

# THE RISING



PHILIP ANTHONY GABLE

# **The Rising**

by Philip Anthony Gable

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## **About the Author**

Philip Anthony Gable was born in the North of England in 1970. He has worked in the music industry, television, theater and film and is currently the EVP of Witchfactory Productions, a Los Angeles based transmedia production company. He is married to artist and producer Lauren Elizabeth Scime, who is not only the love of his life, but also his mentor and friend. Philip and Lauren currently live in West Hollywood, California.

## **About The Rising**

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*For my wife, Lauren.*

# Chapter One

**Los Angeles, October 2005**

The night vision goggles shrouded the studio lot in eerie shades of artificial green.

Joni padded silently along the side of a massive sound stage, careful to stay in the shadows. Shouts came from up ahead as film crews scrambled around in the dark. Some wielded flashlights in wild arcs, while others cried out blindly in the darkness. Humming generators kept a limited amount of equipment working, but for the most part the studio was in complete darkness.

The blasts from her explosive charges had successfully taken out three city blocks, severing electricity supplies to substations and backup lines. Sounds of the chaos drifted in from the surrounding roads, a distant roar of car horns and shouts of frustration.

Joni moved towards stage 51. Her target was waiting, black and motionless, left virtually unprotected by a crew of disoriented guards.

She approached a guard and offered him a fake studio pass. His flashlight scanned the laminate, as he looked her over with indifference, quickly passing light over her petite frame. She could tell by his expression that he was annoyed, but he gave his approval, not bothering with any further formalities.

She was dressed as a pilot wearing a night vision helmet, carrying a silenced sub machine gun and a toolkit, but this didn't faze the guards any more than if she had been dressed as a robot, a cowboy or a Zulu warrior.

*Welcome to Hollywood.*

She went to work on the helicopter, opening a small rectangular panel on its underside with a modified screwdriver. She had to disable the tracking device.

The confusion perpetuated around her, insolent complaints and shouts of frustration carried around the lot, the headlights of passing golf carts darting to and fro in all directions.

Halting the production of multiple movies would cost millions of dollars per hour, but she didn't care. She was just relieved that she hadn't had to kill anyone yet. Killing was something she did out of necessity, not by choice.

Once the device was disabled, she replaced the panel and climbed up into the cockpit. She had never flown that model before, but she had read the manuals and practiced on simulations. You couldn't order Apache Longbow helicopters from Amazon. This one had been fitted out by the US military with missile and rocket launchers. It was the real deal.

The missiles and rockets carried no explosives. The built-in chain gun bullets were training blanks, but the mountings were there, and that was all that mattered.

She closed the cockpit hatch and started flicking switches to start the engines, excited and tense at the same time. This was a pilot's dream, the most advanced attack helicopter in the world, fully decked out for combat. It would be expected on set later that night to make some handsome idiot look good, but it had a different purpose now.

The rotor blades started spinning, cutting the air, faster and faster. The surprised guards motioned for her to stop, waving frantically in the darkness, hands on their guns, one frantically waving a clipboard. She gave them a token thumb, but they didn't see her.

She pulled back on the stick and felt the blades catch the air, pulling her high above the studio lot. The lights were still out around her. Emergency services were closing in on the area, their blue and red lights flashing as they tore down the dark streets. From above, it looked like a game of Pac Man. She laughed aloud at the freedom she felt.

She was an eerie black shape hovering in the sky above the valley, her body melded as one with the dark hovering metal, a sleek and pitiless hunter. She had just stolen 15 million dollars worth of military hardware and it felt good.

Joni steered the helicopter across the valley, following the Interstate 5 towards Santa Clarita. She knew that flying so close to Burbank airport would trip the default alerts. She was flying unscheduled, straight across runway flight paths without comms. Air Traffic Control would most likely solicit Air Force fighter jets to investigate. Of course, once the studio raised the alarm, the fighter jets would be imminent regardless. She gauged a window of 10 to 15 minutes max before they were on her either way.

She rounded the hills into Antelope Valley and veered North. She could have flown the chopper all night. It filled her with a sense of power and purpose. At nineteen, she was probably the youngest combat pilot in the world. It made her smile.

She landed about three miles from the freeway on a tiny dirt road in an empty patch of desert. There were no lights visible, just a faint orange glow above the jagged hills to indicate that the city was not far away.

A crew dressed in dark clothing moved in on the helicopter with carts and trolleys, immediately beginning the process of arming the helicopter. They worked in silence, each with purpose.

Brent climbed into the gunners seat and plugged in his headset.

“Nice work Joni,” he said through the helmet comms.

“It’s a hell of a ride,” she answered.

They saw the lights of fighter jets flying fast overhead.

“I hope you’re tracking those bastards,” Joni said.

“I am now,” Brent replied.

“They’re heading over Malibu to sweep around. Police have scrambled several choppers, studio must have squealed.”

“They think we’re unarmed. That’ll be a nice surprise,” Joni added.

Joni had been planning the operation for months. She had helped stockpile ammunition, hellfire missiles, Hydra 70 rockets, 30-millimeter rounds, and large quantities of C-4 and Semtex explosives, small arms and grenades. After six hit-and-run missions against military ammunition stores across the country, she was lucky to be alive.

Once every six years, their enemies would congregate in numbers for a secret meeting. This time they had inside information, a location and a date. The availability of an Apache helicopter had been an unexpected surprise.

The people on the ground moved away from the helicopter. Some waved while others stood motionless, watching.

Joni took a long, deep breath.

“OK, I need a window of three minutes to get back over the city. They won’t shoot us down while we’re over the Valley,” she said.

“The jets are moving over Pasadena, sweeping south towards Long Beach. They are swinging wide to stay clear of LAX.”

They sat silently awaiting the right moment to take off, monitoring the progress of the fighter jets. Brent was younger than her by two years. He was a good man, but his spirit was too damaged to find the happiness he deserved. Perhaps that was why he had volunteered for this particular mission. Either way, she was glad he was with her.

“Looks like the jets are bowing out. They’re over San Bernardino now. You have your three minutes,” he said.

Joni started the engines, pulling up aggressively as soon as the blades bit the air. She pushed the helicopter as hard as she could, just missing the power lines as she banked back towards the sprawling city.

She tried to think of nothing but her mission, her final destination. She knew she was going to her death, but it didn’t bother her. Not any more. Before this, her life had been painful, isolated by an unshakable belief that something was wrong, that the world was shrouded in deception and evil. Then she had found others like her, others who fought back. Now she had a chance to make a difference.

Her death would go unrecorded. Her act of revenge would be publically dismissed as an unscheduled movie shoot for a blockbuster epic that went wrong, covered up and filed away by lawyers and bribes. The studio would be paid off for their silence, the neighbors would receive gifts, the rubble would be rebuilt into another Hollywood mansion, and the police would look the other way. But the scars inflicted on the enemy would remain. The scars would be deep, and her death would count.

She glimpsed downtown LA through gaps in the hills, the tall buildings rising up from the concrete floors like stalagmites. She would love to explore it, rent an apartment, get a job, buy a car and a cat, but that was someone else’s story.

The mansion stood secluded on a hilltop where no one could look down on it, and nothing could approach without being seen. It provided an anonymity afforded only by the obscenely rich, a lonely place in the middle of a sprawling metropolis.

Turquoise blue swimming pools were lit elegantly in front of the high glass-bayed windows of the main function room. Figures milled around the pool and around the tables inside, but they were not draped in the dresses and tuxedos of a diamond-studded opening night.

They were morose creatures, shrouded in dark robes, shawls and bandages. Their deformed shapes twisted uneasily as they moved. Some eyed the helicopter hovering in the distance, their senses dulled by cocktails.

Joni flicked on the searchlight.

The figures shielded the dark sockets of their eyes against the blinding light. Some clapped, as though suspecting a surprise visit from a malformed benefactor, perhaps bearing an exquisite and unexpected gift.

What they got were four hellfire missiles.

The explosions rocked the building. A massive fireball spewed out between the broken teeth that had been supporting pillars, concrete beams collapsed, crushing and maiming. Burning body parts landed in the pool and sizzled.

Brett released the remaining hellfire missiles, and the roof collapsed under the explosions, the whole central section of the mansion caving in on itself in a swath of fire and black smoke.

Joni held the helicopter straight while Bret sprayed the swimming pool and surrounding area with thousands of high caliber bullets from the chain gun. Cruelly

warped bodies disintegrated into showers of raw meat and bloody mist. Joni wished she could hear their screams as she fired the remaining Hydra rockets into the burning edifice, but the noise of battle drowned them out. She watched them die, smiling.

She ignored the bleeps and flashing lights in the cockpit warning her of the proximity of Air Force jets and inbound missiles. In her mind, she saw the image of her mother and began running towards her with outstretched arms, a child again, but everything went black before she reached her.

## **Present day**

Snow watched from her bed as dawn broke over the savanna. Thick mists trailed across the rolling grasslands, curling around the feet of the giant acacia trees that dotted the horizon. The wispy dampness offered a temporary cooling relief before what promised to be another scorching day. The sun hung low in the east, shimmering through the moist air, its yellow core feathering out into a halo of deep oranges and reds.

The moon, still visible in early sky, looked down onto the great African plains one last time before retreating. A chorus of grunts and growls drifted through the haze, as hundreds of animals prepared for another day of harsh survival.

Snow heard her father's Land Rover pull away from the lodge complex. She had tried to speak to him the previous night about her future here in Africa, a conversation several months in the making.

She tried to clear her head.

She had been preoccupied all week, planning the best way to broach the subject, the right angle, the right points to make, preparing convincing rebuttals to his most likely counter-arguments. Then last night, when he was cornered, corralled and finally willing to listen to her, all she had achieved was a stream of directionless anger.

*Nice going, Snow.*

She wanted to go after him. She lifted her head up from her pillow but thought better of it. He was going to the research compound, and even if she managed to catch up with him, he wouldn't listen. He would be back in a couple of days and she would try again.

Pierre stirred next to her, muttering something in his sleep. She ignored him.

She slipped out of bed naked, and passed through the draped mosquito netting.

She crept into the small bathroom and looked into the mirror. A young woman of twenty-two with blue-grey eyes stared back, bored and discontent. She flicked strands of long red hair away from her damp cheeks. Her mother had been beautiful, but had died when she was four, leaving no real memories. She had inherited some of her mother's features and spirit, but not her freedom. Her father had taken her away from America on a research excursion after her mother's funeral, and had never taken her back.

She splashed cool water over her face.

Dressed in shorts and a tank top, she strapped on a wide green utility belt, grabbed her rifle and left the lodge. Pierre muttered something after her but she didn't respond. Pierre had been a mistake, just like the others.

That was another reason she needed to get away. He kept her bed warm, her nights entertaining and her father furious, but she didn't need a boyfriend or a husband. She needed adventure.

Still, she craved companionship. Hers was a lonely life, standing on the outside of a vibrant world, looking in. She thought of Mark and smiled.

The heat was rising with the morning sun. The last hints of evaporating mist still clung to the complex as she headed out to the south marker. She slung the rifle across her back and broke into a fast jog.

She loved the freedom of the open savanna, diverse and dangerous, but her mind drifted way to the places she had never seen: Manhattan, London, Paris, Rome, Los Angeles, the list was endless.

She would spend hours on the Internet, learning as much as she could, following trends, checking on companies that shipped goods to Botswana, making friends she would never meet, hacking other computers, breaking cryptographic algorithms. When visitors came to the compound, she asked them endless questions about shopping, nightclubs and fast food restaurants.

She also loved researching and debating conspiracy theories. She was convinced that she lived in one; her life was conspiring to get very dull very quickly.

She had been old enough to leave for several years now. She earned her own money at the lodge, and had saved a considerable sum, but she had never been able to break free from the life she had here in Africa. This place had a mysterious pull that continually won out over her fantasies of escape.

She slowed her stride as she reached a ridge that fell away to a valley floor, and paused to marvel at the panorama. Thousands of wildebeest grazed lazily below, along with herds of zebra and impala. A small group of giraffes moved among a crop of tall acacias. The sky was clear blue now, spattered with wispy white clouds.

She wondered if people in cities thought the same about the savanna as she did about their concrete jungles. She wondered if the cities would be as dangerous.

After a few miles, she stopped jogging, her breath returning to normal. She thought of Mark again, which was strange. The feeling seemed more than a memory, somehow sharper, as if she could sense he was close by. His image created a ripple through her whole body, visceral and intense.

She must have inherited more than natural beauty from her mother. She had skills and intuitive abilities that she couldn't explain. She had stopped using them for the most part since people often reacted fearfully to the inexplicable. It was this fear that had often led to her social exclusion. It pissed her off.

Something suddenly felt wrong. She scanned the horizon for danger, and locked onto an indiscernible object about a mile away, heading in her direction.

She had almost reached her destination at the valley floor when the first of the helicopters approached overhead.

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For more information on the Rising, visit <http://www.join-the-rising.com>