

**C H R I S L Y N C H**

**SPECIAL FORCES**

**UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE**

**BOOK 1**



**SCHOLASTIC PRESS ★ NEW YORK**

Copyright © 2018 by Chris Lynch

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, and imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication  
Data available

ISBN 978-0-545-86162-5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1                      18 19 20 21 22

First edition, December 2018

Printed in the U.S.A. 23  
Book design by Christopher Stengel

## CHAPTER ONE

# True Tough

**I** was beating the tar out of my brother Edgar. And because Edgar was born with an abnormal amount of tar in him, beating it out was nearly a full-time, full-on job.

I had him by the neck, by the throat, pressed deep into the upholstery of Dad's big wingback reading chair. There was no question I was winning this fight, just as there was never any question of who was winning our frequent, spirited, intense confrontations. That would be me.

No question except, I suppose, in the mind of Edgar. That was one place I would never want to go, personally, even to find out how he thought he'd wiggle out of my grip. But his face was helpful enough. Turning plum purple, and with his strength draining so quickly I could feel it running down my arms and torso and onto the floor, he still managed to lay that vile and infuriating toothy leer on me.

Which, naturally, drove me berserk. As it was intended to.

I threw my whole life-force into the effort of strangling my brother and breaking his neck and putting him personally into his final resting place directly beneath our house. The chair flew backward, and Edgar flew backward, and I flew forward without ever losing my grip. The thunder-crash as we hit the floor was somehow not quite enough, so I went onward and jackhammered Edgar's head against the hardwood floor. I just wanted to get that victory expression off his face because, in all fairness, it was all wrong in this instance.

"Stop it! Stop, Danny, stop!" My other brother, Kent, screamed as he slammed into me from the side, toppling me but failing to break my grip.

"Idiot, I'm doing this for you!" I screamed back.

"Well you can stop doing it for me!"

"No, I can't. I can't stop," I said, pinning Edgar to the floor with my right hand and shoving Kent's face away with my left.

A crack of knuckles to the tip of my chin sent my head snapping back. Edgar seized his moment.

"One hand?" Edgar yelled as he rolled me backward and jumped on me. "You think you can hold me down with *one* hand, Danny?"

He wasn't appalled by many things, my brother, but he was rightly appalled at that. Because while I always beat him, always, I didn't always beat him easily or by much. It was a brothers thing, where you know one another so well, without even knowing *what* you know, that you can turn a sure mismatch into a real contest. If you have the guts for it.

My brothers had the guts for it.

Even Kent, who looked like he wouldn't give your average badminton player much trouble, could scrap like a wild dog when he had to. So we had our pecking order in our house. Edgar whomped on Kent, and then I whomped on Edgar for whomping on Kent. I felt like it was my job and my duty, no matter how hard or how fun that job was. And no matter whether Kent appreciated me for it or not.

With my back flat on the floor and Edgar on my chest, I balled my left fist, zeroed in on his puggy nose . . . and then Kent lunged. He grabbed my arm before I could let fly.

"No, Danny, stop!" Kent squawked, though I could barely hear him over Edgar's howl of delight. He could neither believe his luck nor contain his joy. Edgar thanked Kent by popping me a sharp, snapping left jab, right off of my forehead.

“Kent!” I bellowed. I wasn’t even much bothered with Edgar anymore, since he was only doing exactly what he should have done in that situation. I’d have been angry if he *didn’t* punch me with a sweet opportunity like that.

In one super heave, I blasted Edgar right off of me, sending him crashing into the base of the front door. Then, I went for Kent.

“You idiot,” I barked as I gave him a hard backhand across his cheek. “You don’t break up a fight by holding one guy’s arm down so the other guy can pound him! How do you not know that? Have you been paying attention at all?” He was paying attention now as I bapped him across the face. Back and forth and back and forth with my right hand, while I held him still with my left.

“I didn’t want you to kill my brother,” he protested.

“You didn’t want . . . *I’m* your brother! And I was flat on my back!”

“Yeah, Kent,” Edgar said, enjoying his seat on the floor. “Danny was *losing*.”

“I was *never* losing,” I shouted, turning toward Edgar just as the front door opened and cracked him right in the back.

“Ha!” I roared, still cuffing Kent casually into submission.

Then I saw it was Dad coming through the door.

I immediately felt bad, but there was nothing I could do about it now. I ceased all movement, though, releasing my grip on Kent.

“Why?” Dad wailed, in that way of his. In just the way I knew he would. He had a low note he would hit at times, when we did stuff that wounded and saddened him. That note wounded and saddened me, too. Then he balled his fists up the best he could, and hit it again. “Why, Daniel? Why can’t you just leave them be?” He looked down, as if yelling at the rug. His hands trembled with the intensity of his anguish. The left fist he threatened the floor with looked like a normal fist. But the right one, the withered one, shook worse.

I couldn’t look his disappointment straight on. So I had to do the other thing, the crappy, unfunny, unfair thing.

“I think it’s their hair, Pop.”

He looked up now, with his fist and his withered hand held unsteady in front of him.

“You think it’s what?”

“Oh, not this again, Danny,” Edgar barked.

“Not again. Not now,” Kent moaned.

They had offensive, antagonistic hair, both of them. Edgar’s was bunchy and big, like a snow cone of hair. Kent’s was straight and wispy and almost girly long. And it was orange. They both had bright orange punch-me hair. Mine was normal human brown, with a normal side part.

“Half the guys in school have lined up to fight these two because of their hair. How am I supposed to resist when I have to look at it round the clock?”

For a second, I convinced myself I was making a pretty good case. But then something happened that I never saw coming. Something I could not possibly have seen coming because it had never happened before. Something that was too unreal to be real and so I didn’t believe it was possible, even as I watched it rolling straight toward me.

My dad, my sweet-natured, physically-unfit-for-service-in-two-wars-even-though-he-tried-to-sign-up-for-both father, threw himself forward in an effort to attack me.

“They . . . are . . . not . . . getting . . . in . . . fights . . . because . . . of . . . their . . . *hair!*” Dad wheezed as he flailed awkwardly, clapping me on the chest and shoulders as I stared in complete shock. My brothers jumped

in to restrain him. “They are getting in fights, Daniel, because *you* are training them to be chippy, combative ruffians! You mold them in your own image, so they’ll fight with anything that moves, for no apparent reason!”

I had never seen him so upset. I had never *felt*, inside myself, so upset. Things did not upset me. That was part of my package, part of how this machine worked. But this vision here: My poor old man, enfeebled by polio, then again by post-polio—because life is loaded with great punch lines—who never did anybody any harm ever, was trying with everything he had to harm me. And everything he had barely amounted to anything. My poor dad couldn’t even throw me off balance. Not physically, at least.

But it paralyzed me all the same. My arms hung at my sides as he tried and tried to get at me. Dad’s strength rapidly ran down, and both Edgar and Kent tried to assure him in low voices that everything was all right, but he wasn’t assured in any way. I wanted to tell him I was sorry. But nothing came out of me. When I couldn’t get it out in time, Dad finally started crying. Giving up. He just let my brothers hold him, weeping away.

I was not going to cry, no, it just wasn’t going to happen because that was not how this machine worked.

But all the strength that had to be diverted to holding back my tears made it even more impossible to tell Dad I was sorry and that I would do better.

He deserved to hear that at least. But no. The machine was in high gear.

He could cry. How come I couldn't?

Finally, I snapped out of my stupor. I blew past all three of them and bolted out the front door.

"Why do you have to do these things?" he wailed, just before I had time to slam the door between me and his words.

Not that I'd have had an answer for him. I didn't know why I had to do those things. I just had to, was all.

Anyway, Edgar and Kent were lucky to have me around, to be honest. It was me making those two sad-sack brothers of mine into hard nuts who could handle anything that came their way. That's what I figured. No way could Dad have ever taught them the stuff I taught them.

Although there was one big thing I could never teach them. That was how to be as tough as the toughest guy I ever knew.

Dad.

“Daniel!”

Oh, no, please.

I was quickstep-walking away from the house and that scene, faster than most people could run. I didn't lose any pace as I looked back over my shoulder to verify what I already knew.

“Go home, Dad!” I yelled.

That was pointless, of course. Once I looked back, he had me hooked, and he knew it.

I stopped fast-walking, started backward-walking as I watched the old man put every which kind of energy into going not very fast at all. I stopped backward-walking and came to a stop. Dad wore a brace on his left leg that turned every other stride into a small pole-vaulting action. Made no difference to him as he huffed and hobbled down that sidewalk to get to me. His good left arm pumped the way anybody's arm would when running, only it pumped at about a three-to-one rate compared to his right one.

To look at his strained face, his frantic body language, you would find no sign that he didn't believe he'd eventually catch me. Even when I started walking toward him to make the trip just marginally shorter, he didn't let up one tiny bit on the gas.

He practically fell into my arms with exhaustion when we finally came together. I held on to him as he struggled to catch his breath. And he held on to me as best he could.

We hung on like that for a few minutes. Which was good. Without saying anything. Which was even better.