

Storyboard-21

The mansion sits on half an acre of land patrolled by men in expensive black suits. I watch Bart move through the property, through the scope attached to the JDJ. I only catch the occasional glimpse, even knowing the route he has to take, and the skill he demonstrates at not being seen is creating havoc among the boxes that is making it difficult to focus.

Admiration, yearning, fear, joy, paranoia are among the loudest slamming against their sides, cracking them and leaking, forcing me to spend yet more time bringing everything, bringing myself, under control.

I want to be home, curled up in a ball, so I can stop having to maintain such tight control for a while. Just rest, be safe, not care about who hears me scream and cry. I want him to—

Stop!

I don't want. Want is how I take advantage of others. It is not something I have so others can use it against me. I have a job to do; Bart is helping me. That is where it ends.

I locate him as he slips into a deeper shadow and the guard walk by him.

He offered to kill the guards as he encountered them, but I don't have the equipment needed to intercept their communication. Do the check-ins for them, hide the fact they are dead.

That is bad planning on my part. I should have gotten what I needed from Jofre, not just the JDJ. It's going to cost me—I slam a hand on the reproach.

I want to sleep. The little I had was not enough.

I track Bart again. He moves like a shadow. He had training. He places a pack of explosives against the wall. Behind it is one of the supports to the crossbeams, taking the weight of the entire structure. Eight points are touching the outside wall where those supports are connected. Inside, there are eight more, then the central support.

Bart offered to slip inside to attach explosives to those points too, but I refused. The idea of him entering, of being out of my reach, out of my ability to help if—

Going inside alone isn't tactically sound when we know nothing of the distribution of the men inside.

With the outer wall supports weakened if not outright shattered, all it will take is the destruction of the central support to push every other one beyond their maximum carry limit and the building will crumble in on itself, killing everyone in it.

Bart vanishes around the corner of the building, and instead of allowing his box to dictate how I'll worry about what could happen while he is out of my sight, I scan the windows, looking for the target.

Asir confirmed that he was here before we arrived. This is where the man who controls Liaison, Keith Riddle, lives and operates from. The man has no family that Asir could find, other than a father in Michigan. The only other people in the mansion are the guards and whatever employees he needs there. They found no indication that he has any of his products there, which is smart, but unusual. Men who build an organization centered around abuse normally start it because it makes feeding their own needs easier.

I locate him in an office, talking on the phone. Something else I did not prepare for—sloppy!—I could get vital information from that call.

If not for how my hands are shaking, making keeping the scope centered on him, I would remove him right now and go home. Leave Bart to deal with the result—liar!—and put all of this behind me.

Pride tells me I can still make the shot, even at this distance and with withdrawal affecting me. I am Tristan, after all. I just need to take the time to aim, and I never miss.

I never miss because I don't let things like my emotions control what I do. I only take the shots I will not miss.

The target ends the call, Leaves the room, I track him to the corridor, then he moves deeper into the mansion, out of sight from the windows. The places he can go to from there are many, but I have line of sight on the garage, the front exit, and the driveway. He cannot leave without me knowing.

His office is on the east side of the building, the kitchen on the ground floor. He has six rooms he uses for his bedrooms. He is sufficiently aware of the evil he is doing to take precautions against someone coming for revenge.

It will not help him.

If I have to, I will go in there and make him pay my—

I close my eyes and tighten my hold over the boxes.

I need sleep. This is no longer a situation of simply wanting it. The drug is no longer helping me. Three days are catching up with me. I just... I just...

I want so badly.

A click in my ear and I look up, eyes snapping open.

I take control of the boxes before reproach and fear can cause me to wonder what happened while I was asleep. The click was Bart's signal that he placed the last of the explosives. I quickly find him as he slips behind one of the guards and disappears into more shadows.

I want to go down there and make sure he exits. My stomach is in knots until I see him outside the property. He looked in my direction, around, confirming he's alone, and blows me a kiss.

I swallow as my cock gets hard and only the discomfort forces me to take control of myself. That was cocky and useless of him. He has no idea I am watching him.

I smile.

He is such a showoff.

I am calmer now that he is off the property—safe—and go back to watching it. The explosives are wrapped in fabric the same white as the foundation walls. It is unlikely they will be noticed, but if they are, I will have to detonate them now instead of letting Bart do the honor. He has done much of the work and deserves that as a reward, since I will not give him the one he wants.

I hear his steps approach. He is whistling happily. I sigh. The job isn't over. He can't be letting his guard now, that will get him killed.

I look over my shoulder, and he grins. "All done."

I slam the annoyance down. I know he's done. He wouldn't be here, and he wouldn't have sent the signal otherwise. I motion to the spot next to where I am lying and he sits, bringing up the binoculars to his eyes.

"I didn't see or hear anything unusual. It's almost as if he doesn't know he's about to die."

He'd better not know since the only other person aware of the plan is Bart and I don't want to think about him betraying me. I hand him the detonator. I suppose I will find out soon enough. I should have requested a second one, just in case.

"Once I take the shot, you detonate the explosives."

"Yes!"

I glare at him, and he forces a semblance of seriousness on his face. He can be serious, deadly so, but it doesn't seem to be a standard setting. It is... worrying.

I go back to looking at the mansion through the scope. I need to hit the central support pillar one-third of the way up from the ground. It is two feet in diameter, made of reinforced concrete. There are six walls between me and it, but only one matters. The outside one. Adobe bricks over another concrete wall. Nothing short of the most powerful rifle has any chance of punching through the outer wall and still have enough momentum to crack the support column.

Which is why I have the JDJ with three bullets chambered; the most it will take.

I calm my breathing, and for once in the last day few days, the boxes cooperate and remain quiet as I line up the shot. All I have to go by are the blueprints Asir found. They are recent and any modification on a level that would affect the location of the central support would have left a trail impossible to hide from them.

My hands steady as my breathing slows. I do not think of what comes after this, only of the feel of the trigger as my finger touches it, then presses lightly. The detonation is deafening, but the slam of the butt in my shoulder from the recoil causes enough pain to overshadow that in my ears. I chamber the next round as the flash of the explosives registers.

I fire again, and as I chamber the third round, the final planned one, but the mansion collapses in on itself, rendering the shot unnecessary.

It is over.

It is finally over.

I can go home.

The rifle slips from my hands with how badly they shake from the relief, which tells me I am losing control of the boxes. This isn't over until I am home.

I need to stand, get to my car, drive away. Leave Bart behind.

My body does not obey me. It takes nearly all the strength not spent keeping the boxes quiet to keep my eyes open.

"We need to leave," I say as I make out sirens in the distance. "I... Help me up," I order.

With Bart's help, I get to my feet. The two fingers in the rifle's finger guard are the only thing keeping me from letting go of it. I am not losing such a weapon now that I have it.

I am reminded Bart is stronger than he appears as he supports most of my weight to the Chevelle. There, I realize an additional problem. I am in no condition to drive, which means Bart will—

“You can rest and heal up at my place,” he said, looking eager. That would solve the problem. Once I am better, I can ensure he doesn’t follow.

Only I do not know his house. I have no safeties in place, and in my condition, he can take advantage of—I silenced the paranoia, but the point remains valid. I will be at a further disadvantage there. Not to say of the idea Bart will get about something like *us* existing.

“No. My home.”

The excitement in his eyes at my pronouncement makes me question the wisdom of him knowing where I live, but if he pushes the issue, there is always the final solution to the problem that is Bart.