

Falling From a Height (Division P Book 4)

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Falling From a Height

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Chronology of stories in the Division P universe

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Falling From a Height

Zero to 165

Don't Fret the Timing

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Begin and End With You

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Chapter 1

If the universe had a basement, this would be it. Captain Jonas Nightengale sat in the airport bar, killing time and waiting for his flight. He'd been through this particular airport a number of times over several years. They'd improved the décor so it was a step above the industrial grunge it used to be. Maybe midnight in any airport was just as bad.

Jonas had left San Diego at four in the afternoon after receiving orders from Division P. They had yanked him from some downtime at the Coronado Naval Amphibious Base between SEAL ops and sent him off in the direction of Fort Detrick in Frederick, Maryland. San Diego to here, then to Dulles, where he was supposed to pick up a rental car and drive to Frederick.

Division P was a black ops group of psychics on the government payroll. It was not a team per se, not really even a group exactly, more of an organization. If you passed the screening process, and less than 0.1% did, you were sent on for more testing. Each round was harder, a near 100% failure rate. They only recruited a handful of people per year. Recruitment, training, then intermittent assignments. Nearly all the Division P people juggled two jobs. A normal average government career linked job and the job they did for Division P.

Jonas stared down into the last couple inches of his beer, half listening to the background drone of the TV above the bar. The information he'd received from Division P this morning had been cryptic, but probably no more than usual. Go to Fort Detrick, contact Colonel Sjevda and help him with finding out some information about a misfired experimental weapon. Uh-huh, that was definitely on the vague side. He suspected that it would all boil down to them wanting him to touch something. After all, that's basically what he did for Division P. The more technical term was actually psychometry. The ability to glean information from an object by touching it. He had a light dose of telepathic talent along with it, but that Talent was weak and unpredictable.

That little bit of telepathic Talent along with the fact he was watching her in his peripheral vision clued in him to the fact that the female bartender was eyeballing him. He'd play along a little. It wasn't like he had anything better to do. He gave her a bit of a smile and actually let her see his eyes raking down the length of her body and back up. She wasn't exactly his type, too short and almost rail thin. Ah well... it wasn't like this was going anywhere anyway.

Jonas crooked a finger at her and she walked over. "Can I get an order of nachos?" he asked, wondering if it was too late to order food.

"Yeah, sure. Would you like that with or without the jalapenos?" she said.

"With. I like hot things," he answered with a grin. She had the grace to blush a little.

~

The trip from the Dulles airport to Frederick, Maryland took Jonas about forty five minutes. Driving through a couple of miniscule towns along Route 15, he'd squinted at the GPS in the darkness, wondering if he was really headed in the right direction. Crossing a steel trestle bridge over a river, he noticed some bright light far up on a hill. It reminded him of the kind used for night time road construction. He returned his attention to the road.

It was four in the morning when Jonas got to the base. Fort Detrick was an amazingly odd collection of different branches of the military all lumped together in one place. It held dozens of different sub-branches of the Army, a couple of Air Force offices, a little Navy, Dept of Health and Human Services, Dept of Agriculture and the almost obligatory presence of Homeland Security, all housed on a meager five square kilometers. He was directed to the main building that housed the Tactical and Advanced Technology Research Center (TATRC). It was an unassuming three story brick building. Inside, he flashed his Division P badge for the soldier standing duty and was swiftly shown to an office. He was obviously expected.

"Captain Nightengale, you made good time getting here from the west coast. I'm Colonel Trevor Sjevda. I'm really hoping you can give us a hand," the older man said. As they shook hands, Jonas spent a moment studying everything from the Colonel's rank insignia to the touch of gray at the man's temples. Career military all the way.

"Why don't you bring me up to speed and I'll see what I can do," replied Jonas.

Sjevda leaned out the door of his office and asked his assistant to please bring some coffee. "We have a new highly experimental weapon being studied here. The deployment system was being set up for a test flight out in a rural section of Loudoun County. No actual explosive on board, just the electronics and guidance parts. It was set to launch, fly a set path and land in the same field it was fired from. Things did not go according to plan. It went off course and crashed into a cliff above the Potomac River near a place called Point of Rocks. We have an entire team setting up for retrieval but we were told that the fewer people who touch it, the better your results are likely to be."

"And I'm assuming there's some sort of proof this wasn't just a malfunction?" asked Jonas.

"The launch team seems to be certain the guidance system was electronically hijacked. They suspect the encryption chip in the missile itself was tampered with. Obviously we won't know for certain until the missile is retrieved. If you can provide any information as to the who or the how this was done... That would be ideal."

"I might be able to. You know what I do doesn't come with a guarantee," replied Jonas.

"I am aware of that. I worked with a Division P operative once before. The results were eminently satisfactory." There was a light knock on the door and the young male corporal entered, bearing coffee.

"Thank you. Make sure the vehicles are being loading for retrieval," ordered Sjevda.

"Yes sir," the man replied.

"I realize you've been traveling for hours, but getting this done as soon as feasible is a priority. I'm really hoping you've had some experience at rappelling?"

Jonas grinned. "Yes, I'm proficient at rappelling." It amused him just a little. Division P seldom volunteered any information about what their people did in their "other job." Sjevda would have no idea that Jonas was in fact a Navy SEAL.

"When we get to the site, you'll be meeting with Sergeant Quilleran. Just a little forewarning... She's... very straight forward."

"Does that translate into flaky ?"

"Oh no, not at all. She's head of security for TATRC. She's good at what she does. Very Good. If she can't do the job herself, she's excellent at finding the right personnel and making sure it gets done. But, well, let's say personality is not necessarily her strong point."

"Oh." Jonas pondered that for a moment. If she was a bitch, she was a bitch, just so long as she did her job.

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It wasn't until Jonas was almost there that he realized he was on the exact same road where he had seen the bright lights on the hill. Only now the sky was beginning to gray a little with predawn light and the work lights didn't seem quite as bright.

Sjevda's personal assistant, Daughtry, had driven Jonas to the site. The Colonel was supposed to follow as soon as he cleared up the mobilization of some extra equipment that might be needed.

At the foot of a steep wooded incline, a number of Army vehicles were parked. Daughtry pulled the car up close and the two men climbed out. Jonas noticed a woman leaning against the fender of a jeep, reading something from a PDA. She wore BDU trousers, tucked into boots, a matching tunic shirt with a beige t-shirt visible underneath. Her brown hair was pulled tightly back into a French braid, and she wore no make-up. All business. She wasn't beautiful, more like striking, the kind of face that made you wonder what she would look like if she smiled.

"Sergeant Quilleran, this is Captain Nightengale, the consultant sent to help," said Daughtry.

Jonas held out his hand to the Sergeant and they shook. She wasn't short either, he noticed, only a hand span shorter than his six foot two frame.

"Captain, glad you could make it. Two of my men have been down to do a visual inspection of the missile. It's lodged in the cliff roughly seventy-five feet down from the top. An attempt was made to access it from ground, but it's proving easier to come down from above. If you'll follow me, we can walk around to the bottom of the cliff face and you can have a quick look before we go up top," she said.

Definitely a no-nonsense soldier. Just the bare minimum greeting and a direct launch into the details of the situation. Jonas decided he could like her. There wouldn't be any bullshit.

"Did they tell you why you were supposed to wait for my arrival?" he asked, curious about the extent of her knowledge.

"I have no idea sir. Just following orders. Please let me know if you need anything specific to do this job."

~

Sergeant Sarah Quilleran let herself glance at Jonas Nightengale for just a moment as they walked across through a line of trees and over a railroad track. Light brown hair, cut military short, a sharp angular face with a long straight nose, rumpled clothes and in serious need of a shave. She felt a thread of sympathy. She'd been told they were waiting on a federal agent coming from San Diego. Given the twenty hours since the incident, the guy'd probably been traveling non-stop. There weren't many people she liked and even fewer who she trusted, but she almost always made up her mind in the first thirty seconds. Physical appearance didn't have a whole lot to with it, but it didn't hurt that she thought Nightengale was seriously gorgeous. He was probably going to end up in the first category and possibly in the second too.

If anyone ever asked Sarah about her snap judgments, she would have said she simply trusted her gut. But there was actually a lot more to it than that. That "gut instinct" not only seldom steered her wrong, she could tell if she was being lied to, and there were way too many times she knew what people were going to say long before the words came out. A long ago friend had accused her being psychic. Sarah had laughed it off.

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Jonas stood on a wide dirt path near the base of rocky cliff, and looked up.

"The missile, sir," said Quilleran, pointing. It was about a hundred yards up the cliff, buried nose first into the stone at a slight downward angle. It had sustained some visible damage as one of the fins appeared to be peeled back. Beyond that, it was too far up to tell more. A rope dangled off to either side, evidence of the earlier inspection.

"So what's this dirt road for?" Jonas asked.

"It's the towpath. It runs along the old C&O canal, it was for the mules to walk on when they pulled the barge."

"Oh. Is there anything that actually qualifies as civilization around here? I have this vain hope of breakfast sometime in the next six hours."

"There's a little town on the other side of the highway down over the hill. It's called Point of Rocks. There's a train station there, so I guess there might be someplace to grab some food."

"Okay let's get this show on the road then, 'cause I'm hungry," said Jonas. It seemed like a long time since his midnight snack at the airport.

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The sun was just beginning to creep over the horizon and throw sharp glints of light off the surface of the river as Jonas was clipping his harness to the belay line. Four feet away, Quilleran was doing the same thing.

"I assume you've done this before, sir?" she asked. He smirked a little and decided to own up to his other job just to see what kind of response he'd get.

"When I'm not solving problems for Division P, I'm a Navy SEAL. So, yes." This drew no more response from her than a nod, and she began easing back off the edge of the rocky precipice.

It took them roughly five minutes to rappel down over the craggy bumps and cut outs of the stone face to the lodged missile. One side of the missile was more heavily damaged than the other at first glance, and the nose was probably mangled, but it wasn't visible, as it was jammed into a crack in the rocks.

Jonas secured his line and did as thorough a visual inspection as he could manage. Now for the harder part. Although he had no fear of heights and probably could have rappelled down the cliff half asleep, the situation didn't make for good concentration for the psi part. He laid one hand flat against the metal. It was cool in the early morning air. He slowly dropped his psychic shielding and let impressions wash through him.

Multiple people had touched the missile in the preparation for its test flight. Jonas closed his eyes for a moment, trying to sort through the information. There ought to be one that conveyed nervousness or anger or something that just didn't track. There. A hint. He slid his hand along the underside of the weapon. There was something that didn't belong. An indistinct impression of a dark haired man with pale skin, wearing military clothing and an ID tag, flitted through Jonas mind. The man had touched the missile with a very specific intent. Jonas had expected that the hijacking of the flight path had been a reprogramming thing. No, there was something on the surface of the missile that had been added. Jonas opened his eyes and twisted to try to get a better look at the tiny, almost flat object. No luck. Lowering himself down another couple of feet, he re-secured his line and, tilting his head at an angle, he could just barely see it. Similar in size to an SD Ram card, it was no longer clinging to the metal; instead it was stuck at an odd angle between the belly of the missile and the rocks. Jonas fished at it with two fingers. It was too tightly wedged. He was sure the minute they tried to retrieve the missile itself, the chip-like object would go flying and falling. *

Navy SEAL and Division P operative Jonas Nightengale is sent to Ft. Detrick, MD to determine who tried to divert a highly secret experimental missile. Sergeant Sarah Quilleran is in charge of security for the weapon and is overseeing the site where the missile landed; the side of a cliff. The weapon is unstable where it hangs embedded in the rocks, so that when Jonas and Sarah rappel down to take a look, the unthinkable happens. Sarah's rope is cut by a sharp piece of metal from the missile. What's a girl to do? Pray for a savior with fast reflexes?

One attempt to steal the missile thwarted, the mystery traitor is determined to keep on until he achieves success. Sarah and Jonas find their lives increasingly threatened as they draw closer to finding the truth. Will a heady mix of sexual attraction and shared psychic talents be enough to keep them alive long enough to solve the problem?

A hand-book for travellers in Switzerland and the Alps of - in the Physics Education Division (PED) of the European Physical Society (EPS) same, the maximum range is obtained for a hole punched at half height ($H/2$) of the misleading drawing was

included by Leonardo da Vinci in his book *Del moto e fall*. The relationship $\Delta p = \rho g(H-h)$, where Δp is the difference in pressure

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