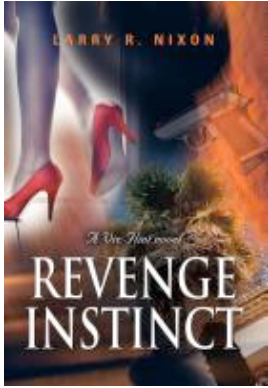




LARRY R. NIXON

*A Vic Flint novel*

# REVENGE INSTINCT



*Victor Flint is a highly trained undercover operative working for the military and the FBI. For publication, his profession is developing weapons and high-tech equipment for the military. Without knowing of his secret profession, Vic's partner, Susan, continually fights the assignments placing him in dangerous situations all over the world. Ironically, Vic has to be on guard thwarting attacks from assassins sent to kill him because of his work with Susan, not his clandestine assignments.*

## **REVENGE INSTINCT**

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# **REVENGE INSTINCT**

**A Vic Flint novel**

By  
**Larry R. Nixon**

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## ***CHAPTER ONE***

Dream along with me.

February 10, 2004 (Lincoln City, Michigan)

Looking through the scope on my experimental, long-range, laser-aimed, computer-controlled, sniper rifle, I focused on the naked girl bound spread-eagled to a stake within inches of a blazing bonfire. It was Brenda. How could that be? She was dead, killed in an explosion nearly a year ago. As I stared, the skin on the inside of her legs bubbled into huge raw blisters and began to char. I could see her mouth open wide in a long protracted scream, but could not hear her from this distance. She was over a mile away. Although shooting her would put her out of her misery, I just couldn't do that, but I could shoot the person responsible for her anguish standing beside her, laughing at her pain, Senator Carol Smart. I moved the crosshairs of the scope from Brenda onto Smart's chest and squeezed the trigger. Nothing. I squeezed it repeatedly but still nothing happened.

With a jolt, I sat upright at my desk and awoke. It was a horrendous dream; a nightmare I had been tortured with every night for the last month, and now it was invading my days as well. There seemed to be no escaping the unbearable vision.

My eyes watered from the brilliant sunlight beaming through the west-facing office window, glaring off the snow-covered rolling fields and ice coating Lake Carolyn three miles away. Rubbing and blinking my eyes, I tried to focus on the snow-covered landscape, but it only brought more tears. I sighed, lowered my head, and closed my eyes. At least, I was free of the dream, for the moment.

The anniversary of the attempt on my life was approaching, the attempt that had killed three of my best friends, Brenda Moeller, her brother Carl, and Scott Campbell. Within four months of their murder, the assassin was dead, killed, not by me, unfortunately, but ironically

by the most unlikely person you could ever imagine. Although the assassin was dead, the instigator behind the plot was free, and in my mind thriving. Last month her lawyer had won her case on a technicality getting the murder charges dropped and triggering my relentless nightmare.

You'd think that after months of remorse, I'd start to forget, and stop believing that I could have prevented the horrifying tragedy. Although the facts proved otherwise, my subconscious would not accept it. There was no such thing as 'A good night's sleep' anymore. Unanswerable questions plagued my nights, as I attempted to fall asleep. What if I had done this, why had I done that? The only way I could fall asleep was to begin planning my revenge in exacting detail. In my head, I tortured Smart to death in every atrocious way I could imagine. I was positive that the sleepless nights would last until I had carried out an act of vengeance with murder a viable option.

"Wake up, Flint. Someone just came in the door, downstairs," Johanson growled.

Sven Johanson and I had just returned from working out. Normally we did not work out together, mainly because we hated each other, and stayed as far apart as our job would allow. We were exact opposites in every way. Although the six-foot three Sven was down to a svelte 245 pounds, I'll always see him as the 280-pound fat slob I had learned to hate. The gobs of black grease that used to reside under his nails added to his revolting image. I, on the other hand, was truly svelte at an even six-foot and 180 pounds of hard muscle, and quite humble about it I might add.

"I heard it, and I wasn't sleeping, just resting my head on the desk. You were the one sleeping, snoring loud enough to break the ice on Lake Carolyn."

"Wasn't sleep'n, just relaxing on the couch."

"You relax louder than a chainsaw, Johanson."

It was Monday afternoon and the only reason we were together was that we were waiting in our Lincoln City, Michigan office for a call from our partner Susan MacDonald, presently in The Swamp

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Office near Boca Raton, Florida. Lincoln City lies about an hour south of Traverse City, Michigan.

“Who’s there?” I called out.

“Sheriff Watson,” a gruff voice answered from below.

“Come on up, Sheriff. You here to arrest Johanson? It’s about time. What did he do this time?”

“I didn’t do nothing, Flint.”

Heavy steps ascended the stairs.

“I’m not here to arrest anyone . . . yet,” the sheriff said as he entered the room and scowled at me, “Just heard you were in town, and came here to warn you. You get into any trouble around here again and I’ll put you away.”

“Me? What about Johanson?”

“We’re used to handling him. Barroom brawls are nothing compared to what you bring to town.”

The sheriff was referring to the explosion that leveled a farmhouse killing my friends. The bomb was supposed to kill my business partner, Susan MacDonald and me, but we were outside the building when it erupted. To the perpetrator who set the bombs, the ones killed in the blast were simply collateral damage, nothing more. Shortly after that, another attempt on our lives had failed as well.

“If you are referring to the explosion, the guy who set it is dead, as you know. Why worry now?”

“He’s dead, but I understand he was just hired help. How about the person who hired him? Is he dead, too?”

“It was a she, not a he, and she was arrested, but her lawyer got her off on a technicality. We’re sure she won’t try again.”

“You’re positive of that?”

I shrugged.

“Why did she want you killed in the first place?” the sheriff asked.

I could have told him that the real reason for her plans to kill SueMac and me was to get sole possession of an artificial intelligence computer program Susan MacDonald and I had designed. With us out of the way, Carol Smart believed she would gain full control of the AI

program. Her reasons for wanting control of AI were mainly political in nature, but once she discovered the real power of the software, nothing would be beneath her. She had attempted to have SueMac and me assassinated, proving there was no limit to how far she would go.

“Uhhhh, don’t have a clue, must have been about one of our government contracts,” I answered.

Sven smiled, “Either that or maybe she likes you as much as I do.”

“You were as close to getting killed, as I was, Sven. Maybe she was really after you,” I countered.

“Next to you, I’m a saint. She don’t even know me.”

“Well, if she did, you’d be high on her list. No one deserves the top of a hit list more than you.”

“What is it with you two, always fighting, and why are you still working together?” the sheriff asked. “It sounds like you hate each other.”

“Can’t stand him Sheriff. He’s a big, fat, dumb, lummo; I don’t dare turn my back on him.”

“He’s a skinny, smart-assed jerk. Thinks he knows everything, but he’s noth’n but a puny punk,” Sven remarked in retaliation.

“But according to Susan MacDonald, you’re supposed to be partners. How can you hate each other and still work together?”

“What does that have to do with anything? Johanson does his job and I do mine. Granted, as stupid as he is, I have to think for him, but as long as I keep him in line, everything works out.”

“Keep me in line??? I have to watch out for him.” Sven turned to look at the sheriff. “He’s too little to take care of himself. Makes my job harder, but I’m big enough to handle it.”

“Being partners was SueMac’s idea. If I had my way, I’d send Johanson to a pig farm where he belongs. In saying that, I have to apologize to the pigs. They’re a class above him, and they smell better.”

“That happen, and you wouldn’t last out the next mission, and Susan knows it,” Sven grumbled.



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“Missions? That’s another thing, Flint. What type of work do you do?”

Sven has to learn to keep his big, fat mouth shut. “We test and perfect hardware for the military. Sometimes it takes us into dangerous areas,” I answered, trying to be as vague as possible.

“Okay, but why here in the backwoods of Northwestern Lower Michigan?”

“The product we are working on right now requires cold weather testing, and our South Florida testing facility does not fit the bill for that, even in February,” I answered.

“But why here? Couldn’t you go to Alaska or better yet, the South Pole?”

“It’s a cost thing, Sheriff. We have a tight budget to follow.”

“Just what is this ‘product’ you’re testing?”

“Can’t say, Sheriff,” Sven answered with a smirk of importance. “It’s classified.”

“This weapon you’re testing better not be dangerous to the public,” the sheriff said with a scowl.

“Not a weapon, sir, and it’s not dangerous at all,” I answered to keep Sven from giving anything away.

“Don’t care. I better not catch you running your tests on public property. You know, I tried to have this office closed down, Flint, and you forbidden from coming here, but an FBI agent, Dan Cacho convinced me not to pursue that angle.”

“It’s Agent Daniel Di Ciaccio. Besides, Sheriff, legally you couldn’t do that. Is that what he told you?”

“There are ways, Flint, and if I have any trouble from this office, I’ll exercise them.”

“Okay, Sheriff, I’ll keep a low profile and try to keep Johanson out of trouble as well, even if I have to kick his butt to do it.”

“That’ll be the day, little man,” Sven grumbled.

“Sounds like all I have to do to keep the peace around here is to put you both in a fighting ring and turn you loose.”

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“Won’t work, Sheriff. He just won’t learn,” Sven said. “Someone put him in the horspital a couple times before, but here he is still talking out of his ass.”

“You’ve been promising to put me in your *horspital* for years, Johanson, but all you have to show for it are scars on your chin, where I slammed you face-first onto the ground.”

“That fight is not over, Flint, just between rounds.”

“You two keep on arguing,” the sheriff said as he moved toward the stairs. “I have to get back to work, but I’m warning you; one sign of trouble from either of you, and you’ll find yourselves behind bars. My deputies have orders to keep a close eye on you. You won’t get away with anything, as long as I’m in charge.”

## ***CHAPTER FIVE***

Triskaidekaphobia.

February 13, 2004 (Lincoln City, Michigan)

Naturally, it was Friday making it twice as unlucky. Without SueMac to run interference, we were in deep doo-doo. As it turned out, her presence would have made no difference.

They were waiting inside the office, Danny at my desk and the colonel standing in front of the windows his bulk blocking all of the sunlight streaming into the office. These two were a contrast in types. FBI Agent Daniel Di Ciaccio stood around five foot eight with the build of a power lifter, and Colonel Samuel Hileman seven or eight inches taller in the mold of an NFL linebacker. He reminded me of Lawrence Taylor the New York Giants' famous linebacker.

With no greeting, Danny started giving orders, "We have a few scenarios in mind for you, black operations, requiring you to give up all of your IDs. Neither of you will carry any identification, when on one of these missions. If you have any tattoos, have them removed immediately."

"Wait a minute. How did you get in here?" I demanded. "Our security is foolproof."

Danny just smiled.

"I don't give a damn how they got in, but I'll tell you, I have a Marine Corp tattoo on my shoulder," Sven said, "and no one is going to remove that."

"It identifies you as an American. Listen, Jarhead, this is not up for debate," Colonel Hileman said. "Get your butt over to Selfridge Air National Guard Base north of Detroit and report to the base hospital and have it removed. They will be expecting you. Once these missions are over, you can have that stupid ass tattoo put back if you want."

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“He probably has a tiny rainbow tattooed on his ass, as well, but to tell you the truth, I’m surprised he has any tattoos at all, Colonel. He’s afraid of needles. I heard he spent the first month in the Marine Corp passed out. Every time someone brought a needle near him, he keeled over.”

Sven ignored me and asked, “What kind of missions?”

“And where are we going?” I added.

Di Ciaccio ignored both questions. “Last month in Detroit, a sting operation, set to catch car thieves, snagged several gang members in the act of stripping stolen cars, but the cops got a surprise. A handgun, confiscated from one of the perpetrators during the sting, was later identified as one shipped to the army in Iraq six months ago. With that information, they got a search warrant for the sixteen-year old kid’s home and found a small cache of weapons, including several RPGs (Rocket Propelled Grenades), also identified as belonging to that Iraq shipment, but the most surprise came from the Stinger Missile found with the weapons. It wasn’t part of that particular shipment to Iraq.”

“I’d hate to think what fun a gang of kids from Detroit could have with a ground to air missile, not to mention the RPGs,” I grimaced.

Colonel Hileman added, “The kid’s brother is a former enlisted man, presently employed as a combatant working for a mercenary organization based in Afghanistan.”

“What are we supposed to do?” I asked.

Again, they ignored my direct question.

Di Ciaccio continued, “A truckload of weapons and ammo was supposedly destroyed in a roadside bomb blast near Fallujah, Iraq. The confiscated weapons, recovered in Detroit, were part of that shipment. As coincidence would have it, the perpetrator’s brother was in Iraq at that time, nearing the end of his enlistment. Upon his honorable discharge, two weeks after that particular roadside bomb blast, he joined the mercenaries and is now based somewhere in Afghanistan.”

Hileman cut in before I had a chance to ask my question again.

“Yesterday, we stopped by The Swamp Office in Florida and talked to your boss, Susan. We explained the situation, and asked her to do some research for us before we get your help. She wasn’t too happy about involving The Swamp Office, but said she would look into the problem.”

Still not answering my questions, Di Ciaccio added, “We believe there is a lot of money being made selling off those weapons, and these mercs have the right connections to do that. There’s no telling where the weapons may be going.”

“Will you answer at least one of my questions?” I demanded.

Di Ciaccio said, “And stop shaving. I want you both sporting heavy beards ASAP. With the beards, hair dye, some makeup, and Afghan clothes you will be able to pass for one of the locals.”

“I doubt if Flint can grow a beard, but don’t worry, he can pretend to be a little boy,” Sven said.

It was my turn to ignore someone. “Why are you involved, Colonel? The last I heard, you were leading a squad of Special Forces in Iraq, working behind the lines. This doesn’t sound like your kind of operation.”

He finally answered a question.

“I won’t ask how you knew about my prior assignment, Flint, but to explain this job, I have been temporarily assigned to the Military Police just for the purpose of this mission.”

“What about our testing responsibilities?” Sven asked. “We aren’t finished with the qualification tests for the Army.”

I looked around to see who was coaching him. This bright query was just too intelligent to come from him.

“We informed Susan, in fact she is onboard with the whole idea,” Di Ciaccio said.

I choked, “She approved of our involvement in this?”

“I didn’t say that,” he answered.

Colonel Hileman added, “She has agreed to go along with this as long as she is free to back up your operations with her computer inquiries.”

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I shook my head. “Come on, Colonel, I can’t see SueMac giving in to you, and you know the AI program was destroyed last year, so her help will be somewhat hindered.”

“Susan described how you destroyed AI, but she says that in trying to design a simple replacement for the dead AI program, she has come up with a modest copy, and while it can’t duplicate AI’s speed and accuracy, it seems to be working to some degree.”

Di Ciaccio added, “I never believed in your artificial intelligence program in the first place, though I have to admit, Susan delivered some accurate answers. I knew she was a genius, so I came to the conclusion that her answers were just intellectual deductions, and the so-called indecipherable printouts from AI that only she could decipher, were just a subterfuge.”

“While Johanson is in Detroit having his tattoo removed, you’ll be conferencing with your boss, getting all the information you need,” the colonel said to me. “As we told you, she already started an initial investigation into the ammo disappearances. You have to be in close communication with her, so I’m leaving two encrypted satellite phones for you and Sven to use. She has an identical one down in Florida. Not only will the encryption prevent anyone from tapping into your conversations, but on top of that, the phones will automatically scramble the signal as well.”

“Good to know. You keep referring to SueMac as my boss,” I corrected. “We are partners.”

“I’m sure,” Di Ciaccio frowned.

“You haven’t described our mission, yet. Where are we going and what will we do there?”

“All in good time, Airman.”

“Whatever this mission is, will we be able to use some of the items we have checked out for the military?” Sven asked.

*Who is this guy, and where is getting these bright questions?*

“Possibly,” Colonel Hileman said, “but not the suits. Agent Di Ciaccio and I were informed about those tests, very impressive. We tried to get permission for you to use them, but it was not possible. The prototype nanotech suits cost too much, each one over three

hundred thousand bucks, and that does not take into account the cost of the exotic machine needed to perfectly weave the strands together.”

“Costs that much, huh. I was hoping to use them. They would be great, but it seems human life isn’t worth that much to you guys. Speaking of that, we have to be given time to finish those tests, Colonel. Another month and we’ll be at a good holding point.”

“We’ll make arrangements for you to complete the tests simultaneously with the missions,” he replied. “In most incidences the testing can be completed by one of you, allowing the other time to proceed with a follow-up mission, if necessary.”

“Johanson, get over to Detroit today, and get those tattoos removed, Hileman ordered. “Took a lot of time getting approval for this operation; can’t waste anymore.”

“I only have one tattoo. Flint don’t know what he’s talking about, but why do I have to go all the way to Detroit? Can’t I just go to the hospital here in town?”

“I could grab a belt sander and get it off in two seconds,” I offered.

Danny ignored me and explained, “We do not want any official record of your tattoo removal, for security reasons.”

“Seriously,” I said, “A good reason for the belt sander.”

Thinking I was kidding, he continued, “In the meantime, Vic, talk to Susan; she wants the two of you running simultaneous inquiries about this mission. She said your point of view will be better than hers; don’t know where she got that idea, never knew you to have a point of view worth anything.”

He was kidding . . . *really*.

Di Ciaccio had arranged for Johanson to fly out of the local airport to the National Guard base in an agency plane. Sven was impressed.

After Di Ciaccio, Hileman and Johanson had left for the airport still without informing us of the mission details. I called SueMac. “What have you agreed to, Sue? I’m surprised you let them talk us into this operation.”

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“It was either that or you and Sven would find yourselves back in uniform.”

“They couldn’t do that . . . could they?”

“Apparently, both you and Sven can be called back into service at any time, what with the war in the Middle East.”

“That sucks.”

“I know, but we’ll keep a close eye on things through the software, should be able to keep you both safe.”

“What is the mission, Sue?”

“They did not tell you?”

“No, but can’t we dump Johanson? I’ll have enough trouble without having to contend with him; he’s nothing but a hindrance.”

“You are just prejudiced, Vic. He can be an asset.”

“You got the *ass* part right.”

“Whatever,” she sighed.

“What do you want me to do to get started?”

“We cannot talk now since we are on landline phones, so use the new encrypted phone that Danny gave you and call me back from the Lake House this evening. I will fill you in on the mission and have a strategy worked out by then.”

Without as much as a polite ‘goodbye,’ she hung up.

\* \* \*

The Lake House, SueMac referred to, was on Lake Carolyn a few miles west of Lincoln City. The Swamp Office had bought the house for us to use as a residence when we were working here in Michigan. Bertha’s great grandfather had moved into the house to stay year round serving as caretaker. When we were in residence, being somewhat of a recluse, he moved out of the Lake House back to his isolated cabin near Tustin on the eastern edge of Bertha’s farm.

I saw him a while ago at the Lake House from a distance. I had stopped by to inspect the dwelling to insure that everything was in order, namely the heating system, and the internet connection. As important as proper heating was this far north, the internet was more vital. The Swamp Office depended on it.



As I entered the house, I saw an old man, later identified by Sven as his great-uncle, Bertha's great grandfather, pulling a sled onto the ice. He was going ice fishing, and even from this distance, he appeared grumpy enough for the role. I think he hates people except for Bertha and Sven. Bertha, besides being one of the sweetest people I know, is a real hottie, tall, and stacked. I can understand the old man's feelings for his sweet great-granddaughter, but his oaf of a great-grandnephew, Sven, no way. Sven tells me that his uncle is as strong as a bull and a genius to boot, but then again, Sven thinks Donald Duck is real, and Bugs Bunny a genius.

The house, built in the early 1900's of milled hardwoods found in the forests around Lincoln City, looked like a dump. The outside was covered with warped clapboard siding. Paint had not touched the outside in over forty years. The best feature, visible from the outside, was a screened-in porch facing the lake. The inside, on the other hand, was luxurious, designed by SueMac. She had overlooked no modern convenience.

This time Bertha's grandfather was nowhere around when I entered the Lake House. Maybe he was a clairvoyant rather than a genius. The house was empty, but warm and clean, as if the maid had just left. I can't imagine the grizzled old man, I had seen heading out on the ice a few weeks ago, being this neat.

It was nearly seven in the evening when I picked up the satellite phone to call SueMac, but before I could dial her number, the landline phone rang. It was Sven.

"What do you want, Jug Head?" I asked.

"That's Jarhead, jerk off," he answered.

"Okay, Jarhead Jerk Off, what do you want?"

"They stranded me at the airbase," Sven growled. "When I tried to get back to the plane, it was gone. They left a message, 'get home on your own'."

I laughed, "That's great. I guess you'll have to hitchhike. Someone as ugly as you will freeze to death before anyone picks you up."

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“I ain’t gonna do that. I’m gonna rent a car, a Cadillac, and send the bill to Di Ciaccio.”

“Go ahead, Jug Head, rent a car. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Where are you, Flint? I got instructions from the colonel to talk things over with you first thing?”

“I’m at the Lake House.”

“Bertha’s expecting us. Go out there and I’ll see you there in the morning.”

“All right, Jug Head. Enjoy your long drive back from Detroit. I’ll see you then.”

“I’m gonna kick Di Ciaccio’s ass the next time I see him, and you quit call’n me Jug Head, or I’ll kick yours, too.”

I laughed when I heard Sven slam down the phone.

I couldn’t help grinning whenever I pissed off Johanson. I was still smiling when I called SueMac on the satellite phone. Following Danny’s instructions, I dialed a code number that connected my phone to hers. There was a code number for Danny, the colonel, and another for Sven, but his phone was a waste of time. I doubt if Sven could remember which end of the phone to talk into let alone how to work it. Even standard pushbutton phones are confusing to him. His fingers are too fat and hit adjacent buttons simultaneously.

“It is about time you called,” SueMac said. “We have a lot to research with AI.”

“Sorry Sue, I’m at a loss, don’t have a clue where to start. Have you come up with anything?”

“Yes, and it scares me.”

The smile slid off my face. Anything that scares SueMac terrifies me. “What do you mean? What scares you?”

“It is the connection to Afghanistan and the reason behind it that has me nervous,” she answered. “A mercenary, in Afghanistan, seems to have an agenda to cause trouble in Detroit. Growing up in a Detroit neighborhood controlled by gangs, he had to join one for his own protection, the same one his brother belongs to now. He managed to escape by enlisting in the army as soon as he graduated from high

school. A genuine tough guy with brains, he breezed through Special Forces training, coming out at the top of his class.

“AI says he is stockpiling a cache of weapons including rocket-propelled grenades, and even stinger missiles, with the purpose of eliminating the drug trade in Southeast Michigan. He believes the only way to wipe out the gangs, and drug traffickers in Detroit, is to use sophisticated weapons. The powerful explosives may accidentally kill a few innocent people, but that would be acceptable, in his estimation.”

“I guess, since you are looking into the mercenary’s involvement, I could find out who is doing his dirty work locally, and where the bulk of the weapons are being stockpiled.”

“No, we do not have time for that. We have to look closer at the operation Hileman has lined up for you and Sven. Parachuting into the mountains of Afghanistan takes top priority.”

“Parachuting into mountains, in Afghanistan? What the hell is that all about?”

“Although we may be duplicating each other’s work, let us run simultaneous inquiries. You and Sven discuss your findings, and then the three of us will evaluate possibilities.”

“Leave Johanson out of this. He doesn’t have brains enough to plan anything more difficult than choosing which hand to use when playing with himself.”

“I do not like that kind of talk, Victor. Sven can be a valuable partner in our endeavors, and it’s about time you treated him with respect.”

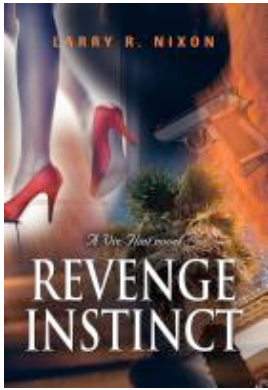
“Yes, ma’am, but Hileman and Di Ciaccio didn’t say anything about parachuting anywhere.”

“And, don’t hand me that *ma’am* crap either. If you were here, I would throw something at you.” She hung up.

Sometimes, pissing off SueMac brings a smile to my lips, but she was right. Although, I can’t stand the oaf, I have to work with him, at least for now. Maybe, if what SueMac says is true about parachuting into the Afghan mountains, I’ll get lucky and my chute won’t open. That way I won’t have to put up with Jarhead anymore.

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Immediately after hanging up, I headed to Bertha's. I love her cooking.



*Victor Flint is a highly trained undercover operative working for the military and the FBI. For publication, his profession is developing weapons and high-tech equipment for the military. Without knowing of his secret profession, Vic's partner, Susan, continually fights the assignments placing him in dangerous situations all over the world. Ironically, Vic has to be on guard thwarting attacks from assassins sent to kill him because of his work with Susan, not his clandestine assignments.*

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