

THE CLEANER

THE BEGINNING

Written By Tammy M. Hall

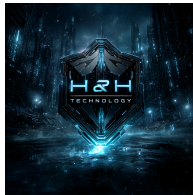


**Before he was a ghost...
he was a soldier.**

The Cleaner

WRITTEN BY

Tammy M. Hall



Copyright © 2026 Tammy M. Hall

All rights reserved.

Published by HNH TECHNOLOGY

HNH Technology

526 County Line Rd

Carthage, MS 39051

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: PROLOGUE: The Ghost Remembers	3
Chapter 2: PART ONE: THE SOLDIER	6
Chapter 3: PART TWO: THE GHOST	27
Chapter 4: EPILOGUE: The Ghost Returns	44
About the Author	46

CHAPTER 1

PROLOGUE: The Ghost Remembers

The rain was falling. It always was.

Stone Jaxxon stood on the rooftop, looking out over the city. The neon signs buzzed—pink, blue, cyan bleeding into each other like bruises on water. The flying cars hummed, their light trails cutting through the mist like lazy comets. Steam rose from the vents below, carrying the smell of wet concrete and ozone. The city never slept.

He was fifty-two years old. He had been dead for twenty years. Officially, he didn't exist. No records. No past. No future. Just the work.

His left hand rested on the railing. Scarred knuckles. Flesh. No metal. No glow. He was still human. That was the one thing he had managed to hold onto.

He flexed his fingers, feeling the familiar ache in the joints. The scars were old now—some from the war, some from the work, some from nights he couldn't remember. They told the story of

his life, written in flesh and bone. Each scar had a memory attached to it: the bullet that had grazed his hand in the ambush, the knife that had sliced his palm in a close-quarters fight, the glass that had cut him when he had shattered a window to escape a burning building.

He reached into his jacket and pulled out a small photo. The edges were worn from years of handling. Sarah. Her smile. Her warmth. The way she used to laugh. The photo was old, faded, but he could still see her clearly. He would always see her clearly.

He had seen her two months ago. For the first time in twenty years. She had found him. She had said: “Stay.” He had said: “Okay.” And for the first time in twenty years, the ghost had let himself be human.

But the work wasn’t done. It was never done. There was always another file. Another target. Another debt to collect.

He put the photo back in his jacket, close to his heart. He walked to the edge of the rooftop and looked down.

The city sprawled beneath him, a maze of neon and shadow. Millions of people. Millions of stories. And somewhere down there, a man named Varga was still breathing.

That would change.

He turned and walked toward the stairwell door. The metal groaned under his weight. He had work to do.

But for the first time in twenty years, he had something to come home to.

CHAPTER 2

PART ONE: THE SOLDIER

CHAPTER 1: Unit 7

Sixteen years before he became the Cleaner, Stone Jaxxon was a soldier.

He was twenty-eight years old. He had been in the military for ten years. He had seen things that would never leave him. But he had also found something he never expected: a family.

Unit 7 was special forces. Off the books. Unofficial. They were the ones who handled the missions that didn't exist. The ones that no one would ever acknowledge.

They were seven soldiers. They had been through hell together. And they had come out the other side.

There was Marcus, the tech specialist. He could hack anything. Open any door. Erase any record. He was quiet, but he was always watching. He had a way of seeing through people, of knowing what they were hiding. He was the one who had taught Stone how to read a room, how to spot a lie. Marcus had been a prodigy, recruited straight out of university. He could code in his

sleep. He had a girlfriend back home, a woman named Elena, who he talked about constantly. He showed her photo to anyone who would look. He was going to marry her when the war was over.

There was Chen, the sniper. He could hit a target from a mile away. He never missed. He said it was because he had nothing to lose. Chen had been a farmer's son from the countryside, drafted young, and had never quite shaken the dust from his boots. He was quiet and patient, but he had a dry humor that could break the tension in any room. He had lost his brother in the first year of the war. He never talked about it. He never had to.

There was Reyes, the explosives expert. She was small and fast and could turn anything into a bomb. She had a dark sense of humor. She was the one who kept them laughing. Reyes was the youngest of them, barely twenty-five, but she had already lost more than most people do in a lifetime. She buried it behind jokes and recklessness. She had been in the foster system since she was a child. The military was the first place she had ever felt like she belonged.

There were the twins, Viktor and Sergei. They were big and silent and deadly. They spoke in a language that only they understood. They were the muscle. They were the shield. No one knew much about their past, and they never spoke of it. They just stood together, the only family each other had ever known. They had grown up in a war zone. They had been fighting for as long as they could remember. The military was just another battlefield.

And there was Lieutenant Voss. The commander. The leader. The one who had recruited them all. He was older than the others, with grey-streaked hair and sharp grey eyes. He was the one who had made them a family. He had seen something in each of them—something broken that could be shaped into something dangerous. Voss had been in the military for thirty years. He had seen everything. He had lost everything. But he had never lost his belief in the mission.

Stone was the close-quarters specialist. Hand-to-hand. Disarmament. Neutralization. He could take down a man in seconds with nothing but his bare hands. He had trained for years. He had trained until the movements were muscle memory. Until he didn't have to think.

The seven of them sat in the barracks one night, drinking cheap beer and laughing at something Reyes had said.

"You know what I'm going to do when we get out of here?" Reyes had asked.

"What?" Chen had replied.

"I'm going to buy a house. With a garden. And a dog. And I'm going to sit on the porch and watch the sunset."

"You?" Marcus had laughed. "You'd go crazy in a week."

"Better crazy than dead," Reyes had replied.

They had all gone quiet at that. Because they all knew what she meant.

Stone looked at his hands. Scarred. Calloused. They had done things that would never be undone.

“We’re going to make it,” he had said. “All of us. We’re going to make it.”

He had believed it.

He was wrong.

The Training Years

Before Unit 7, before the war, Stone was just a recruit.

The training facility was brutal. A converted factory on the edge of the city, surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. The recruits were the best of the best—soldiers who had already proven themselves in battle. But here, they were nothing. Here, they had to start over.

Stone was twenty-two years old. He had been in the military for four years. He had seen combat. He had killed. But he had never been tested like this.

The instructors were veterans of a dozen wars. They had no mercy. They had no patience. They broke the recruits down and rebuilt them from the ground up.

Stone remembered the first week. The sleepless nights. The endless drills. The constant pressure. He had never been so exhausted. He had never been so close to giving up.

But he didn’t give up. He couldn’t. Because there was something inside him that refused to break.

He found a friend in the chaos. A fellow recruit named Chen. They were paired together for a survival exercise in the mountains. Three days. No food. No water. Just each other.

They almost died. Twice. But they made it. And when they came back, they were no longer just recruits. They were brothers.

“We’re going to make it,” Chen had said. “All of us. We’re going to make it.”

Stone had believed him.

CHAPTER 2: The Ambush

The mission was simple. In and out. Extract the intel. Eliminate the target. No civilians. No witnesses. Clean.

It wasn’t clean.

Stone crouched behind a concrete barrier, his heart pounding, his breathing ragged. The enemy had known they were coming. They had set a trap.

Viktor was down. Sergei was down. Chen was missing. Marcus was trying to hack into the enemy comms to call for backup. Reyes was covering fire.

Stone looked across the battlefield. He saw Lieutenant Voss, pinned down behind a collapsed wall. Voss was shouting something, but Stone couldn’t hear it over the gunfire.

He saw Marcus fall. A bullet to the head. He was dead before he hit the ground.

He saw Reyes fall next. An explosion. She was there one moment and gone the next.

Stone felt something break inside him. Something that would never heal.

“Fall back!” Voss shouted. “Fall back now!”

Stone grabbed Viktor’s body. He dragged it across the broken ground, his fingers slipping on the blood and mud. He didn’t stop. He couldn’t stop.

Chen appeared out of nowhere. He grabbed Sergei. He was bleeding badly, but he was still moving.

The three of them—Stone, Chen, and Lieutenant Voss—retreated into the darkness.

The ambush had killed four of them.

Stone carried Viktor’s body for two miles before he collapsed.

He didn’t cry. He didn’t scream. He just lay in the mud and stared up at the sky.

He had survived. They hadn’t.

And he would never forgive himself.

The First Mission

Before the ambush, there were successes.

Their first mission as Unit 7 was a hostage rescue. A group of corporate executives had been taken hostage by a militant faction. The military had tried to negotiate. It hadn’t worked.

Unit 7 was called in.

Stone remembered the night. The rain was falling. It always was. They moved through the darkness like ghosts. They were silent. They were efficient.

Stone was the point man. He entered the building first. He cleared the first room. The second room. The third room.

He found the hostages in the basement. Five of them. Huddled together. Terrified.

The guards were watching them. Four armed men. Professional. Efficient.

Stone moved. He was faster than them. He was better than them.

He took down the first guard. The second. The third. The fourth.

It was over in seconds.

The hostages were safe. The mission was a success.

Stone remembered the feeling. The adrenaline. The pride. The knowledge that he had made a difference.

That was before the ambush. Before everything changed.

CHAPTER 3: The Survivor

The hospital was quiet. White walls. Fluorescent lights. The smell of antiseptic and blood.

Stone lay in the bed, staring at the ceiling. His hands were bandaged. He had broken three fingers dragging Viktor's body.

He didn't feel the pain.

He felt nothing.

The door opened. Lieutenant Voss entered. He looked older. Exhausted. His sharp grey eyes were dull.

"They're going to discharge you," Voss said. "They say you're fit to return to duty."

Stone didn't respond.

"Stone."

"Marcus. Reyes. Viktor. Sergei. They're dead."

"I know."

"You told me to fall back. You said we could save them."

"I was wrong."

Stone sat up. He looked at Voss.

"Who sold us out?"

Voss was silent for a long moment.

"I don't know yet," he said. "But I'm going to find out."

Stone didn't believe him.

CHAPTER 4: The Return

Stone stood in the doorway of the small apartment. He had been gone for eight months. He had seen things he would never unsee. He had lost people he would never forget.

And now he was home.

Sarah looked up from the book she was reading. Her eyes widened. She dropped the book and ran to him.

“Stone.”

She threw her arms around him. He held her. He didn’t let go.

“You’re home,” she whispered.

“I’m home,” he said.

He held her for a long time. He didn’t want to let go. He knew he would have to. But not yet.

“What happened to you?” she asked, pulling back to look at him.

“Your hands—”

“It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing.”

He shook his head. “I’m okay.”

She didn’t believe him. But she didn’t push.

“Come sit down,” she said. “I’ll make tea.”

He sat in the worn armchair by the window. The rain was falling. The neon signs were buzzing.

Sarah came back with two cups of tea. She sat on the arm of the chair and looked at him.

“You’re not okay,” she said.

“I will be.”

“Will you?”

He didn’t answer.

Sarah’s Perspective

While Stone was fighting, Sarah was waiting.

She remembered the day he left. He had kissed her forehead and promised to come back. She had believed him.

She remembered the days that followed. The silence. The fear. The hope that would never die.

She remembered the day he came home. He was different. There was something in his eyes that hadn’t been there before. Something broken.

She tried to reach him. She tried to bring him back. But he was already gone.

She remembered the night he left. She had woken up to find the apartment empty. His jacket was gone. His phone was gone. He was gone.

She had waited. She had hoped. She had prayed.

But he never came back.

She didn’t know what had happened to him. She didn’t know where he had gone. She just knew that the man she loved had disappeared.

Years passed. She moved on. She built a new life. She tried to forget.

But she never stopped loving him. And she never stopped hoping that one day, he would come back to her.

CHAPTER 5: The Nightmare

Stone woke in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat, his heart pounding. He had been dreaming about the ambush. About Marcus's head exploding. About Reyes's body being torn apart.

He sat up, gasping. His hands were shaking.

Sarah was beside him. She had woken up too.

"Stone. Stone, look at me."

He turned to her. His eyes were wild.

"You're safe," she said. "You're here. You're with me."

"I killed them—"

"No. You didn't."

"I left them behind."

"You survived."

He shook his head. "I shouldn't have."

She reached out and took his scarred hands in hers.

"Listen to me," she said. "You survived because you're strong. You survived because you had to come back to me."

He looked at her. The warmth in her eyes. The trust.

"I don't deserve you," he said.

“Yes, you do.”

He didn’t argue. He just held her.

CHAPTER 6: The Offer

Stone was at the bar when Voss found him.

It was a small place on the edge of the district. Dark. Smoky. The kind of place where people went to be alone.

Voss slid into the booth across from him without asking.

He was older. Grey hair slicked back. Expensive coat. Sharp eyes that missed nothing.

“Stone Jaxxon,” Voss said. “I’ve been looking for you.”

Stone didn’t react. “You’ve found me.”

“I know what happened to your unit.”

“You don’t know anything.”

“I know you were betrayed. I know twenty-three soldiers died. I know you survived because you were lucky. Or because someone wanted you to.”

Stone set his glass down. “What do you want?”

“I want to offer you a job.”

“I’m not interested.”

“You haven’t heard the offer yet.”

Stone looked at him. “I said I’m not interested.”

Voss leaned forward. “Your unit knew things. Classified things. There are people who want to make sure those secrets stay buried. I need someone who can clean up messes. Someone with your skills.”

Stone laughed. It was a cold, hollow sound.

“You want me to kill people.”

“I want you to solve problems.”

“I’m not a killer.”

“Every soldier is a killer, Stone. You just haven’t been paid for it yet.”

Stone stood up. He threw some credits on the table.

“Find someone else,” he said.

Voss didn’t try to stop him. But as Stone walked toward the door, Voss called out:

“They’ll come for you, Stone. They’ll come for her. And when they do, you’ll wish you had taken my offer.”

Stone didn’t look back.

But the words followed him home.

CHAPTER 7: The Warning

The message came three days later.

Stone was alone. Sarah had gone to the market. He was sitting in the armchair, staring at the rain, when his phone buzzed.

He looked at the screen.

“You know too much. Leave tonight or she pays.”

He stared at the words. His heart didn’t race. His hands didn’t shake. He had been expecting this. Dreading it. But not surprised.

He deleted the message.

It came again five minutes later. Same words. Different number.

He deleted it again.

It came again. And again. And again.

He turned the phone off. He sat in silence for a long time.

When Sarah came home, he was standing by the window. His face was calm. But she knew him too well.

“What happened?” she asked.

“Nothing,” he said.

“Stone. Tell me.”

He turned to face her. He wanted to tell her everything. The messages. The war. The twenty-three faces. The man in the bar who had offered him a job.

But he couldn’t. Because telling her would put her in danger. And he would rather die than let that happen.

“Nothing,” he repeated.

She didn’t believe him. But she didn’t push.

CHAPTER 8: The Hallway

They came at midnight.

Stone was in the armchair. The lights were off. The rain was falling. He heard them before he saw them—boots on the worn carpet, muffled voices, the click of a suppressed pistol being chambered.

He moved.

He was at the door in three steps. He pressed his back against the wall and listened.

Four of them. Professional. Efficient.

He waited.

The door burst open. A figure in black tactical gear rushed through. Stone moved. His left hand grabbed the man's wrist. His right hand struck the man's throat. The man dropped.

Two more entered. Stone grabbed the first, using him as a shield. The second fired. The bullets hit his own man. Stone dropped the body and lunged forward.

His left hand struck the second man's temple. The man dropped.

The fourth man was at the door. He raised his weapon. Stone moved faster. His right hand grabbed the man's wrist. He twisted. The pistol dropped. His left hand struck the man's throat.

Silence.

Stone stood over four bodies. His breathing was steady. His hands were steady.

But inside, something was breaking.

He walked to the bedroom. Sarah was still asleep. He stood in the doorway and watched her for a long moment. Her chest rose and fell gently. Her face was peaceful.

He closed the door.

He grabbed his jacket. His keys. His phone. He walked to the door and paused.

He wanted to wake her. He wanted to say goodbye.

But if he did, she would try to stop him. And he needed to go.

He left.

CHAPTER 9: The Subway

Stone ran.

He ran through the rain-slicked streets. He ran through the crowded markets. He ran past the neon signs and the flying cars and the steam rising from the grates.

He ran until his lungs burned and his legs ached.

He found a subway entrance. He descended into the darkness.

The tunnel was empty. Flickering lights. Dripping water. The distant hum of a train.

He walked along the tracks. He didn't know where he was going. He just knew he had to keep moving.

His phone buzzed. He looked at it.

“Come to the Vega District. Midnight. We’ll talk.”

He stared at the words. He knew it was a trap. He knew he shouldn’t go.

But he also knew he had no choice.

He called Sarah.

She didn’t answer.

He called again.

She didn’t answer.

He called a third time.

No answer.

He had to find her. He had to make sure she was safe.

He headed toward the Vega District.

CHAPTER 10: The Warehouse

The warehouse was abandoned. Guttled. Rain leaked through holes in the roof, pooling on the concrete floor.

Stone entered. His boots echoed in the silence.

A single figure stood in the center of the space. Older. Grey hair slicked back. Expensive coat. Calm smile.

Voss.

“You were hard to find, Sergeant Jaxxon,” Voss said.

“Where is she?” Stone demanded.

Voss gestured to a monitor on the wall. It flickered to life.

Stone’s breath caught.

Sarah. She was sitting in a clean, well-lit room. A book in her hands. Unaware. Unharmed.

“She’s safe,” Voss said. “Unharmed. I’m not a monster. I’m an employer.”

Stone forced himself to look away from the monitor. “What do you want?”

Voss gestured to a table. On it: a file folder, a data chip, a suppressed pistol.

“Your unit knew things,” Voss said. “Classified things. I need someone who can clean up messes. Officially, you’re dead. Unofficially, you work for me. Sarah gets a new life. Safe. Paid for.”

Stone looked at the pistol. The file. The chip.

“And if I refuse?”

Voss nodded toward the monitor. Sarah turned a page in her book.

“Then you both disappear,” Voss said. “Permanently.”

Stone was silent for a long moment.

“What’s the first job?” he asked.

Voss smiled.

CHAPTER 11: The Deal

Voss led Stone to a small room in the back of the warehouse. There were more monitors. More screens.

He pointed to one. Sarah. Still reading.

“She’ll stay there until the job is done,” Voss said. “After that, she’ll be relocated. New identity. New life. She’ll never know you’re alive.”

Stone watched her. His jaw tightened.

“Can I talk to her?” he asked.

“No.”

“Can I see her?”

“Not yet. After the job.”

Stone looked at Voss. “You’re trusting me.”

“I’m not trusting you. I’m trusting what you’ll do to keep her safe.”

Stone turned back to the monitor. Sarah turned a page. She looked peaceful. She had no idea.

“Show me the job,” he said.

Voss handed him the file. Stone opened it.

MARCUS REN. CEO of OmniTech. Sold military secrets to enemy states.

“Clean him,” Voss said. “And she lives.”

Stone closed the file.

“I’ll do it,” he said.

“Good.”

Stone walked toward the door. He paused at the threshold.

“I have one condition,” he said.

“Name it.”

“I never see her again. That’s the deal. She never knows.”

Voss nodded. “Agreed.”

Stone walked out into the rain.

Voss’s Perspective

Voss had been watching Stone for years.

He had seen the potential in the young soldier. The skill. The determination. The willingness to do whatever it took to get the job done.

He had seen the betrayal that had shattered Stone’s unit. The ambush. The deaths. The trauma.

He had seen Stone struggle to adjust to civilian life. The nightmares. The fear. The constant vigilance.

He had seen Stone fall apart. And he had seen him put himself back together again.

Voss knew that Stone was the perfect candidate for the job. He was broken. He was lost. He was desperate.

And desperate men were the most useful.

Voss had waited. He had watched. He had bided his time.

And then, when the moment was right, he had made his move.

He had offered Stone a job. A purpose. A reason to keep going.

And Stone had accepted.

Voss smiled. He had gotten exactly what he wanted.

CHAPTER 3

PART TWO: THE GHOST

CHAPTER 12: The First Clean

Stone stood across the street from OmniTech Tower.

He wore a black suit. White shirt. No tie. He looked like a businessman. A corporate executive.

He was neither.

He studied the building. Guards at the entrance. Security desk in the lobby. Elevators with keycard access.

He had a plan. He always had a plan.

He walked across the street. The rain fell. The neon signs buzzed. He entered the glass doors.

The lobby was sleek. White marble. Holographic logos. Two guards at the desk.

He walked toward them.

“Sir, this is a restricted—”

Stone moved. His right hand struck the first guard's throat. His left hand struck the second guard's temple. Both dropped.

No gunshots. No sound.

He dragged them behind the desk. He walked to the elevator. He pressed the top floor.

The doors closed.

CHAPTER 13: The Tower

The elevator ascended. The city sprawled beneath him. Rain streaked the glass. Neon lights blurred.

He cracked his neck. He checked his cuffs.

He was ready.

The doors opened.

INT. REN'S PENTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Marcus Ren sat at his desk. A glass of whiskey in his hand. He didn't look up.

"Voss sent you," he said. "I told him I'd pay double."

Stone stepped forward. "That's not why I'm here."

Ren looked up. His confidence wavered. His hand moved toward a drawer.

Stone was faster. The suppressed pistol was in his hand, aimed at Ren's head.

“You sold targeting coordinates,” Stone said. “My unit. Twenty-three soldiers. Dead.”

Ren’s face went pale. “That was business.”

Stone’s finger moved to the trigger. “Now it’s cleaning.”

One shot.

Ren slumped over his desk. Blood pooled on the white marble.

Stone lowered the pistol. He stood still for a moment, looking at the body.

He felt nothing.

He turned and walked away.

The Aftermath of the First Clean

Stone walked through the rain, feeling nothing.

He had just killed a man. Marcus Ren. Corporate executive. Traitor. The man who had sold out his unit.

He had done it without hesitation. Without emotion. Without remorse.

He had become a monster.

He walked through the city. The neon signs buzzed. The flying cars hummed. The rain fell.

He didn’t know where he was going. He didn’t care.

He found a small park. A bench. He sat down and stared at the rain.

He thought about Sarah. He thought about the life they could have had. The children they might have raised. The quiet nights and peaceful mornings.

He thought about the man he used to be. The soldier who believed in something. The husband who loved someone.

That man was gone. In his place was a ghost.

He didn't regret his choice. He had done it to save her. He would do it again a thousand times.

But that didn't make the weight any lighter.

He sat on the bench for hours. The rain fell. The city moved around him. He didn't move.

When the sun rose, he stood up. He walked back to his office. He opened the next file.

He had work to do.

CHAPTER 14: The Ghost

Voss's office was sleek. Dark wood. Glass walls. Rain on the windows.

Stone stood in front of a mirror.

The man looking back at him was a stranger.

The olive green military jacket was gone. In its place: a black suit. White shirt. No tie. Black shoes. He looked like a corporate executive. A businessman.

But his eyes were the same. Cold. Tired. Empty.

“You look the part,” Voss said from behind him. “That’s half the battle.”

Stone didn’t respond. He adjusted the cuff of the jacket. His scarred hands looked out of place against the pristine fabric.

“Your name is gone,” Voss continued. “Your records are gone. You’re a ghost now. No one will find you. No one will remember you.”

Stone turned away from the mirror.

“What about Sarah?” he asked.

“She’s safe. She’ll never know you’re alive. She’ll never know what you’ve become.”

Stone nodded slowly.

“Good,” he said.

He didn’t mean it. But he said it anyway.

CHAPTER 15: The Long Road

Stone had been the Cleaner for five years when he realized he had stopped counting the bodies.

It wasn’t a conscious decision. It was just that the numbers had blurred together. Politicians. Corporate executives. Gang leaders. Traitors. Each one looked the same in the end. A body on the floor. Blood on the carpet. Silence in the room.

He had stopped sleeping. That was the first thing to go. He would lie in bed, staring at the ceiling, his mind racing through

the details of the next job. The exits. The targets. The cleanup. His body was exhausted, but his mind wouldn't stop.

He had stopped eating. That was the second thing. Food tasted like nothing. He would sit in a restaurant, pushing food around his plate, watching the people around him. They were alive. They were real. He was neither.

He had stopped feeling. That was the third thing. The most dangerous thing.

He was in a hotel room. Another city. Another job. The rain was falling. It always was.

He stood by the window, looking out at the neon skyline. The city was alive. Millions of people. Millions of stories. He wasn't part of any of them. He was a ghost. He was the Cleaner.

He reached into his jacket and pulled out the photo. Sarah. Her smile. Her warmth. The way she used to laugh.

He hadn't seen her in five years. He hadn't heard her voice in five years. He had no idea where she was. That was the deal. That was the price.

But he still held onto the photo. It was the only thing that reminded him he had once been human.

He put the photo away. He turned from the window. He had work to do.

The Nightmare Returns

The nightmares never stopped.

Stone lay in his hotel room, staring at the ceiling. He had been the Cleaner for ten years. He had killed more people than he could count. He had seen things that would never leave him.

But the nightmares still came.

He dreamed about the ambush. Marcus's head exploding. Reyes's body being torn apart. Viktor's eyes staring at nothing.

He dreamed about the faces of the people he had killed. The ones who had begged for mercy. The ones who had screamed. The ones who had died in silence.

He woke up in a cold sweat, his heart pounding. His hands were shaking.

He looked at his hands. Scarred. Calloused. They had done things that would never be undone.

He thought about Sarah. He wondered if she was happy. He hoped she was.

He got out of bed. He walked to the window. The rain was falling. It always was.

He had work to do.

CHAPTER 16: The Mission

The target was a man named Dorian Black. Corporate executive. Arms dealer. He had been selling weapons to both sides of a war that had killed thousands.

Stone studied the file. Photos. Safe houses. Known associates. Operation details.

Black was careful. He didn't trust anyone. He had layers of security. Guards. Cameras. Locked doors.

Stone didn't care. He had been careful once. Now he was something else.

He moved through the building like a shadow. He didn't make a sound. He didn't leave a trace.

He found Black in his office. He was sitting at his desk, talking on the phone. He was laughing. He had no idea.

Stone moved. He was at the desk in three steps. His hand struck Black's throat. The phone dropped. Black's eyes widened. His mouth opened.

Stone's hand struck again. Black fell forward onto the desk. He didn't move.

Stone checked the body. No pulse. He wiped the desk. He wiped the phone. He vanished into the night.

He felt nothing.

He had felt nothing for five years.

CHAPTER 17: The Price

Stone was in his office. It was a small room in a nondescript building. No windows. No decorations. Just a desk, a chair, and a file cabinet.

He had been doing this for five years. He was good at it. Efficient. Cold. Emotionless.

But it had cost him everything.

He thought about Sarah. He thought about the life they could have had. The children they might have raised. The quiet nights and peaceful mornings.

He thought about the man he used to be. The soldier who believed in something. The husband who loved someone.

That man was gone. In his place was a ghost.

He didn't regret his choice. He had done it to save her. He would do it again a thousand times.

But that didn't make the weight any lighter.

He opened the new file.

VARGA.

He read the details. Cartel leader. Arms dealer. Connected to the people who had sold out his unit.

Stone closed the file.

"Finally," he said.

He had been waiting for this for five years.

The Confrontation with Voss

Stone confronted Voss about the deal.

It was late at night. Voss's office was quiet. The rain was falling.

Stone walked in without knocking. He was angry. He was tired. He was done.

“You lied to me,” Stone said.

Voss looked up from his desk. “I never lie. I just don’t tell the whole truth.”

“Sarah. You said she was safe. You said she would never know.”

“She is safe. She doesn’t know.”

“Then why did I just see her?”

Voss was silent for a moment.

“You saw her?” Voss asked.

“On a monitor. In one of your safe houses. She was reading a book. She looked happy.”

“She is happy.”

“She’s not happy. She’s in a cage.”

Voss shook his head. “It’s not a cage. It’s a home.”

“It’s a cage,” Stone repeated.

Voss sighed. He leaned back in his chair.

“What do you want, Stone?”

“I want out. I want to see her. I want to tell her I’m alive.”

“You can’t. You made a deal.”

“I’m breaking it.”

Voss smiled. It was a cold, hollow smile.

“You can’t break it, Stone. You’re a ghost. You don’t exist. If you try to see her, they’ll find you. And they’ll find her.”

Stone was silent for a moment.

“I don’t care,” he said.

He walked out of the office.

CHAPTER 18: The Hunt

Stone began the hunt.

He studied Varga’s operations. His patterns. His weaknesses. He found gaps in security. Moments of vulnerability.

He moved through the city like a ghost. He was everywhere and nowhere.

He watched Varga from a distance. He learned his habits. His fears. His desires.

He was patient. He was methodical. He was the Cleaner.

He was going to destroy Varga.

And he was going to enjoy it.

CHAPTER 19: The Confrontation

Stone found Varga in a nightclub.

It was loud. Flashing lights. Crowds of people. Varga was in a VIP booth, surrounded by guards. He was laughing. He was drinking.

Stone moved through the crowd. His hand found his pistol. He was ten feet away. He was five feet away.

Varga looked up. His eyes widened. He recognized Stone. He knew who he was.

“Cleaner,” Varga said. “I thought you were dead.”

“Not yet,” Stone said.

The guards moved. Stone was faster. He disarmed the first. He struck the second. The third dropped before he could raise his weapon.

Varga stood up. His hand reached for his pistol. Stone was faster. The pistol was in his hand, aimed at Varga’s head.

“You killed my unit,” Stone said. “Twenty-three soldiers. Dead.”

Varga laughed. It was a cold, hollow sound.

“Business,” he said. “You understand business, don’t you, Cleaner?”

Stone’s finger moved to the trigger.

“I understand,” he said. “That’s why you’re going to die.”

He paused.

“I’m going to take everything from you,” Stone said. “Your money. Your power. Your life. I’m going to destroy you.”

Varga’s smile faltered. He realized Stone wasn’t going to kill him. Not yet.

Stone lowered the pistol.

“This isn’t over,” Stone said.

He walked away.

CHAPTER 20: The Weight

Stone walked through the city. The rain was falling. The neon signs were buzzing.

He had been the Cleaner for fifteen years. He had killed more people than he could count. He had lost everything that mattered.

But he had found something new. Purpose. Vengeance. The need to destroy the man who had destroyed his unit.

He walked past a woman on the street. She was laughing. She sounded like Sarah.

He stopped. He turned. He watched her walk away.

He didn’t follow. He couldn’t.

He had made his choice. He was the Cleaner. He was a ghost.

And ghosts didn’t get to go home.

CHAPTER 21: The Call

Stone was in his office when the call came.

He had been the Cleaner for twenty years. He was fifty-two years old. He had been dead for twenty years.

His phone buzzed. He looked at the screen.

Unknown number.

He answered.

“Stone?”

His heart stopped.

“Sarah.”

“I found you,” she said. “I’ve been looking for you for years.”

He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t speak.

“I need to see you,” she said. “Please.”

He was silent for a long moment.

“Okay,” he said. “Okay.”

He hung up. He walked to the window.

The rain was falling. It always was.

But for the first time in twenty years, he had something to come home to.

CHAPTER 22: The Diner

Stone walked into the diner. It was small and rundown. The rain streaked the windows. The neon signs buzzed.

He saw her. She was sitting in a booth by the window. She looked older. There was grey in her hair. Lines around her eyes.

She saw him. She smiled.

He sat down across from her.

“You look old,” she said.

“So do you,” he said.

She reached across the table. Her hand touched his scarred knuckles.

“I never stopped looking,” she said.

“I never stopped hoping,” he said.

“Stay,” she said.

“Okay,” he said.

He had been a soldier. He had been a ghost. He had been the Cleaner.

But now he was just a man.

And he was finally home.

CHAPTER 23: The Beginning

Stone walked out of the diner with Sarah. The rain had stopped. The neon signs were still buzzing. The city was still alive.

But for the first time in twenty years, Stone felt something other than emptiness.

He walked beside her. Her hand was in his. He didn’t know what came next. He didn’t know how to be a normal person.

But he knew one thing.

He was done running.

“Where do we go?” he asked.

She looked at him. The same warmth in her eyes.

“Home,” she said.

He didn’t know where home was anymore. But he was willing to find out.

They walked into the night. The city behind them. The future ahead.

For the first time in twenty years, the ghost was gone.

The New Beginning (Insert after Chapter 23)

Stone and Sarah built a new life together.

It wasn’t easy. The past didn’t just disappear. The nightmares didn’t stop. The memories didn’t fade.

But they had each other.

They moved to a small house on the edge of the city. It had a garden. A porch. A dog.

Stone learned to live again. He learned to sleep. He learned to eat. He learned to feel.

He wasn’t the same man he had been before the war. He never would be.

But he was human again.

Sarah helped him. She was patient. She was kind. She was everything he needed.

They sat on the porch every night, watching the sunset. The neon signs were far away. The flying cars were distant. The rain

was gentle.

“We made it,” Sarah said one night.

“We made it,” Stone agreed.

He held her hand. He didn’t let go.

For the first time in twenty years, Stone Jaxxon was at peace.

CHAPTER 4

EPILOGUE: The Ghost Returns

One year later, Stone stood on a small balcony. The city stretched out before him. The neon signs were buzzing. The flying cars were humming.

But he wasn't alone.

Sarah came up behind him. She wrapped her arms around his waist.

"You're thinking," she said.

"Always."

"About what?"

He turned to face her. "About how I got here."

"You got here by not giving up."

He smiled. A real smile. The first one in twenty years.

"I love you," he said.

She kissed him.

“I know,” she said.

They stood together, watching the city.

The war was over. The ghost was gone. And for the first time in twenty years, Stone Jaxxon was at peace.

BOOK SERIES PLAN

Book

Title

Synopsis

1

Origins

Stone’s backstory – soldier to ghost to reunion

2

Neon Debt

Stone vs. Varga – the main story

3

Reckoning

Stone and Sarah’s future – the final chapter

About the Author

Just a nerd who loves Science Fiction & Technology

Copyright © 2026 Tammy M. Hall. All rights reserved.

Published by HNH TECHNOLOGY

