


CHESAPEAKE VALOR
— BOOK ONE —

COLD SHOT

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BETHANYHOUSE
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dani Pettrey, *Cold Shot*
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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-0-7642-1197-3

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2015952284

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Cover design and photography by Kirk DouPonce, DogEared Design

Author is represented by Books & Such Literary Agency

16 17 18 19 20 21 22 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Lisa:
For being a faithful friend,
sister at heart, and partner in crime.
Love you!



1

Fog wafted over the silent hilltop, dancing in eerie waves amidst the centuries-old trees, the weathered trunks the sole markers of the lost graves littering the grounds surrounding them.

Shoving his frost-nipped fingers into his stiff jeans pockets, Angus Reed shifted his weight, trying to pump some warmth into his limbs. His cousin Ralph moved slowly, methodically, over the grid they'd compiled.

Gazing up at the slip of a moon glimmering behind the clouds, he whispered, "Come on. Stay out just a while longer."

It was too risky to use any light other than the moon's, even if it was the observant ranger's night off. Angus shook his head. The man possessed a level of dedication and fastidious attention to detail the other rangers did not.

His leg twitched. The search was taking too long. "Anything?" They should have found it by now.

"Shh," Ralph hissed. "I gotta concentrate."

The twitching intensified. *Concentrate quicker.*

An owl screeched overhead, sending Angus's heart racing. He caught a glimpse of its shadow disappearing with the moonlight into the thickening cloud cover.

"Maybe we should come back another night."

Ralph's detector hummed to life.

Angus smiled. He *knew* it. Too many men had died on this hill. Many left to rot in mass graves, even more unaccounted for—just like his great-great-grandpappy.

Why should that woman and her team get all the treasure just because they had a sanctioned dig? His kin died defending this hill. Why should some anthro-archaeologist or whatever she was swoop in and steal what belonged to the families of those lost?

Nah. He was taking what was his—a chunk of the history his kin helped shape.

The detector whirred to a fevered pitch at the base of a gnarled oak tree, and Angus's shoulders slumped with hard-earned relief. *About time.*

"Told ya." Ralph snickered. "Get the shovel—and some light."

The thickening cloud cover left them no choice. They needed some light to work by. Resting the flashlight on the ground would hopefully limit the beam's reach.

Clutching the handle, he cut into the earth. A foot down, the tip of his metal shovel twanged off a hard shock of resistance.

Ralph gaped at him with a tooth-filled grin. Angus couldn't remember the last time he witnessed his burly cousin smile—the sight bringing the days of them as young 'uns running wild through the Pennsylvania countryside back with a *whoosh*.

Pulling a trowel from his bag, Angus aimed the light downward and set to work uncovering the source of resistance.



Griffin grabbed a flashlight from his desk drawer and slipped it into his belt loop. He preferred the stillness of night, nothing but the moonlight to guide his steps, but the moon had all but disappeared behind the burgeoning blackness of sky about to let loose with rain. Hopefully he'd get his rounds in before it started. Leave it to Hank to get married on a cold, soon-to-be very wet, November night.

Not that he minded swapping shifts. In fact, he far preferred patrolling the park after hours, without the usual throng of tourists—just him and the battles' casualties sharing the hallowed ground. He'd drive the necessary perimeter, then park behind Devil's Den and climb to his favorite lookout, which afforded him the best surveying spot outside of the tower.

His gun in his holster, he shrugged on his coat and zipped it up. Grabbing his hat off the hook by the station door, he stepped out into the brisk night. The air was thick and held the promise of rain, the fresh scent tantalizingly close.

Clearing the lower grounds, he made it to Devil's Den before the rain began. After parking his car, he took off on foot from the boulder-strewn area, heading for Little Round Top. Yes, there was a road winding around the back side of the hill famous for the 20th Maine's heroic standoff, but driving took the fun out of it. This time of year he was likely to see deer—even bats if he was silent enough—blending in with the darkness.

Cresting the rise, a faint glow caught his attention.

Halting, he listened.

Two muffled voices.

He crept closer, pulling his weapon. Vandals or relic hunters, most likely. Either way he wasn't approaching multiple unknowns unarmed.

"There it is!" a man hollered.

“Keep digging,” a second man responded.

Griffin’s jaw clenched as the men and the grave they were desecrating came into view.

“Looks like we found ourselves a soldier and some fine artifacts.”

Griffin clicked on his flashlight, holding his weapon steady. “Oh, I’d say you found yourselves a whole lot more than that.”



Finley’s phone vibrated against her rib cage.

Please be an out.

Slipping it from her clutch nestled tightly between her body and the stiff chair arm in the darkened concert hall, she glanced at the number and recognition dawned.

Ranger McCray? *Seriously?* At nine o’clock on a Saturday night? The man really had no life outside of work. She looked over at the date her mother had set her up on and winced. Actually, she was only pretending at one. Had been ever since . . .

Blackness flashed before her eyes, and then the shining light. She blinked, her chest tightening, her palms moistening.

No. Not now. Not surrounded by all these people. Please.

Nauseated terror sloshed over her in a clawing rush, frustration and irritation following. How could it come on so fast?

Do the stupid breathing thing.

Sucking in what was supposed to be a deep inhale, her rib cage barely inched up, but she focused on the stage before her and forced herself to release the pitiful amount of air slowly, like a balloon squeaking out tiny spurts as it deflated. *One, two, three, four.*

She let the memory of panic drop, or at least pretended to. She was getting good at that—*pretending*. But she had no choice.

She refused to let the world see what a mess she'd become. Least of all, a ranger who was too uptight for his own good—or anyone else's.

At least with Ranger McCray what you saw was what you got. He didn't tiptoe around her, which was refreshing, but then again, he didn't know. Though she doubted it would make a difference. The man possessed no filter, no sense of pretense, which she admired . . . at least half the time. The other half she wanted to throttle his ridiculously handsome neck.

God was using McCray and their time together as a test. She'd sensed it the first time they met, but it was a test she'd ignore. Despite what God thought, she was anything but ready for it.

Her phone vibrated again in her palm, and she looked back to it. Clicking on the voice message, she held it to her ear, attempting to ignore the offended looks of the other concert patrons.

"Ms. Scott," Ranger McCray began with *that* tone—his nerve-pricking emphasis on *Ms.*, which burrowed under her skin. How many times had she asked him to call her Finley?

"This is Chief Ranger McCray from Gettysburg National Military Park."

Like she didn't know who the infernal man was. If she'd had any idea the planned three-month dig would run so far past estimated completion, that she'd be forced to endure his brooding and incessant lectures about disturbing hallowed ground over and over, she never would have applied for the grant in the first place. It seemed a safe enough job. Controlled. Helpful. Just how she needed to spend her summer. But she hadn't foreseen Ranger McCray or the feelings he stirred—both the good and the bad.

"We've got a . . . situation. Could use your expertise. Come as soon as you get this."

What possible *situation* could he have with an archaeological dig at a Civil War battlefield at nine o'clock on a Saturday night?

He, of all people, would manage to find one.

Glancing over, she found Kirk's basset-hound-brown eyes staring at her. "Is everything copacetic?"

"Actually, no." Beginning with his use of the word *copacetic*. Was that the fourth or fifth time he'd used it tonight? She gripped her clutch. "Work emergency. I'm afraid I have to go."



Griffin tapped his booted foot. How long was this going to take? She lived an hour away, and it had already been an hour and a half.

He rested against the two-hundred-year-old oak, garnering a little shelter from the downpour.

Ralph and Angus Reed were now in the custody of Gettysburg police under charges of trespassing, vandalism, and grave desecration. Once Ms. Scott found time to arrive and determine the general age and possible identification of the remains, they'd know if further charges would apply. Feeling a storm in the air and in his knee, he'd quickly tarped the site as the first drops of rain fell, but the sooner she arrived, the sooner the proper processing could begin.

Twenty minutes later the storm subsided and he bent to examine the condition of the remains, praying the tarp had done its duty.

Shining a flashlight on the exposed bone, he froze.

Was that . . . ?

He leaned closer, examining the ring still hanging around the metacarpal and what appeared to be soft tissue holding it there.

He swallowed.

If what he was looking at was in fact soft tissue, this was not a Civil War-era grave—it was a modern one.