**BERT MARSHALL**

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## CHAPTER

# 2

“Captain, I’ve heard a lot about you.” The man across from me could be my father, except he is darker-skinned than my dad – what little I remember of him. “My name is Marcum Stanley. I am ex-Army, former Green Beret and now the District Attorney of Harris County. I understand from Lt. Colonel Fisk you are an ex-PJ needing work.” Before I can object, he holds up his hand and pours us both two fingers of Johnny Walker blue label whiskey.

The powerful looking black man takes a sip and stands, removing his expensive suit jacket in the process. Without saying a word, he removes his tailored shirt. On his forearms are Special Forces tattoos, along with a couple of ugly bullet exit scars. He doesn’t stop there and removing his t-shirt, I see the scars equal to my own, that come only from combat and pain. He raises his eye brows and I nod in acknowledgement to his service.

He takes another sip of whiskey and redresses, replacing his shirt with a fresh one. “I have a need, or shall I say; Harris

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County has a need for someone with your special skills. Someone, shall I say who can get the job done without being seen... interested?" He asks the last question as he looks at me and smiles. Yeah, he knows who he is talking to.

"Go on." If this man in front of me wasn't of my ilk, I would walk, but warriors talk, when everyone else just tries to blow smoke up your arse, as the Brits say.

"First off, the job pays very well, with severe doses of adrenaline to boot. Bad guys, lots of really bad guys are involved. We know who they are and they operate outside of the law, thanks to crooked lawyers who keep them safe. If we grab them, they are on the street in minutes and our families are in danger of retaliation."

"You need someone who can finish the job." I say quietly, sipping my liquor.

"Exactly. That others may live, Captain," and that is how it started. I was living in a rundown trailer, except when I stayed over at Miranda's house in the Heights of Houston and now I am living on forty acres on the north side of Baytown, close to the Mont Belvieu salt dome petrochemical storage complex. It keeps the south and east side of my property completely secure. The west side has an extensive security system, as does the entrance – all paid for in cash and monitored 24-7 by the Brinks Security Industrial division paid in full, five years in advance.

One of my lesser used skills until recently is animal husbandry, learned in AG – Agriculture classes in Mississippi and I have ten head of exotic sheep and goats that compliment my property and lower my taxable land bill considerably. I keep to myself and am often seen wearing Lee jeans, straw hat, and cowboy boots – a common enough sight around these parts

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that I draw little attention, except at the Tractor Supply where the cute young women who work there openly ogle me.

Although tempting, Miranda would skin me alive if she found out I had bed one of them and she keeps me plenty occupied to insure my faithfulness. I have one stipulation in our relationship and that is I maintain my privacy, so our intimate time together is limited to overnight stays and activities inside the Houston city limits. She is my sole lover for the last two years and is becoming suffocating needy and clingy. I am good with our established relationship, but she needs more and lately, the subject comes up nearly every hour we are together.

“I can’t go on like this, baby.”

“I know.”

“Tommy...”

“No.” I say in almost a whisper and she begins to cry. It’s over and we both know it. I’ve been withdrawing from her for weeks. She knows I have a severe problem being close to anyone, as it has hurt too much when they die and many have died around me. She knows my love for her is real, but she fears if she walked, I would simply move on.

She’s right of course.

Two days later I get a phone call from the VA and a young woman tells me my psychiatrist is now a man named Walter Petrovski. My eyes unexpectedly fill with tears and I utter a rare curse under my breath.

\* \* \* \* \*

I let two full weeks pass and call Miranda and get a recording saying the line is no longer active. I can’t commit to her, but I need her. She is like a lifeline to me and I drive by her

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house. It's vacant with a for sale sign in the yard. Property here goes for a premium most cannot afford, but this excellent house will sell within the week. Driving to the VA hospital, I am told she quit two days ago and they will see if they can get a forwarding address for me, but after fifteen minutes, I get the message loud and clear. She has protection from the other women here and there will be no forwarding address.

I could easily get it on my own, but to what end?

Except for my quarterly review, I have no intention of seeing Walter Dipstick and I tell him so when his office calls. They can kiss my ass for all I care. I want Miranda back. I stop at the Spec's liquor store with every intention of getting stumbling drunk when two men run out the door with handguns, shooting back inside the store. They jump into a new black Tahoe with dealer plates and peel out heading for Garth Road and I-10 most likely. One was big and black and other a scraggly white dude and I get a good enough look that I think I can identify both in a line-up.

Dialing 911 as I run for the store I rapidly tell them of the shooting and hang-up before I can give up my personal info, as I want to check on the owner. His name is Andy and he's "Persian" according to him and a very friendly guy. I am armed, possessing a concealed handgun license, but I do not draw my Beretta, as this place will be crawling with cops in about one minute. Poor Andy is laid across the counter and as I enter the store I can plainly see a bullet hole in the top of his head. His oldest son is on the floor in front of the counter and his wife is laid across him sobbing.

I stop and step outside the store, so angry I can hardly talk as the first Baytown Cruiser comes screaming up. I raise my

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hands, showing they are empty and as the cop throws down on me, I tell them I called it in...and I have a CHL and am carrying. I allow him to roughly handcuff and disarm me and am told to sit by the curb, just as four more cop cars arrive. I offer no resistance, knowing the drill.

A few minutes pass and they un-cuff me and take a statement. There is no need for an apology, as everyone is suspect at a crime scene. A few minutes pass and Andy's wife Atoosa comes out and when she sees me she runs to me crying. "Why, why, why, Mr. Tommy? Why they kill my Anoush and baby boy?" Her tears tear at my heart and I feel the salty drops run down my face too as the fat little woman shakes in grief with my protective arms wrapped around her. She suddenly looks up me, realizing it is me who called the cops and she drags me into the store and points at a case of very expensive whiskey and pleads with me to take it – which I do, albeit with weak objections.

I took the case of whiskey home, but didn't drink a drop. Instead, I went for a fifteen mile run and felt so much better than I would have if I would have drank myself into a stupor.

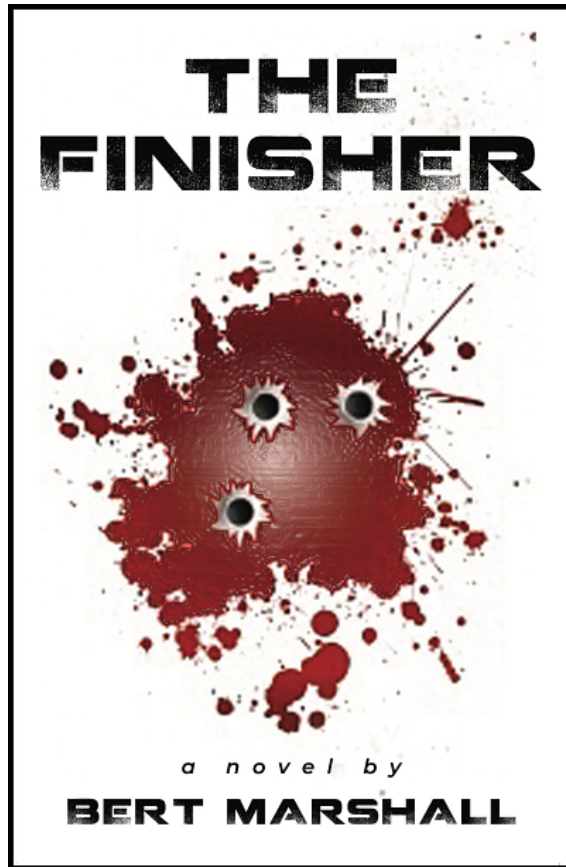
When I arrived back at my house inside my mailbox is a letter, which I recognize has a coded series of numbers in it. It will be the GPS coordinates to a secret cache with coded instructions for my next job. It's how I will get my assignments and first payment. This letter has a commemorative stamp on it, marking it urgent. "Crap!" I say softly, as I had every intention of showering, grabbing a bite to eat and spending the evening watching an episode of "The Unit". I empathize with Delta, as I've worked with them a bit.



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I walk down the long driveway, reading the letter and then shower, grab a quick sandwich, my Garmin Oregon 750 GPSr unit, and war bag and head for the cache. It's out off of I-10 East at the J.J. Mayes Wildlife Trace and walking out the second boardwalk, it takes me all of five minutes to find. It is two .50 caliber ammo cans and wearing rubber gloves, I am careful to empty them out and later throw away the Wal-Mart tennis shoes I wore, per instructions. The Ammo cans are to be left by a trash can in front and will be excitedly removed by the first person who sees them. My boss is being extra cautious and I appreciate this.

Safely back at my place, I put the ten thousand dollar advancement in my safe without counting it and sit down on the back porch to see what they've assigned me.



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