

**C H R I S   L Y N C H**

**SPECIAL FORCES**

**GOOD DEVILS**

**BOOK 3**



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CHAPTER ONE  
Gabe-Real

**T**his is how I got here. As for exactly where *here* is, more in a bit.

Love is what got me here. I love and respect my brother so much that I became him.

Borrowed him. Stole him, some might say.

Dallas is my older brother. He's not my big brother, because I'm twice his size, give or take. On the inside, he's every bit as large as me, if not larger. We'll never know what would have happened if he'd grown to full size, but he never did, largely due to a severe case of something called scoliosis, which he's had since he was about eight years old. It means his spine is so twizzled around that his ribs are squashed on his left side and his shoulder blade pushes to the right.

That spine snakes up through him from tail to throat. It even speaks for itself, since much of the time Dallas's voice wheezes, on account of his squeezed heart and lungs.

My name is Gabriel. Or it used to be, anyway. I'm six feet three inches tall and weigh 220 pounds. Up until not long ago, I was a two-way star for my high school's football team. I started at quarterback—because why bother with anything else if you have the choice?—and middle linebacker. Played nearly every down, every game. I also threw things—javelin, hammer—for our track and field squad. Throwing things can be very satisfying.

Good as I was at all that, I may have been an even better skier. My town has the tallest ski jump in the whole United States, and I sacrificed many bones, ligaments, teeth, and what have you to mastering that thing.

But I mastered it, eventually.

Everything I did, my brother was there, clapping and huffing me on. He wanted me to be better and better and best at everything. It also gave him his own special style of joy to participate alongside me. Through me.

My father was there for a lot of it, too. Pa. Even though he spent most of his waking hours working. He worked full-time at the paper mill in town. He worked part-time up farther north, logging all over the Great North Woods, providing timber to feed that

mill and several others in the area. Even his play was kind of like work: hunting, fishing, and trapping things to eat or sell in order to make life that little bit better for us. (Though not exactly better for the things he'd hunt, fish, or trap.)

That life was lived primarily in Berlin. That would be the Berlin in the great state of New Hampshire, as opposed to the one that exists in the depraved state of evil and chaos on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

We had a second home, too, which made us lucky indeed. That was the result of all that hard work my pa put in—though I helped, too, by working as much as I could. The big house, the one with two bedrooms, was in Berlin. The second had no bedrooms, because it was more of a hunting, fishing, trapping shack. It was sixty or so miles north in Pittsburg, also in the great state of New Hampshire and hard by the border with Canada. Close enough that you could hit a golf ball from Pittsburg to Quebec. Which I would do if golf wasn't such a jerk sport.

Very international, that northern arrowhead of New Hampshire is. We've got a lot of French Canadians in Pittsburg, and a lot of Norwegians in Berlin. That's how we wound up with the Nansen Ski

Club, and then the jump, “The Big Nansen.” That was one of Berlin’s big claims to fame and where I wound up claiming my own piece of fame when the first Olympic trials in ski jumping were held there in 1938.

I was almost thirteen years old.

Technically, I was too young to participate without parental consent. But I was more than ready in every other way. On the other hand, Dallas *was* old enough . . .

So, at the age of almost thirteen, I qualified for the United States Olympic team by jumping as Dallas Greene. Team selectors were none the wiser.

Problem was, everyone else in town was plenty the wiser. Including my father, who thought I was still a child and ought to be living the life of one.

I was an Olympian for about five days.

It was a tasty five days, however.

No matter how much high school football and track and field I participated in, nothing ever quite matched that feeling again. I was restless, always restless. Got in lots of fights, too. Life seemed to be coming up unsatisfying and unfair. Life needed to be punched.

Dallas was also restless. And while he didn’t get in

a lot of fights, he was more and more in a fighting mood. If *I* felt life was unsatisfactory and unfair, he had six thousand times more right to feel that way.

Then came December 1941. And everyone everywhere was in a fighting mood.

The first Saturday after Pearl Harbor we were in a regional playoff game down in Franconia. We were killing them. Slaughtering them. If we were still little and had the slaughter rule, where you stopped the game when one team was mauling the other, this game would have been mercifully stopped.

Fortunately, there was no slaughter rule at this level. So we slaughtered them. Then slaughtered them some more.

Don't know if I was angrier than everybody else, but what I do know is that, on this day, I was better than everybody else. I was throwing passes so hard and bullet straight that eventually my receivers were missing catches on purpose to protect their delicate hands. But no matter, I took it all on myself after a while. Three out of every four offensive downs became running plays, run by *me*.

And run *at me*. Since I was also our team's middle linebacker, I got this thing in my head. I felt like if I took it to the other team's ML—took it to him

consistently and ferociously—I was somehow winning a battle with myself. Like he was me, only I was the better me. I ran at this poor sap so relentlessly it became like the guy with the ball was pursuing the defender. I guess I was. Pursuing and *trampling*.

And on defense, I was the disrupter general. In my mind, my teammates were on the field just to hold their positions. But the job of attacking the opposing team was mine. That is the beauty of middle linebacker, when you do it right. If you want the thing, it's yours.

And I wanted it.

Pass plays, run plays. If I was blitzing or stuffing the run or harassing the sad little quarterback they fielded, none of it mattered. I sacked the QB more times than I could count. (That's a lie. I can actually count to seven.) I saw running backs practically tackling *themselves* to avoid being forced into contact with me. I even intercepted two passes, the first two of my life. I was embarrassed for them.

Dallas was there, cheering me along as best he could. Pa was there, thundering his love at me above all other sounds just by calling my name. There was a small traveling contingent of Berliners barking out my pretty great nickname, *Gabe-Real! Gabe-Real! Gabe-*



*Real!* so persistently that eventually the Franconia fans had to succumb and join in.

The final score was probably 65,000 to nothing, but the scoreboard only went up to two digits, so we left it as an indistinct yet comprehensive victory.

One would think that it would have been an unbeatable day. Short of something along the lines of making an Olympic team, say.

“That was the greatest thing I ever saw” was Dallas’s recap of the game.

“Son,” Pa added, simply shaking his head in wonderment. It would be fair to say my father was a man of few syllables, so that counted as a mouthful.

So everybody was satisfied, right?

Thing was, to be fair, dominating in this game, in this region, at this level, was not a herculean feat. I knew what I was achieving, and what I wasn’t.

So that was the day I quit.

Quit football. Quit track and field. Quit skiing. Quit school. Quit New Hampshire. Quit being a kid.

I waited until the first week of May 1942 to make it anything like official, however. That was nothing to do with finishing out the school year, though, and everything to do with fishing.

Spring fishing season starts when the lakes all ice out and start dumping their bait fish into the Connecticut river, with the salmon running right behind them.

I don't even like salmon, but that's not the point. The point is that fishing is the one outdoor activity my father, my brother, and I all enjoy together. And that means we hang around riverbanks and inside the shack for good long hours, talking about stuff if we have stuff we want to talk about.

I had stuff I wanted to talk about in May 1942. So did Dallas.

"I would kill to be able to fight," Dallas said, seemingly to the fish he was casting for.

Pa and I said nothing right away. Neither did the fish.

"I want to fight," I said eventually, making a point of addressing my father directly in the way my brother had not.

Pa looked at me while continuing to cast. "Me?" he said, straight-faced. "You saying you want to fight *me*, boy?"

"No," I said, "not you, Pa."

"Good," he said. "'Cause, big as you are, we both know I'd still kick your butt."