

**UNSTOPPABLE**

**NOWHERE TO RUN**



**JUDE WATSON**

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# PROLOGUE

*Somewhere off the coast of Maine*

There was only one house on the island. The rest was pine forest, a thick, dark, bristling screen that threw the beach into shadow for most of the sunlit summer days. It also concealed most of the buildings, the three pools—outdoor, indoor, and lap—the tennis courts, the helipad, the landing strip, and the four-car garage from any passing sailboat. Only tourists came close. The locals knew better.

They knew the muscled men in tight black T-shirts in the fast rubber boats who would cut your fishing line or blare a warning with a horn that could make your eardrums bleed.

They knew the treacherous currents, too. They knew how the wind seemed to whip through the channel at a speed and ferocity that you didn't feel in the harbor. They knew to stay away.

The sound of a violin soared through the still air. A sixteen-year-old girl watched her fingers moving

without error, notes sliding and falling like pure water. What used to confound her now flowed. She knew that if she worked at her skill she could succeed, even though she had no talent.

That's what her father tells her.

The thirteen-year-old boy just defeated his tennis pro in straight sets without breaking a sweat. He saw the surprise on the pro's face. Just wait until the guy found out he was fired. The boy's dad always fires a coach after he's been defeated.

*They lack the killer instinct, his father said. You want to turn out like that?*

He whacked the tennis ball hard, sending it back over the net. The coach had bent down to retrieve his bag, and the ball slammed into his back. Ow. That must have *hurt*. The boy knew it well from experience.

"Never turn your back on a competitor!" the boy jeered.

That's what his father tells him.

*Killer instinct.*

Far out to sea, a man was swimming, moving as precisely and tirelessly as a machine. Even though he had three pools, he preferred swimming in the open sea. This year the seals had been swimming closer and closer to shore. This meant, he knew, that the great white sharks were lurking, moving constantly in order to feed.

It added a certain . . . spice to the swim.

The man reached the dock with several powerful

strokes. He hauled himself up and strode toward the house. A short but powerfully muscled man in a black T-shirt tossed him a towel, and he wiped his face and threw it on the ground. He did not worry about towels. They were picked up, laundered, and stacked again. He didn't have to see it or think about it. He was always thinking great thoughts now. Thoughts large and complex enough to take in the world.

He entered through the French doors into the den. He almost recoiled from the sight of hundreds of glassy eyes staring at him. His wife was arranging and rearranging her collection. Again. He hurried past before she had a chance to talk to him.

His office was cool and quiet. He pulled on a terry-cloth robe and activated the many transparent screens. Data flashed by, and he absorbed it all quickly and completely. Things were so different now. His strategic thinking was almost as fast as the computer data streaking across his screens.

Almost there. So close he could taste it.

There are only two people alive on the planet who can stop it.

It's time to eliminate them.

*Somewhere near Mt. Washington, New Hampshire*

In the small town where the men occasionally went for supplies, their story was that they were on a corporate retreat, testing their skills in the wilderness. The

men—they were all men—looked remarkably alike. They were all fit and muscular with close-cropped hair. They usually wore track pants and T-shirts, or hiking gear. They were friendly, but not forthcoming. After they left, the shopkeeper or gas station attendant would realize that they were hard to tell apart. They had names that were hard to distinguish: Joe, Frank, John, Mike.

Over a hundred men had been shifted into and out of the camp, but for the past four weeks the group had been whittled down to six. Six of the best, six of the brightest, six of the most trustworthy.

They had always been in shape; that was their job. But this last month they'd doubled their strength and then doubled it again. They had climbed the mountain fourteen times. They attended classes in combat driving, surveillance, and martial arts. They had been fitted for Italian suits, handmade shoes with rubber soles, and jackets with pockets that will hold their weaponry close and without detection.

They were ready. They just didn't know for what.

All they knew was that they had never felt so powerful. So at the top of their game.

As they sat on hard chairs watching their screens flash with a simulated escape from a metropolitan area, the leader of the men heard the chime of a text. He was the tallest, and the tannest. His teeth were very white and even; his real teeth had been knocked out in a bar fight years ago in Corsica. His face registered no

emotion as he told the rest that it was time to mobilize. They had received their targets.

He connected his phone to the computer. On a large transparent screen floated two photographs.

“Target One, Target Two,” he said in a flat tone.

The men showed no emotion. Even though their targets were kids.

# CHAPTER 1

*Attleboro, Massachusetts*

It was a sunny, beautiful day. A day you felt glad to be alive.

Too bad Amy Cahill was surrounded by the dead.

Amy bowed her head and squeezed her eyes shut. She was only sixteen, but she'd attended too many funerals. She'd said too many good-byes.

Six months ago she'd buried her cousin and her uncle, and today, a marker would be placed for William James McIntyre, family attorney and deeply loved friend.

Her cell phone chimed in her pocket. She slipped it out and read the text. It was from her boyfriend, Jake Rosenbloom. It was six hours later in Rome, where he lived. It would be close to dusk there, and he'd be putting away his books and starting to think about dinner.

I know the service is this morning. I wish I could be there with you. You ok?

Amy's finger was poised over the keyboard. Her gaze drifted down the grassy hill to where a polished gray marker stood gleaming next to weathered, tilting gravestones, the many generations of the Tolliver family who had lived in Attleboro since before the Revolutionary War. Too far away to read the name, but she didn't have to.

#### EVAN JOSEPH TOLLIVER

She slipped her phone back in her pocket. Tears stung her eyes. She'd put on a black dress and gone to Evan's wake six months earlier. His mother had shut the door in her face. Amy had understood. After all, she blamed herself for Evan's death just as much as his mother did. If it weren't for Amy, Evan would still be alive. He would still be volunteering at the local shelter, still be president of the computer club, still be teasing his little sister, still be in line for hazelnut coffee with whipped cream. He would be alive on the earth, feeling the wind, appreciating the sky, every sense alert to this early spring day. Instead, he was in the ground. He had been her boyfriend and he had died for her. And he'd never known she was going to dump him for Jake.

She'd never even had a date before crushing on Evan. She'd just been plain Amy Cahill, the straight-A student in jeans and sneakers. Unremarkable and overlooked. She wasn't the kind of girl boys noticed. Then she'd looked at Evan, and he'd looked back.

She'd thought she was in love. Until she met intense, charismatic Jake Rosenbloom, and realized that she

hadn't had a clue what falling in love was really about.

If only she could remember the exhilaration she'd felt when she'd first realized that Jake loved her back. Now there was so much sorrow and guilt in her heart that she felt as though she was surrounded by fog.

She got up in the morning, brushed her teeth, and did her lesson plans. She and her brother, Dan, now were homeschooled by their former guardian, Nellie Gomez, and several tutors. It had been a rainy fall and a cold winter. The days had dissolved into grays. The books that had once given her comfort had blurred in front of her eyes. Italian lessons, history lessons, math problems, essays, projects.

For the past six months, she'd barely left the house except to run long, hard, cross-country miles. At night she wandered the house, second-guessing every decision she'd made during the battle with the criminal organization the Vespers. When had she gone wrong? Should she have refused to let Evan help them? Should she have ordered Mr. McIntyre back to the US? So many people she had loved had died. She had the clout to force them out of harm's way, but she hadn't.

Why hadn't she used that power?

At sixteen years old, Amy was head of the Cahills, the most powerful family in the world. Their ancestor, Gideon Cahill, had formulated an extraordinary serum at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Since that time, the five branches of the family had battled, spied, lied, stolen, betrayed — all for one purpose only.

Each of the branches had one part of the serum. If the complete serum was assembled, it would make anyone who took it the most powerful person in the world.

After all those hundreds of years, Amy and Dan had been the first to put together the formula for the serum. But they and the other young members of the Cahill family had realized at last that the serum was too incredibly dangerous to even think about producing. Now the formula—a list of thirty-nine ingredients, their complicated calibration, and precise amounts—was safely locked away.

In the steel-trap brain of her thirteen-year-old brother.

Amy's gaze drifted to her sandy-haired brother. Hard to believe that this skinny person now secretly slipping a worm into Aunt Beatrice's purse could be the most powerful kid in the world.

Protecting him—protecting *all* of the Cahills—was her job as head of the family.

*Guess I didn't do so well with you, Mac,* Amy said to the marble urn, her eyes filling with tears. *Murdered in a hotel room in Rome.*

She wiped her eyes. She had waited six months to bury the ashes of Mr. McIntyre. He was her last tie to security.

Mr. McIntyre had been more than her attorney; he'd been her best and most trusted adviser, and maybe her best friend.

Now here they stood, the only mourners except for Aunt Beatrice, who had started off the morning complaining that her hay fever was acting up and the funeral director had better “get this show on the road.”

The elegant marble box sat on a small table. It contained what was left of Mr. McIntyre. Just ashes. His kindness, his shrewdness, his intelligence—it was all gone from the world. Now there was just a box.

The funeral director, whom Dan kept referring to behind his back as “Mr. Death,” had shown up late. He nervously wiped at the sweat on his forehead with a handkerchief. When he’d placed the marble box on the table, he’d almost dropped it.

“Is this his first funeral?” Dan whispered.

The tall, muscular clergyman looked more like a football coach. He’d brought a bouquet of wilted red roses. Not Mr. McIntyre’s style at all. Amy didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. This whole thing just felt surreal. She almost expected Mr. McIntyre to drive up and get out of a long black limousine and say “April Fool.”

“This is a disgrace,” Aunt Beatrice muttered. “Only three people at the service!”

“Henry Smood is in the hospital with appendicitis,” Amy said, referring to Mr. McIntyre’s law partner and their new attorney. “He was really upset that he couldn’t make it. And the hospital wouldn’t release Fiske.”

Aunt Beatrice sniffed. “I was talking about *family*,”

she said. "It used to be when a faithful retainer was buried, the Cahills showed up. Even if we despise each other, we used to know how important appearances are."

"Aunt Beatrice buried her *retainer*?" Dan whispered to Amy. "I just flushed mine down the toilet."

Amy stepped on his foot. Her brother made jokes when he was nervous, or scared. She was used to it, but Aunt Beatrice was not.

"Mr. McIntyre *was* family," Amy said.

"Dear," Aunt Beatrice replied, "only *family* is family."

Amy jerked her head away. Aunt Beatrice was tipping the ceremony from difficult to unbearable.

"The Templeton Cahills always used McIntyre and Smood," Aunt Beatrice went on. "And the Durham Cahills. And surely the Starlings could have showed up! Denise Starling used McIntyre for *years* until she decided he was too close to Grace and sent him that poison pen letter. Even if it *was* real poison, she should have let bygones be bygones. And Debra used him for her pre-nup with that nasty man with the strange name. Never should have married him in the first place . . ."

Aunt Beatrice droned on, naming Cahills Amy and Dan had never heard of. "They didn't come because I didn't invite them, Aunt Beatrice," Amy interrupted.

"But Mr. McIntyre was the family lawyer!" Aunt Beatrice sputtered. She narrowed her beady eyes at Amy. "Did you even *tell* anyone what you were doing?"

"No," Amy said. "I'm not interested in their opinions. I made the decision."

Aunt Beatrice opened her mouth, but Amy held up her hand. "And that's final."

Aunt Beatrice's mouth closed and opened like a fish feeding.

"Way to go," Dan muttered.

Amy gave a small smile. Sometimes it was difficult to be the head of the family, but when it came to Aunt Beatrice, she didn't have a problem.

"Are we ready to begin?" the funeral director whispered. Amy saw him sneak a glance at his watch before gazing down respectfully. She could almost picture him saying, "Dudes, let's get this show on the road."

The clergyman read a Bible verse in a wooden voice. Then he closed the book and nodded at Amy.

"Good-bye, Mr. McIntyre," Amy said. "You were our protector and our friend. The best of the best. Rest in peace."

"Good-bye, Mac," Dan said. "Sorry about the time I put a frog down your pants. Thanks for taking care of us."

Aunt Beatrice sneezed.

The clergyman gestured at the pile of dirt by the open grave. "Would you like to throw a handful of dirt into the grave?" he asked.

"Oh, for heaven's sake. I have *gardeners* for that sort of thing," Aunt Beatrice said. "I have an allergist appointment."

Amy bent down and threw dirt into the grave. Dan did the same. The clergyman handed her the roses and she dropped those in, too. *Sorry, Mac*, she told him silently. *I know you'd prefer tulips*. A sudden memory came to her, of Mr. McIntyre in Grace's garden in his shirtsleeves on a fine May day, regarding a bed of yellow tulips, saying, *Now there's a cheerful flower!*

Tears filled her eyes and she almost asked Aunt Beatrice for a tissue, but her aunt had already stalked off. Her driver was hurrying to open the car door.

Mr. Death had left, too—he was almost running as he made his way through the gravestones to his car.

*That's odd*, Amy thought. *Why did the funeral director leave so quickly? He didn't even say good-bye.*

The clergyman leaned over to pick up the shovel. Amy didn't think she could bear seeing the grave filled up.

As she turned away, something hard hit the back of her head. Pain blinded her, and she felt herself shoved into the open grave.