

Aleman owns the highrise, big surprise. A hundred-plus employees keeping his real estate empire running. Those wouldn't be thugs, since I doubt they'd have the brains to sell houses. If they did, they'd have left that job after we went through the first hundred with barely a sweat. Before that, if they were told about Mexico.

It's after office hours as Tristan unlocks a side door, so those should all be home. Aleman has a clear policy of no overtime. He wants his employees well rested and not stressed, so they can be at their best with the clients.

What a saint.

Asyr confirmed he's here. That he, unlike his employee, almost always works late. They couldn't confirm on what in the short time to drive here, even with having to detour, but I figure that running two businesses means burning the midnight oil. Especially when one of them can't be worked on during the nine to five. I would love to see him explain a line of chained women to his sales team.

We're in; then it's toward the stairs. Of course, since he owns the building, his company is on the forty-third floor, the top one. According to the blueprint, there are no hidden drop shafts; no hidden elevators, not even an executive one. If it gets to that, we blow the elevator bank on his floor and there won't be anywhere for him to run.

We hurry up the stairs. The last gift Asyr charged Tristan for before we got here was that they set the stairwell camera on a loop. At this time of the evening, it's going to be awhile before anyone notices something's off.

We don't encounter anyone on the way to the top floor, and there I take care of the lock since it's electronic. I can't do anything about the entry being noted in the system, but the keycard connected to my phone and the lock-breaker app I wrote will register this as an approved usage. So no alarms.

Hopefully, we make it to his office before he's even aware we're here, and it ends. We kill him; I get access to his system from his computer and destroy the trafficking ring form in there and without leadership, it's just a question of time before it dies out.

The door open, we enter and don't make it past the next intersection that my hopes of this being done quietly and quickly are erased. Two suited thugs are approaching.

Tristan's Desert Eagle completely masks the shot from my APX, and they both go down from holes in their heads, well a hole from me, a lack of a head from Tristan's shot.

My ears are also ringing. "Suppressor," I grumble as we run. "We need to find one that fits that monster of yours." Did they even make suppressors for those?

The next pair of thugs, who were running in our direction, we beat down with our fists before they realize we're there. The next pair surprise us as we round a corner, but I disarm mine quickly, then he slaps my gun away before I can fire, to the sound of that sweet music of the knife he draws. I am already moving to it, stepping aside, reaching to take it out of his hand and—

It shrieks sideways as Tristan closes his hand on the man's and yanks, breaking bone and grabbing the falling knife. He throws it at the thug running away and he goes down. I'm sufficiently shaken by the sudden absence I almost miss the thug reaching behind him. I shot him between the eyes as he pulls his backup weapon out.

Then we're running again.

We another turn and a trio is exiting an office. I recognize that silver hair and fire,

but a thug already has him and it's that back I hit; he doesn't go down. That's why head shots are always better.

Tristan pulls me back as the other thug shoots at us, then we're running after them when he stops. They're already in another office, which means it's the panic room, or where they'll make their last stand. Seeing as he had thugs here, they probably stashed an armory in there.

That doesn't slow us, with Tristan taking the lead. When he collides with the door, the door loses and we're inside. A window blocked by someone crouching in it registers before thugs turning to raise their guns at us.

The figure falls out with a scream as I shoot. With a curse I throw myself aside and curse again as I hit a storage shelf and just how small the room is sinks in. Not larger than a supply cabinet. They are both dead by the time I get to my feet, with my ears ringing from Tristan's shot.

Ear protection. Once this is done, I need to get to an otolaryngologist to make sure I don't have hearing loss, then keep ear protection on me at all times. I'm at the window. There's no way he jumped. The guy who ran a trafficking ring of this magnitude isn't stupid enough to think he can survive a forty stories fall, no matter what he might have set up to cushion his fall.

What he has, instead, is a line anchored to a beam and him dropping along it too fucking fast, but not fast enough to die when he hits the ground.

Well, I can help with that.

I turn to search a body for a knife, and pause at Tristan in the process of putting on a rappelling harness on.

"I was going to cut the line," I say.

"At the speed of descent, by the time you take a knife out, if you can remain in control, and cut the line, he will have reached the ground. All you'll do is force us to use the stairs and give him time to escape." He finishes cinching the harness in place and hook some contraption it I can't even begin to identify. "Get on my back."

I have my arms around his neck before what he intends to do registers.

Look, I do what he tells me, okay? Thinking comes after the fact.

Then we are in the window, the device is clamped onto the rope and before I can ask what he plans on—

Holy fuck, are we falling fast. My screaming might have deafened him.

You try falling to your death and not scream.

Then we're slowing so fast my stomach keeps going without me. When I catch up to it. We are on the ground, and as much as I want to take the time to get over that experience, Aleman is getting away and I am not allowing that. I can deal with my future fear of heights once he's dead.

We follow him into the underground garage, only for a car to come racing at us, picking up speed. I fire at the driver. The silver hair's enough for me, but all my bullets do is leave dust on the bulletproof windshield. It's only when my gun clicks empty I understand I'm in the car's direct path as I throw myself out of the way. It bounces out and onto the road and makes a screeching left.

I'm on my feet, ready to run after it—Yes, I'm well aware of the stupidity of that

thought. I'm high on frustration and adrenaline right now—but the breaking of a window and following car alarm stops me. Tristan is getting into some sort of expensive sports car. I have my phone in hand and scanning for the car's bluetooth well before I'm in it. He won't be able to start it unless I disable the anti-theft.

I'm connected and my breaker has me in the system by the time the door closes, then it's just a question of overriding the computer and, in the process, start the car since it's keyless. Then Tristan had us screaming out of the garage, turning left in the bounce and racing after—

“Did you see his car?” I ask.

“Series Seven BMW,” he answers, and I scan ahead, looking for it, then look at him again. I have no idea what one of those looks like. “Forest green. It's an eight of a mile ahead of us, we're catching up.”

“Where do you think he's going?” I put a fresh magazine in my APX. “He can't have anyone in there with him. We destroyed basically every secure place he had.” I pause. “There's no way he thinks he's going to be safe in his home.” The idea of killing him in front of his wife and son doesn't sit well with me, but I'm not going to let that stop me from ending him.

“I don't know. He's running scared. The thugs show he thought there was a chance we're find him in his office, but if he'd been ready, there would have been more of them. Scared people seek safety, but as you said, we removed all of that. He might think his family would reach any humanity he thinks we have, but that also involves exposing them to the truth of the atrocities he has committed.”

“They don't know?”

“The level of respectability he created is difficult to maintain if a mother knows, considering the danger it brings to her child. I know nothing about her, so I can't be certain, but the odds are she won't know.”

“Then where is he going?” I take out the other phone and dial the number, only to get a ‘it no longer exist message’

“We'll need the next phone to contact Asyr,” Tristan says, taking a turn that nearly raises two wheels off, and when we straighten, I see a deep green car ahead.

“Are you seriously telling me they cut you off like that in the middle of this?” I know they did. I have the address where to pick up the next phone, but still. “Why the fuck do you work with them?”

He smiles. “I never needed to contact them this often before knowing you.”

“Oh, so this is my fault?”

He chuckles. “We make for an explosive pair.”

“I'd like to explode him,” I reply sourly. “Next time, we keep a rocket launcher in the car.”

“You're looking to have a next time like this?”

“No, but like you said, we're explosive. It's going to happen again.” I'm annoyed at the idea. I fucking want a normal life with my man and Emil. Going to work nine to five, maybe hunt down a perv who thinks himself above the law on the weekend. You know, normal.

I am so done with this, taking on a giant organization abusing women and children.

The sudden slowing as me looking ahead as the green car turn into a parking lot three blocks ahead.

“Hurry!”

Instead, Tristan keeps slowing us.

“Are you fucking—”

“It’s a police station.”

The sign atop the pole finally registers.

“Who fucking cares? You think having them arrest him is going to stop anything? He has lawyers working for him. They’re going to have him out under a day. We need to go in there and end it.”

“We can’t go in and shoot up a police station, Alex.”

“Says fucking who? It’s not like anyone in there knows how to shoot. What are they going to do?”

“Destroy any chance we have at a life,” Tristan replies calmly. “There will be cameras everywhere inside. Anything we do will be recorded and distributed before you can do anything about it.”

“Asyr.”

“Isn’t working for me at the moment, and we wouldn’t have the time to get the new phone. Even if they were ready, we would have to kill everyone there to ensure there is no one to report our descriptions. The more police officer die, the harder the others in the city will retaliate.”

“Fine.” I brood as we drive past the police station’s parking lot.

Aleman is already at the door, not looking behind. I lower the window. I can make the shot. I spot the three cameras, one of which is pointed at the road; At me.

“Okay, fine,” I say in a calmer tone, closing the window. “I need to get in their system so I can arrange to have Alema transferred where we want him, and then just end this once and for all.”

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