

Chapter 27

Katherine watched the explosion from two blocks away and smiled. Finally, it was all coming together. She was going to get him this time.

Knowing where he was going had given her the advantage. The main problem had been setting up a surveillance grid around the drug dealer's base that neither Tristan nor Alex could detect. That meant no electronic surveillance.

Convincing Flint to use his people for the oldest surveillance system known had been simple; insisting everyone in it ditched the green and white, more difficult. Flint had given the order easily enough, but his people had been unwilling to comply. It was a matter of pride for them to wear the gang's colors. She'd been amused at the mix of pride and anger in their attitude.

Liz got involved, and together they were able to convince enough people to dress as civilians to cover a twenty-block radius. She gave strict orders that no one was to get within that. Tristan would be paranoid about being followed, and the closer to the building, the harder he was going to work at spotting a tail. She had to remind the gang members they weren't looking to follow Tristan, just know when he was arriving.

She did put her people along the three likeliest routes Armiln thought Tristan would take based on the files. He'd warned her he couldn't be certain, but she'd bet everything on him being right.

He'd been wrong.

It was one of Flint's people who spotted him, and she'd immediately worried this would blow up right then. She'd explained this could only work if they attacked together, the numbers of his gang and the expertise of her people.

Fortunately, Tristan had been alone, and the two leaders had no interest in him. Their people might have wanted some revenge for the pain he inflicted on friends and family, but they wouldn't disobey the orders.

Tristan had spent the afternoon walking around the building, studying it. It was then that Brad contacted her to let her know about Martin's death from attempting to access Tristan's ship. Neither his death nor the destruction of the ship bothered her. Martin was only good as a distraction, and she didn't need him alive for that. The ship meant Tristan would be slowed if he somehow managed to escape her.

Vernon, her sniper, had kept track of what Tristan did from his perch, half a mile away and up. From his reports and the ones from Flint's spotters, spread high with their own method to enhance their vision, Tristan was casing the building.

When the alien left, she'd set Armiln on him, hoping that her alien's predictive ability would let him both stay out of sight and figure out where Tristan was holed up. But Tristan had given him the slip inside a transit tunnel crowded with pedestrians. For a tall, furry alien, Tristan had a knack for blending in.

She'd been disappointed, but not worried. It had been only a backup, anyway. She knew Tristan would be back.

And he was, this time with Alex, and Flint and Liz impressed her with their self-control. Flint shook in anticipation, but he'd stayed with her, coordinating their people's movement along with hers, everyone staying five blocks behind Tristan and Alex.

A few times some of the gang's snipers reported they had a clear shot at Alex, but they were told to stand down. If Alex went down, Tristan would bolt, and the deal with Katherine was that she also got what she wanted out of this. That, and they wanted to make Alex suffer themselves.

She brought all her people as the two of them went inside, but left many of Flint's own outside, in a loose grid, in case Tristan ran.

As soon as Tristan had gone inside, Jurrant had set the explosives. Three sets, for the three ways they were going to assault the building. They went off in near unison. Nothing as powerful as what had taken off half her face; she just wanted in, not to bring the building down.

She gave the signal, Flint and Liz relayed it to their people, and everyone ran in. Her people stood out amongst the gang members, in their armor.

Liz had wanted her own people to be armed and armored like Katherine's, but they'd found out how expensive it was. Even as a top gang on the planet, their finances were limited. They'd tried to get Katherine to shell out the money, and she'd given them the respect they were due by not laughing in their face. She reminded them she didn't work for them, and she'd already replaced Liz's hand. If they needed more, it was their responsibility.

So the gang members didn't look so much as an attacking force than a large mob of angry people.

Weapons drawn, she followed the gang into a room that seemed utterly dark to her with the bright light at her back. She sent a message to her contact, and the lights came back on. Brighter than she'd expected, as well as the fighters, pausing to give their eyes time to adjust.

Almost everyone paused.

Tristan and Alex never even slowed as they fired and moved to take cover behind a large fabricator. Just as they stepped behind it, Alex looked at her, and surprise registered.

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