

*What will you choose?*

Chance Langley, a rookie cop in the capitol of the Republic; Alirodon, is less than enthusiastic with his position in the Traffic Division. He wishes for something with a bit more meaning; but goes about what seems like a normal day, only to discover that his life is about to take a turn he was least expecting.

*Standing in the middle of a battlefield*

An encounter with a well known criminal sends his life into a spin forcing him to contemplate whether to accept an offer or turn it down. Lies are being spilled, secrets are hidden and he may be able to put an end to the chaos brewing in the distance, only if he says yes.

*To join the fight, and risk all*

An old flame is rekindled as more choices begin to spread like wildfire. Friendship, love, family, which is he willing to sacrifice? Which will stand by his side no matter what road he chooses?

*Or stay in a peaceful ignorant bliss?*

Little does he know that one choice will impact generations to come and that everything as he knows it will come crashing down. Be prepared, the war is about to begin...

*Which will you choose?*

## CHAPTER 1

Friday, May 6th

Target sighted at twelve o'clock. Accompanied by male, Caucasian 5'8 or so. Thin build. No visible tattoos or other indiscriminate markings. Doesn't appear dangerous. No threats sighted.

"Here you go, Chance. Extra cream just as you like it. Are you having your usual?" James O'Reilly set the steaming hot cup of coffee down in front of Chance Langley who smiled in gratitude. It was an unusually chilly morning; the hot beverage was just what the doctor ordered.

"Yeah, extra fries if you can muster them up."

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“Not a problem, son.” The café owner turned on his heel heading back into the kitchen.

Chance brushed a lock of wheat blonde hair from his blue gaze as he added some sugar to his coffee before taking his first blissful sip. “Target has been apprehended without a struggle. Damn, I’m bored.”

He had joined the local police force under the impression that he’d be busting bad guys, burning rubber in car chases, and interrogating criminals. Instead the most dangerous thing that could happen was bleeding to death from writing up parking citations. Not exactly the grit or glamour that he had been anticipating. He was nothing more than a rookie that was playing meter maid. Where was the glory? Where was the excitement? Where was everything he had seen as a kid on TV adding fuel to the desire in what he wanted to be in life? When had everything become such a huge disappointment? And because of that Chance always felt deep down that somewhere between school and those exams he had failed.

“Hey, you okay, kid? You seem to have a lot on your mind.” James placed the plate of hot food down in front of the young cop.

Chance shifted uneasily in his seat as he gave the older man a partial smile that resembled a wince. “Yeah, I’ve just been thinking a lot lately.” He picked up a French fry then turned back to the café owner. “Excuse me, Mr. O’Reilly. I don’t mean to intrude, but I was wondering if

you always knew you wanted to own a restaurant. Was this exactly how you envisioned it or did you expect more? I mean if you don't want to answer, that's fine too it's just..."

James smiled leaning over the bar in front of Chance as though they were good friends.

"Things aren't turning out as you expected when you signed onto the force are they?"

"No," Chance lowered his gaze to his food shaking his head. "I guess I must be that transparent, huh."

"Nah, I just recognize that look. A good friend of mine had that exact same look several years back. He too had signed onto something that didn't meet his expectations."

"So, what did he do?"

"Found something better. It took a leap of faith of course, but he realized that it was the best choice he could have made. Never turn down a new opportunity when it presents itself."

"Thanks. I'll take that advice. Hopefully I'll be as lucky as your friend was."

James grinned then refilled Chance's coffee. "Glad to hear it. Just remember even if that something better doesn't show up right away, don't lose hope. It'll come. You just have to be patient."

Chance nodded then returned to his food as James went off to tend to another customer's refill.

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Chance hugged his wool lined coat closer to his body as he exited the warm café and set foot into the chilly outdoors. His head was swimming with the café owner's words. He wished opportunity would knock on his door like it did Mr. O'Reilly's friend.

"Like that would happen," he muttered, digging his keys from his pocket as he headed towards his official police car. And that's when everything came crashing down, literally.

Chance saw the vehicle, one of the newer sleek, BMWs that had been advertised countless times on the television. It sped towards the vacant parking slot next to his own, but didn't slow down.

Chance cursed diving for cover on the other side of his car as the BMW nearly clipped him then slammed into the parking meter which unceremoniously collapsed onto Chance's vehicle.

"Oh shit!" A panicked voice cried out as a young man with a mess of tangled brown hair set the car in park. Rather than attempt to open the door he instead shoved his lanky body out through the window then slid down the car door to collapse in a heap on the pavement.

“Halt! Police!” Chance moved to draw his pistol on the driver who scrambled to his feet like a rabbit caught in the carrot patch by a shovel wielding gardener.

“I didn’t do it!” The young man raced off down the street as fast as his long legs could take him.

Chance swore again, unlocked his door, and radioed in. Then he took off after the man on foot knowing that he’d be in a worse jam trying to take the car instead.

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For once, Chance thanked his lucky stars that he did track and field back when he was in high school. He still ran whenever he needed to clear his head or had excess energy that he had to dispose of.

*I’m not even on duty for crying out loud!* He gritted his teeth against the chilly temperature and picked up speed. He could see the perpetrator further down the road but to Chance’s amusement, was having difficulty with his getaway thanks to his untied shoelaces that every once in the while tripped him up. It seemed to be Chance’s lucky day after all. The man was a major idiot.

Chance wove through a crowd of people then leapt over a park bench as he sighted the other guy scampering through a park only to get himself tangled up in a trio of dog leashes. As he fought his way through them, shouting curses, and kicked a lady's poodle, he was rewarded by the owner who began beating him with her purse. Chance used the advantage to loop around a pair of large oaks, cutting the man off as he escaped from the enraged lady.

Chance was just about to tackle him, when the man tripped on his shoelace again then fell over a trash can. He whipped out his gun, pointing it at the fool. "Police! Freeze! Hands up where I can see them."

"Please don't shoot! I didn't do anything!"

"Hands where I can see them."

"I didn't do it! It wasn't even my car!" The clumsy man trembled as he lifted his hands.

Chance lifted an eyebrow as he yanked out his handcuffs then secured them around the perpetrator's wrists. "I don't think you're helping yourself out. You have the right to remain silent."

"It was my boss's car I mean. He wanted me to get it washed then grab some food, but the brakes gave out."

Chance checked the guy's pockets and pulled out several bags of questionably illegal substances as well as a couple wallets. One of which was pink. "Let me guess, Mr. Smith or perhaps Miss Edwards, but somehow I doubt that; this isn't yours either."

"Right! The jacket is my cousin's who was arrested last week. I found it at his place this morning. Oh! But the boss wanted me to make a delivery, not the weed or powder. No, that was supposed to go to--"

"Are you trying to tell me you wish to waive your rights?" Chance raised his eyebrows as the idiot continued rambling on. He sighed deeply, wincing at the man's bad body odor and breath. "I guess that's a yes."

"-And he lost the keys. Luckily I know how to hot wire a car..."

"Officer Langley?"

Chance looked up as he stood at attention, his grip still firm on Mr. Smith. "Lt. Grant. Sir." He then reported the events that had led up to that moment to his superior.

"Parker Smith, huh. Very good job, Langley. We've been looking for this man for some time." He signaled for two other uniforms who had just arrived on scene. "Please escort Mr. Smith to a squad car. We're going to have a long talk."

Parker paled. “Eh heh, I paid all those parking tickets.... Might have forgotten to put stamps on the envelopes which would explain why I got them back but the car wasn’t mine anyway!” He continued babbling as he was lead away, unknowingly digging himself an even bigger hole.

Lt. Daniel Grant shook his head. “If we didn’t move him out any sooner, we’d probably have to resort to duct tape.” He turned back to address Chance. “Good job.”

“Thank you, sir.” He waited for any additional comments or mentioning of a promotion but received nothing. It seemed no matter what he did, he was only seen as good enough to be a traffic cop.

Chance stood in the park long after his superior had left. It felt good to be in the action, however it seemed unlikely that he would be allowed to embark on that side of duty for some time.

“Don’t take it too hard, kid.”

Chance’s head snapped up as a man with neat dark brown hair wearing a long wool coat the color of deep mahogany walked slowly towards him. He didn’t seem to be threatening but Chance wasn’t going to drop his guard that quickly. He remained silent and only stared as the man came to a stop a foot away from him.

“We’ve been trying to track down Smith for some time. That was some impressive work.” He laughed brushing gloved hands over his hair. “Forgive me. My name is Kenneth Logan. Your shift won’t be for another two hours, correct?”

Chance’s eyebrows winged up as he took a step backwards. “How do you know? Just who exactly are you?”

“A friend of James O’Reilly’s. Speaking of James, let’s have some coffee and talk. He’s told me quite a bit about you.”

“What do you mean?”

“I understand you’re cautious, son. But I mean no harm. In fact, just the opposite. You’re not satisfied in your line of work. You want more. You have something to prove. I understand that and perhaps I might be able to help you.”

Chance pursed his lips as a million thoughts ran through his mind at once. *Never turn down a new opportunity when it presents itself.* He took a deep breath then nodded. “Alright. I’ll give it a shot but only if you’re buying since you’re offering.”

Kenneth laughed again, his emerald eyes twinkling as he nodded in agreement. “Deal.”

## CHAPTER 2

Kenneth Logan stirred his spoon in his coffee for the fifteenth time since Chance had departed. It had long since gone cold, but he didn't notice; his mind was too far gone.

“Are you trying to make a coffee milkshake? If so I think you'll need more milk, some ice cream, and a blender.”

He glanced up to find a dark haired man with brown eyes grinning down at him. Kenneth immediately relaxed as he recognized the man as a friend and comrade. “Seth. What brings you here?”

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“Coffee mostly.” Seth Jordan slid into the booth across the table from Kenneth. “So, you met the kid? I saw his results. Quite remarkable.”

“I don’t know about this. He’s never been in action like this before.”

“Which means that no one will recognize him.” Seth tapped his hands against the table darting his eyes around to make sure that no one was within earshot. Satisfied, he leaned in close. “Listen, I don’t really like this either, but after what happened to Lane... thank God it was only a broken arm, bruised ribs, and a concussion. Richard should have used more consideration in the plan. Instead he put Lane’s ass on the line nearly getting him killed in the process.”

“Do you think I don’t know that?” Kenneth rubbed his face wearily. “How do we even know that we’ll need the kid? We don’t know what Richard and Arthur are planning.”

“Daniel found a connection. The only way to prevent a *coup d’etat* is to have an inside man. I know you and Richard were friends but since he brought in Arthur... I don’t like it. Richard has become a loose cannon. I don’t care to attend anyone’s funeral anytime soon either. Especially my own.”

Kenneth shoved the cold coffee away, staring idly at the cup. After a moment of consideration he lifted his gaze to his friend’s. “Vigil?”

“Vigil.”

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Chance pulled into a vacant parking space in front of his apartment complex then shut off the engine. His mind was still reeling over the conversation he had earlier with Kenneth Logan. He offered him what could be called a chance of a lifetime. A way out of the Traffic Department. It wasn't Homicide, it was something more. All he had to do was say yes.

Closing his eyes he leaned his head against the steering wheel. No one could know what he was doing. It would be a complicated mission, possibly running for several years if not more, but Kenneth said that his team studied his profile and test results from the academy. He advised that they all believed he had great potential.

The man seemed trustworthy; the fact that he was indeed friends with James O'Reilly, owner of O'Reilly's Café spoke volumes. Even though Chance did not know Mr. O'Reilly on a personal basis, he liked the man's cheerful almost fatherly nature. He only wished he knew who exactly Kenneth Logan was and what he wanted him for. All Chance had to do was talk to James and they would set up another meet regarding Chance's answer. Just what exactly was his answer? Kenneth had admitted that Chance would be putting his neck out, but he was the only one so far that they found who they felt could pull off such a mission.

Chance had to admit that he was intrigued. He would no longer have to write parking tickets. Even the acknowledgement of danger seemed enticing. He was fearless, a quality that had earned him bonus points.

“I can’t stay in the car all night. Better call it for the moment. Let it stew in my brain,” Chance lifted his head from the steering wheel, got out of his car, then headed to his apartment.

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“Dude, does anyone have a bucket? The room won’t stop spinning.” Parker swayed in his chair as he clutched his head. His thick brown hair was sticking up in sweat saturated spikes as he sat in the interrogation room. He sniffed his armpit then wrinkled his nose in disgust. “I like *so* need a shower! I smell like a rotting pig.”

“We’ll make note of that, Mr. Smith.” Lt. Daniel Grant took a seat across him at the metal table, inspecting his suspect carefully. Fine grooming, Parker did not possess. There were probably garbage dumpsters that smelled better than the twenty-something year old man. It took several hours for his high to crash which was more than likely caused by illegal substances in the form of cocaine. The effects seemed to linger a bit, but at least he wasn’t bouncing around like a two year on a sugar high.

Daniel folded his hands on the table eying Parker sharply. “Now, Mr. Smith, tell me about your employer. We know you have one.”

“Nah, I work for me and me alone.” He tried to throw down a cuffed hand but clocked himself in the nose instead. He howled out in pain nearly flipping over in his chair as he jerked backwards.

“Somehow, I doubt that. Quite frankly, I don’t think you have enough brainpower to work a calculator.”

Parker snorted as he rolled his blue eyes. “Yes, I do. You press buttons. Easy as... well something easy.”

“Uh huh. You’re a real Einstein. Now talk.” Daniel leaned back fighting against clutching his own head as it began to pound. He hated trying to interrogate assholes and Parker was a well known one. Whoever he was working for made certain that Parker knew better than to spill his guts. So far, they had caught him three times, each time he somehow got out. Whoever was commissioning the loser knew how to keep him tight-lipped.

“About what?” He blinked in confusion causing his interrogator to grind his teeth.

“Who are you working for? Who are you running illegals and other jobs for? We know you’re a sharp-shooter despite your idiocy.”

“Um, what’s the question again? Oh man, I think I really am gonna be sick!” Parker leaned over to the side of his chair then promptly vomited. Once he was done he wiped off his mouth with the back of his hand grimacing. “Whoa, I don’t remember eating that!”

Daniel growled as he rose from the chair, barked to one of the officers standing by to get someone to clean up the mess, then stomped out of the room. “I need some damn aspirin. Stupid idiot is giving me a headache.”

Heath Ronan gave him a sympathetic smile. “It’d be easier to yank out his teeth than make him talk.” He folded his arms as he leaned against a wall. “I saw Lane this morning.”

Grant immediately sobered. “How was he?”

“Still a mess. Damn Richard. What the hell was he thinking if at all? Lane made some cracks about some of the nurses so it seems that his spirits are at least up. Hates the food of course. Can’t wait for a decent meal. I promised him that we’d have James’s Darcy cook him up something. He became more cheerful about that prospect.”

“No more falling off buildings for him.” Grant narrowed his eyes as he shoved his hands into his pockets. “I still can’t believe Richard assigned him to that mission. Was he trying to get Lane killed? He should have gone with Seth. Seth is far more limber than Lane.”

“The mission was risky in itself. Tracking down arms dealers... it could have been done better and Arthur... It concerns me that he knew what was going down, where, and when almost as if he were involved.”

“Yeah.” Daniel walked with Heath to the break room for coffee. “What do you think about the kid?”

“Impressed he caught Smith. I know Kenneth is a bit leery about signing the kid up, but I liked Langley the moment I saw him. I think he’d be a nice addition and could pull it off. We’ll have to keep him hush-hush in some respects but those test results are remarkable. Why the hell they threw him to Traffic is beyond me. The kid would ace going under.”

“My thoughts exactly. Still, the ball is in his court. He can shoot or pass. In the meantime, we get to deal with Smith.” Daniel rubbed at his temples then filled a cup with cool water. “Let’s hope he shoots because I don’t think I can take much more of this shit.”

### CHAPTER 3

Saturday, May 7th

Chance pulled on his sunglasses then locked the door behind him. Normally he looked forward to a day off but now... He had to think. There was finally a way out of Traffic duty, however what that entailed he couldn't be informed of until he agreed. Classified Kenneth had said. The job was classified. Well, now was as good as any time to walk and consider.

One thing that bothered him was that he didn't know anything about Mr. Logan. It appeared that he was friends with James O'Reilly, but even he could have been referred to as a stranger.

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However, there was something about the man that always put him at ease. Chance usually trusted his own judgment. The more he thought it over, the more he realized that he wasn't cautious of either man. The reason why baffled him. It wasn't like they reminded him of his father.

He couldn't actually remember his father. It had been he and his mother since his earliest memories. She never spoke of him; he didn't feel it necessary to inquire, yet there were days when he did ponder who helped in making him part of the world. Chance shook his head. It wasn't important. Not really. Nothing would change even if he did discover his father's identity. He would still be the same man he already was.

Chance blinked at the familiar parking lot then shook his head. Somehow he had wandered all the way to O'Reilly's Café without even planning on it. He shrugged, deciding he was hungry, headed towards the shiny glass door, narrowly avoiding a car door as it swung open.

"Hey!" He spun around, prepared to lecture the driver then froze as he took in the familiar ice blue Volkswagon Bug.

"I'm so sorry! I should have paid attention before opening the door. I didn't hit you did I? I'm sorry," the red haired young woman flustered as she waved her hands around in embarrassment. She lifted her blue-violet gaze to the pedestrian then squeaked as her eyes sparked, widening with recognition. "Chance? Is that really you?"

He shuffled his feet as he dipped his hands in his pockets then cleared his throat. “Um, yeah. Hey Tanya. Long time no see.”

“Is that all you’re going to say to me?” She blew out a breath and sighed as pain flashed across her face. “Chance, it’s been well over three years almost four. You don’t write, you don’t call-”

“I’ve been busy. We’ve both been busy. Sorry, its just...” He ran his hands over his face trying helplessly to collect his thoughts before he said something really stupid. “So, how has college been working out for you? Still going for that Nursing Degree?”

“Chance.” Tanya fluffed out her shoulder length locks then blew her bangs from her eyes. “It’s been good. I’ve... missed you. I decided to visit my family and I was hoping to catch you...” She laughed lightly shaking her head. “Not like this of course.”

“Who told you I came here? I lost touch-”

“With everyone. I know. I wasn’t counting on you being here actually. I wanted to visit Uncle James and see how he and Aunt Darcy were doing.”

“Wait! Are you saying you’re related to the O’Reilly’s? You never told me that!”

Tanya shrugged as she shouldered her purse. “It never came up. Look if you don’t want to talk to me then fine. I get the picture. You want to forget about the past; that’s fine. I... I’m going to go see my uncle. It was nice talking with you, Chance.”

She spun around to rush into the restaurant, but was halted when Chance snagged her by the arm. Her mouth dropped open as she turned to look at him but he said nothing, simply stared at her for a moment.

“I’m... sorry. It’s been rough lately and...”

She touched his shoulder gently nodding in understanding. “How’s she doing?”

Chance lowered his head as he tried keep himself as stable as possible. It wouldn’t do him any good to break down in front of his ex-girlfriend as he spoke about his ailing mother.

“Doctors aren’t quite sure what’s wrong with her. They still need to do more tests next week. The pain is minimal, but still there.”

“I’m sorry. I hope she gets better. I really miss her too.” Tanya sniffled softly as she rubbed at her eyes. “The doctor’s bills aren’t too high are they? I know visits can be costly-”

Chance smiled kindly. “We’re holding out. No cardboard box houses for either of us.”

“I’m glad. Listen if you need anything... Foolish. You’d never ask for my help. You’re too damn stubborn.”

“Nice to see you remember me so well, Tany.”

She smiled back. “What exactly did happen to *us*? Did we break up or did we call it a time out or what?”

He shifted on his feet uncomfortably as he considered the question. “I can’t really remember. I know we knew we were going in separate directions; whether it was a permanent break... no clue.”

She chewed on her lip as she twisted a strand of hair around a finger. “So, what about now or in the future? Are we done for or...”

Chance narrowed his eyes. “We aren’t together now. If there’s someone at that university you want to see or wherever-”

“No!” A blush tinted her cheeks as she made a sound like resembled a wounded puppy. “I mean... damn it. There’s no one else. Never has been. I know long distance relationships can be hard; I’m not saying that it will or won’t work. But if there’s still no one else either of us are interested in and if the spark still survives do you want to give it another shot? I still have feelings for you so if they have lasted this long then maybe once I’m done with school...”

His jaw dropped as he realized that she wasn’t trying to cut all ties but sew them together to save for the future. “Wait, you haven’t been seeing anyone at school for all this time? Truthfully?”

Tanya winced. “My roommate made me go on a blind date once. Good looking guy, nice, charming, but... he was no you.”

Chance smirked. “So, you’re saying I’m not good looking, nice, and charming? Gee, I love you too, Tany.”

“Not like that, you jerk!” She shook her head as she laughed. “You know what I mean. I’m not saying that if you meet someone you like that you are obligated to forget about her. Just do what makes you happy. If we are meant to be, then we are meant to be. We’ll find a way back to each other if that’s what’s supposed to happen.... Just, don’t forget about me.”

Chance closed his eyes trying to clear his head. First, he gets a mysterious job opportunity and now his ex-girlfriend who he actually did not break up with practically confesses that she is still in love with him. Could things get any more complicated?

He had forgotten how much he missed her. Her smile, her laugh, her scent, the way she always toyed with her hair when nervous. They had known each other since their freshman year of high school, yet didn’t hook up until their junior year. Those were the best years of his life. It had nearly killed him the day she left. Her dream was to become a nurse so she could help people. He however didn’t have enough money to go away to college so he stayed in their hometown and went to the academy to become a cop. Of course, that plan didn’t go exactly as he had hoped.

He had a way out, and was sure that it paid better than he was making now. If he accepted, he could find the best care for his mom to help her recover.

“Chance?”

“Huh?” His head snapped up as he looked into her eyes. She smiled gently at him.

“Um, you didn’t give an answer. If you don’t want to, it’s okay. It was just a thought...”

He stared at her a moment before he recalled her confession then flushed as he held his hands up, suddenly feeling a bit jittery. “No! I mean, um....that’s fine. Uh, yes, I agree... oh hell.” Without even thinking, he slipped back four years, grabbed Tanya by the arms, pulled her towards him as his mouth captured hers.

She squeaked in shock her body tense then relaxed as she returned the kissed.

After his head began to swim he finally pulled away then swore as his senses hit him like a freight train.

“Um, sorry. I don’t know where my head went. One minute I was thinking about high school and the next minute found myself kissing you. Sorry.”

“I guess old habits die hard,” Tanya brushed her hair from her face as she straightened her shoulders. “So, was anything still there or did it just go poof during those four years?”

Chance felt himself grin like an idiot. “Oh, it was still there alright. Damn was it there.”

“So, is that still a yes on my proposal?”

“Yeah. There’s no telling what the future may hold. But who knows. Maybe we’ll draw just the right cards.”

Tanya smiled then kissed his cheek. “Well, I’m glad we could finally talk. I’ll leave you to whatever you’re struggling over in that brain of yours but-” she began as she opened her purse then withdrew a pad of paper and pen. “I’ll give you my uncle’s home phone as well, as my parents’ in case you lost it as well as my number. I have to leave Monday, but if you want to get together before then for ice cream, or a movie or whatever, let me know. I’d love to hang out with you before I head back.”

He accepted the small sheet of paper, stuffed it in his pocket. “I can’t make any promises. It depends on if anything comes up. How would this evening for a movie and a cone sound?”

“I’m available if you are,” She grinned then kissed him softly. “I still love you, Chance. I hope to still be in love with you when I’m done with school for good.”

“Yeah, me too, Tany.” He kissed her back as he hugged her tight unaware of how much he had missed her until right then and there. “I-I still love you too.”

Tanya sniffled as he released her then frowned at her watch. “Oops. I should have been in the café a half hour ago! Did we really talk that long?”

Chance twisted a strand of her hair in his fingers. “Sorry, I kept you.”

“It’s okay. They’ll just have to accept it. I’m sure they’ll understand.”

He paled as he glanced at the door and found two sets of eyes staring at them with a pair of grins. Hands appeared waving a friendly hello. “Um, I have a feeling you’re right since I think they’ve been watching us this whole time.”

“What!” Tanya’s face reddened to almost the same shade as her hair. She gripped Chance’s arm then let him go just as quickly. “Oh! Great. Well, I better go.”

James stepped out of the door with a smirk on his face before she could push it open herself. “My lovely, Tanya. Why don’t you bring Chance in with you? It’s a bit too nippy out here to have a good conversation. I’ll even make you your favorite.” He winked at her holding the door open.

Tanya made a noise that sounded like a tiny whimper then sighed. “Well, we were caught. Might as well join the party.”

Chance cringed then shrugged. It was his day off. A little conversation wouldn’t hurt plus who knows. Maybe he could find out more about Kenneth Logan and the mysterious

opportunity. With a smile he walked towards the doors of the café following James and Tanya inside.

## CHAPTER 4

Chance scratched the back of his head uneasily as he and Tanya were led to a booth in the back. Suddenly he felt like a teenager who was about to be interrogated regarding his intentions for the daughter of two rather protective relatives.

A golden blonde head lifted from a stack of books splayed out on a small table blinking curiously at the rookie who shrugged in turn. The young man shook his head mouthing something that Chance didn't quite catch. He'd have to explain things to his friend later. For

now, he had to try to maintain his cool or risk appearing guilty for no reason other than the fact that he had a relationship with their niece.

*This is a good thing. This will give me the chance to get some answers as long as they don't roast me on a pike.* Chance jumped slightly at the sensation of his hand being squeezed. Tanya looked at him with a teasing smile on her pretty face. God, he missed seeing her face. He could be cliché and say it was like the face of an angel. Well sculpted, yet soft. It was hard for him to even contemplate an explanation, but at the same time he didn't feel it was necessary. Beauty was just beauty, even if some may not agree.

"Is something on my face?" She touched her nose then wiped at her cheek.

"Huh? No. Why?"

"Before you looked zoned out and now you're staring at me."

Chance frowned then laughed at her paranoia. "Sorry. I was lost in a thought I guess. Don't worry, you look fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah." He stepped aside so she could slide into the booth first then sat down next to her.

James grinned at him as Darcy came out from behind the kitchen with a tray of what appeared to be two milkshakes and two coffees. He rested an arm affectionately over her

shoulder as he gestured towards Chance and Tanya. “Would you look at that, dear? Young love. Oh, how I remember those days. Especially the loud growls from your father when we turned up at your house past curfew.”

His wife patted his arm, then brushed back a strand of curling red hair. “No matter how often he tried to chase you off, you kept coming back. Then one day, he finally decided that you were worth keeping.”

“Yep.” He took the tray from her placed it on the table then slid in next to her. He turned to the younger couple smiling as he put a tall chilled glass in front of each person . “Who would have thought that you two would appear on the same day after so many years apart?”

Tanya laughed as she accepted a spoon. “You know me too well, Uncle James. You even remembered my favorite.”

“You inspired me to make it.”

“Not many places have cherry ice cream let alone cherry cookies and cream.” She sighed happily as she had a spoonful. Only Tanya could eat ice cream year round. Even outside in the snow. “Oh how I miss this. Most people think I’m mad if I ask them to make it. It’s not like I’m asking them to mix the cherries with peanut butter and mint.”

Chance choked on his shake. He forgot about the odd and disgusting food combinations she’d come up with when feeling silly or bored.

James roared with laughter. “That’s my girl! You always had such a creative way with words.”

“She must get that from your side of the family.” Darcy laughed as her green eyes crinkled with amusement then patted her niece on the hand. “So how have you been? Are you doing well in school?”

“It’s going alright.” Tanya sat up as she told them about her current classes, teachers as well as campus life. “There’s really not too much going on. Its hard work, but I’m handling it well enough.”

“Good to know.”

“So, how are things going with you?”

“Same old dear. Nothing that you don’t already know.”

Thoughts continued to circle around in Chance’s head as the conversation continued to flow and weave. Though he participated, he couldn’t help but return to the questions still burning in his head concerning Kenneth Logan and the mystery job.

“Chance?”

His head snapped up and he found Tanya looking at him earnestly. “Huh? What? Sorry. I have-”

“A lot on your mind. Yeah, I know. Um, I’d love to stick around but I really have to see my parents.”

“Okay.”

“Um, you need to let me out.”

He blinked at her blankly. “Huh?”

“We’re sitting in a booth, remember?” She laughed as he scrambled up to allow her out. She smiled at him then kissed him on the cheek. “It’s okay. I hope you get everything figured out. Don’t forget about me, kay?”

Chance grinned at her. “How could I ever forget you?”

She laughed again then hugged and kissed her uncle and aunt goodbye then left.

James walked up behind Chance then placed a hand on his shoulder. “I’m pretty sure I know what’s swimming around in that head of yours, kid. Care to have a chat in the back?”

He studied the friendly smile on the café owner’s face and nodded. “Sure.”

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Chance sat on a stool in front of James as he shifted a cup of coffee in his hands. He glanced around the kitchen for a moment before returning his attention to James. “So, um what do you what to discuss?”

James burst out into laughter. “You really amuse me kid. You act a bit naïve but at the same time, you’re really not. Kenneth’s right, you’re perfect.”

“Perfect for what? No one has told me anything other than that the assignment is classified. How does anyone expect to make a decision on something that I don’t even know what it is?” He slammed his cup on the table sloshing coffee all over as he leaned towards James in frustration. “How do I know that you guys aren’t doing something illegal or whatever?”

The café owner however nodded calmly as he got up to fetch a rag to clean up the mess. Chance cringed at the spilled coffee, sighed as he stood up to take the rag from James.

“It’s okay, kid. I’ve got it. Sit back down.”

“But-”

“Sit.” James wiped up the mess then poured Chance a fresh cup. “Your, concern is understandable, however we have to keep this quiet. I can tell you this, it’s not going to be easy and it may put you in jeopardy, however if you play the part right, you should be okay.”

Chance's blue eyes widen as his jaw dropped. "Jeopardy? What are you going to have me do?"

"I told you, I can't tell you. But you can trust me. You can also trust Kenneth. We as well as the others will do our best to make sure you won't be in any immediate danger and will pull you if we feel it's going to be too risky.

The shit is going to hit the fan in a few months if things go the way we are expecting them to. There is nothing we can do to prevent it, but you might be able to help us try to put out the fire before it destroys everything." James narrowed his eyes as his tone became serious. "Just remember this, kid. If you accept, you can't tell a soul what you're doing. Not even Tanya or your mother."

## CHAPTER 5

Chance stared up at the ceiling scowling. His life was growing more complicated by the minute. He felt as though he were in a funhouse where the small room shakes and he was struggling to keep his footing. If things kept going the way they were, he'd find himself on his butt in no time.

“Hey, are you okay?”

“Huh?” He lowered his bright blue gaze to meet a stormy blue one. Chance nodded chuckling uneasily. “Uh, sorry, Blake. It's been a rough week.”

Blake Grant nodded and shoved his books to a corner of the table. “That’s okay. Let’s talk about something less brain taxing. So, how are things going with Tanya?”

“Oh boy, here we go...”

“What? You two seemed pretty close despite being hounded by her aunt and uncle who, by the way really approve of you.”

Chance fidgeted in his seat. “Oh come on. It’s not like we’re betrothed or something. I mean it was great seeing her, but she’s not going to be in town for long.”

“Uh huh. Just means you’ll have to make your move that much faster.”

“What move? I’m not making any moves.” Chance ran a hand through his hair as he leaned back, drawing a deep sigh. He was just thankful that he hadn’t been drinking anything. “Is everyone expecting us to get married this weekend or something? It’s not happening. At least not yet. Not until she’s done with school and as long as she is still interested in me.”

Blake arched an eyebrow. “Wait... you two actually made marriage plans? Holy... Chance, I was just pulling your chain. I didn’t expect that you would even... damn.”

“It-it just happened!” The cop stuttered as he realized that he said more than he meant to reveal. He should have known Blake would find a way to coax it out of him. He was a Grant

after all. They were notorious for digging up dirt one way or another which was why Blake's father made an excellent detective."

"Okay, okay. Your face is as red as a tomato by the way. Nice color for you."

"Shut up," Chance grumbled as he picked up his glass of Coke and took a gulp. He had to admit, it was nice hanging out with Blake again. He missed being around his two best friends. Of course, they were both missed on different levels. He most certainly couldn't discuss the same things with Tanya as he could Blake and vice versa.

The sound of a bell jingling caught Blake's attention as a small group of young teenagers bounced into the café with a young man following close behind.

"Ian, you promised!" The boy with shoulder length dark brown hair pouted. A girl with auburn curls gave him a playful shove.

The dark haired young man that looked Chance's age grumbled as he took out his wallet. "We're here, aren't, Flynn? Let's just make this quick. Don't forget that we need to bring back a vanilla shake for Whitney. He should be released from the hospital today."

"Chance? Hey, you awake over there?"

"Huh?" Chance blinked then refocused his gaze on Blake. "Sorry."

“Man, you’ve been spacing out a lot lately. Are you sure you wouldn’t be better as an astronaut than as a cop?”

“Ha, ha.” He sat up nodding towards the group. “I haven’t seen them around here before.”

Blake stared at him in bewilderment. “You’re kidding, right?”

“No. What?”

He shook his head. “They’re Logans. All of them except the girl. She’s a Knight.”

Chance’s knee jerked. This was just getting too weird. “Any relation to Kenneth Logan?”

“The older guy and the one the girl is pestering are his sons. The other is his nephew,” Blake shrugged. “They’re a nice bunch. I’ve been to a few barbecues at their house. Don’t really see much of the Knights outside of Julia. That’s the girl’s name. Her father and Mr. Logan were pretty close before, but now... not so much.”

“Why? What happened?”

“Let’s just say Mr. Knight has been acting very strange lately.”

The door chimed again as a young woman with golden blonde hair entered. She wore a mischievous grin as she swept her long mane of hair over her shoulder.

“Julia! There you are.”

The teenaged girl spun around and jumped. “Kat! What are you doing here?”

“Fetching you before Dad has a cow, and several other barnyard animals. The dork squad will probably be here shortly so you better scoot.”

“But-” Julia pouted then nodded solemnly as she turned back to the Logans. “Thank you very much for allowing me to accompany you, but I’ve got to go.”

Flynn sighed as he scratched his head. “Okay, um, bye, Jules.”

Ian eyed the blonde haired teenaged girl suspiciously for a moment. “Is something going on?”

“It’s nothing to be concerned with. Come on, Julia. We have to go.” She reached out for her little sister’s wrist and gave the Logans an apologetic smile. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay. We’ll hang out again sometime, Right, Flynn?” Julia grinned as she tossed her ponytail behind her. “Maybe I can convince Gwen to join us next time.”

“Right,” he smiled back with a wave.

Chance glanced at Blake then noticed that his jaw was firmly set. “What’s wrong? Is something wrong?”

Blake stoically shook his head. He lowered his gaze to the table then pushed away from it, absently packing his books in his bag. He swung it over his shoulder as he rushed off. “I’ve got to go.”

“Wait!” Chance threw money down on the table for their bill and sprinted after his friend. His mind began to race as he burst through the door of the café then watched in horror as a car came barreling towards an unsuspecting Blake. Chance choked on a scream as the car struck the young college student.

## CHAPTER 6

No. Chance's stomach did flip-flops as the car screeched away but he could not do anything, except stare at where Blake had once stood.

“Oh, my God! Darcy, call emergency! Blake's been hit by a car,” James's voice shouted next to Chance, snapping the young cop from his stupor.

Without a word, he raced towards where a crowd began to gather. “Police! Back up. Give him some room.”

He knelt next to Blake and checked his pulse then sighed in relief at finding one. “Blake, you okay, man?”

A pained groan erupted from his friend as he tried to reach for his arm.

Chance grabbed the wrist of the uninjured arm sucking in a breath at the awkward position the right one was in. Blood was steadily saturating the torn dark green sweater. He lifted Blake’s head gently and set it on his knees, trying to ignore the raw scrapes on his friend’s face that resulted from hitting the pavement. “Whoa, take it easy and don’t move. Everything is going to be okay. Just stay with me. Help is coming. Okay, buddy?”

“My- my-”

“It’s better if you don’t talk. Just stay still.”

James jogged up to them and spread a jacket over the Blake then knelt next to him. “You’ll be okay. You’re a Grant. Grants are made of tough stuff. Just hang in there.”

Sirens blared in the distance. Chance released the breath that he hadn’t known he had been holding. Everything would be okay. It just had to be.

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“Chance, sit down.”

The traffic cop jerked. Turning his head he found James sitting on one of the chairs in the waiting room of the hospital. He held a cup of coffee out towards him.

“Sorry,” he mumbled but continued to pace. “Blake and I have known each since grade school. He’s practically like my brother.”

“He’ll be okay. The paramedics said aside from his arm, possibly his leg as well, the worst he may have are some fractured ribs.”

“I should have done something! Instead I just stood there with my mouth open as whoever hurt Blake got away.” Chance ground his teeth together as anger overruled his shock. “I’m a cop damnit!”

“And a damn good one, but you’re not going to do anyone any good if you just stand there beating yourself up over it.”

“Chance!” Tanya burst into the waiting room and threw her arms around him. “Aunt Darcy said that Blake was in an accident. Is he okay? How bad is he?”

“I-I don’t-” the blonde mumbled weakly feeling as though he could crumble to the floor any moment.

“We don’t know yet, however we think he has a good fighting chance,” James explained as he rose to his feet to help Chance into a chair. “I told you to sit, kid. When the adrenaline wears off, it can knock you for a loop.”

“Yeah, sorry,” he muttered as he collapsed in a plastic chair. Tanya sat between her uncle and Chance.

“Are you alright?” She asked softly, brushing his hair from his eyes. Taking one of his hands in hers she squeezed it.

“I’d feel better if I knew what Blake’s outcome was. I was so pathetic. I just stood there like an idiot. I-I couldn’t do anything to help him. It’s my job, but I failed...” He gritted his teeth as he felt his eyes begin to flood, yet refused to allow the unshed tears to fall.

“Kid, it’s not your fault. Stop beating yourself up,” James said firmly. “Unless you plotted an assassination attempt on Blake’s life there is no reason for you to feel guilty.”

“If you say so...”

“Chance,” Tanya pursed her lips as he lowered his head in what appeared to be shame. “None of this is your fault. Please look at me.”

He closed his eyes as he shook his head but said nothing.

“Where is he? What happened to my son?”

Chance sucked in his breath at the sound of his best friend's father's frantic voice tinged with what he suspected anger.

"Daniel, calm down." James stood up and walked towards the man before he could start a rampage.

The Lieutenant's dark gaze flickered as he narrowed it at the café owner. "That's my son in there and no one is telling me a damn thing!"

"The doctor said Blake's injuries aren't life-threatening. He should pull through with nothing more than some broken bones which can be mended."

Daniel drew a breath that seemed to calm his nerves. "Okay. I guess I'll have to accept that. Damn, I need some coffee."

"I'll go with you," James said then turned to Tanya and Chance. "We'll be back. You kids just hang tight."

"We'll be fine, Uncles James," Tanya gave him a reassuring smile dismissing him as he led Daniel down the hall.

Chance's ears however perked as he caught the barely audible grunt of his best friend's father muttering something about 'being a hit if he hadn't seen one.' Did someone intentionally try to hurt or kill Blake?

His skin froze with an undesired chill as he played the scene over in his head. Blake ran out of the café. A dark car came out of what seemed to be nowhere then struck him before speeding off. Blake seemed normal until the blonde haired girl had arrived to retrieve her sister. Did Blake know her? He seemed really intent on catching up to her before he nearly became road kill. Something strange was going on and Chance had a bad feeling that this was only the beginning.

*Was this what James was referring to as the shit hitting the fan? If so, what exactly is going on and how can I protect everyone?*

## CHAPTER 7

“Hello Tanya,” a familiar voice greeted as Chance snapped out of his shock. He lifted his head only to discover the one person that he had wanted to speak to ever since he had been given the decision of a lifetime was standing in front of them. Kenneth Logan’s face appeared worn and stressed as he smiled thinly at the two young adults.

“Mr. Logan,” Tanya stood up then shook his hand. “How are you? I guess you must have heard about Blake. He should be okay though. Just broken bones at the worst.”

He nodded. “That’s good to hear. I need to speak to your uncle and Mr. Grant. Do you know where they are?”

“They went to get some coffee. Mr. Grant was really upset, but well, who could blame him.”

“How are you holding up?” He addressed Chance as he patted him on the shoulder.

Chance blinked then stared at the man before finally answering. “Okay, I guess. I just...”

Kenneth nodded understandingly. “Let’s take a walk if you don’t mind, son. We have something that we need to discuss that I’m afraid can’t wait.”

Tanya looked inquisitively between the two but said nothing as the blonde rose from his seat.

He turned to her and smiled. “Will you be okay by yourself?”

“I think so. I can finally catch up on the past five months latest fashions,” she grinned lifting a pile of old magazines from the small end table. “Have fun.”

“You too,” he gave her one last look before disappearing down the hall with Kenneth.

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“Chance,” Kenneth began as they turned down the corridor. “I’m sure that there has been a lot happening since we last spoke so you may not have been able to think things through, but—”

“Dad!”

Chance spun around to find the boys that were at the café earlier. *That’s right. Blake said, they were Kenneth’s sons. I shouldn’t be so surprised.*

The elder one came to a stop in front of him and dragged the longer haired boy towards them.

“Flynn, tell them.”

Kenneth sighed, “Ian, can this wait? There’s been an accident-”

“I know! Sorry, Dad. I didn’t mean to cut you off, but we saw it happen. Flynn might have seen the license plate of the car involved in the hit and run.

“Flynn?” He turned to his son who seemed rather unsure of himself. “Are you telling the truth?”

The boy folded his arms over his chest as he looked around as though afraid that something would jump out and attack him. “Yeah, I wouldn’t joke about something like this, Dad! That was scary! Did he die?”

“Stop babbling, Flynn. Spit it out,” Ian scolded. “It’s important.”

The young teenager closed his eyes as he recited what he remembered. Kenneth patted his youngest son’s shoulder in approval. “I’m proud of you. Ian, call up Sidney’s father and tell him everything. He might be able to pull up-”

“I’ll look up the plate,” Chance interrupted, determination shining in his blue eyes as he set his face in resolve. “Sir.”

“Chance-”

He shook his head. “I want in. He was my best friend. They could have killed him. Once I get my answer concerning who the plate belongs to, I’ll give you my answer to your proposal.”

After a moment of silence, Kenneth finally gave in. “Okay, let’s see what you can do, and what you may remember.”

Chance’s eyes widened at the last part. “Excuse me?”

“You will have to discover the truth for yourself, Chance. Only then can you actually give me an answer. I hoped that you wouldn’t have to find out this way, but, perhaps it’ll be better.”

“I guess I’ll just have to take your word for it. Thanks, Mr. Logan.”

“I told you before. Call me Kenneth.”

He nodded. “All right. I’ll do my best.”

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Chance glanced around the cramped office at the station. He didn't understand why he felt on edge. Ever since the incident with Parker Smith, he had a feeling that something was going to happen and it would not be a good thing.

The Republic already had its' set of problems. Apparently they were only going to increase. It was like dropping a lit match in a trail of gunpowder leading up to the powder keg. It was bound to blow sooner or later.

"Let's see who you belong to." His fingers flew over the keyboard, anticipation rushed through his veins as he sought out the owner of the car that had hit his best friend. His blue eyes narrowed as a name flashed on the screen. "Wait. That can't be right..."

His adrenaline raced in a mad sprint as he typed in a few more queries then stopped dead. It appeared that the answer had just created even more questions.

## CHAPTER 8

Chance stared in disbelief at the screen. His stomach turned as his blood ran cold. It couldn't be a coincidence. The same plate linked to the death of his father by gunshot was the one that hit Blake. What could it mean? Was someone gunning for him now or was there something else going on? Just as he was about to enter a new command, Chance felt someone enter the room. He quickly switched the screen to a recent traffic violator then swiveled around in his chair to meet the eyes of the head of Traffic.

“Langley, what the hell are you doing in the office? Isn’t this your day off? LT. Dirk narrowed his dark gaze at the rookie.

“Grant gave me a project. We’re trying to ID the guy that held up Snaks N Stuf yesterday. He got a lead and wanted me to sniff it out.” Chance shrugged, inwardly sweating bullets even though it was a partial truth.

“Since when have you become Grant’s lapdog?”

“Sir, I am not his lapdog,” he replied with indignity dripping off his words. “He said I have potential for other assignments outside of traffic so I agreed to assist.”

Dirk snorted shaking his bald head. “You’re wasting your time. You’ll never make it out of traffic. And don’t even expect a promotion anytime soon. In fact, if you’re not careful, you may find yourself out on your ass.”

Chance drew a breath, simply training his gaze on the other man as though he were nothing more than a boring piece of drywall. What he would rather do was punch the guy out like a boxing champion. “Sir. If you have anything more to say then do so. If not, I have a criminal to hunt for.”

“Whatever, Langley. Go back to kissing Grant’s ass. I’ll warn you, if I see you screw around, I’ll personally make sure you’re out. And I’m not just talking out of a job if you know what I mean.”

Chance stared at the departing man, only allowing himself to release the breath he had been holding once the door swung shut.

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“What the hell is going on?” Chance narrowed his eyes at Kenneth Logan and Daniel Grant, shoving a printout in their faces. He paced the hospital room. He was grateful that they hadn’t departed shortly after his visit from Dirk. He had to get his contained fury under control before it could ignite. He managed to get rid of most of it, but a small portion had remained, flaring up once he had reached the hospital.

“Are you trying to tell me that my dad is wrapped up in this mess too? Is everything happening because of me?” He slammed his fist on the small table, sloshing coffee out of the Styrofoam cups. “Give me some answers, damn it. I’ve had enough with all this cryptic shit.”

Kenneth glanced over the paper as Daniel folded his arms over his chest. Wincing James mopped up the mess. “You have to admit. You saw this coming.”

“Chance,” Kenneth began, taking a seat at the table. “Your father wasn’t involved in insurance, he worked for us. As you know, the Republic has always been unstable and we have

a bad feeling that it's going to become worse. So far, our suspicions have been horribly confirmed.”

“The Republic, but-”

“Some of us are on the council, yes, however that doesn't mean that there aren't those who are plotting for more if not complete power. This place has always been viewed as a powder keg. That's why other countries usually won't have anything to do with us. The peace in our society is very fragile. There have been wars in the past and unless egos are contained, it'll happen again.”

“So, do you know of someone behind everything?”

“It's not concrete evidence,” Daniel explained, taking his half empty coffee cup in hand. “That doesn't mean we're going to ignore it either. I also have a feeling that Blake somehow got caught up in this mess, damn kid.”

Chance thought of his friend's actions in O'Reilly's. “I don't know of any of that, but I can try asking him if you want. It might be easier since he might feel like he's disappointed you, Lieutenant.”

“Just don't start getting into trouble yourself, kid.”

All right.” He paused a moment, running a hand through his sandy locks. “I guess my dad must have been on some mission when he died. I don’t really remember him.”

Kenneth smiled gently. “He was in the field a lot. When he died... it was a case of the wrong place at the wrong time. He had a lead on the whereabouts of a smuggler. Just as he got out of his vehicle... That car came out of nowhere. It’s like a phantom or something. As you saw, any data referring to ownership is missing. We’ve tried searching through old files, but it’s gone.”

Chance hardened his jaw. “It can’t be completely gone. There has to be something out there.”

“We’ve tried. Believe us.” Daniel sighed, rubbing his tired face. “If you want in, kid you can search to your heart’s content. In fact a new set of eyes might be the ticket. It’d give us all a peace of mind if we can catch that bastard.”

“Fine. Just tell me where to sign on the dotted line.” Chance pressed his hand to the table, determination shining in his blue eyes. He had never felt surer about anything in his life than he did now. After all, what could he lose?

## CHAPTER 9

The evening air was crisp and welcoming as Chance stepped outside of the hospital. He needed the air. He frowned at the sky pondering how many hours had he spent in the waiting room. It felt more like days, months, even years. Blake was finally stable. The doctors had to set his fractured arm and leg, as well as tend to some bruised ribs. The worst was a slight concussion, but everything should heal nicely. He would survive.

“Chance?” Tanya’s voice broke him from his thoughts as she joined him on the sidewalk.

He turned his gaze towards her. Her bright red hair fluttered around her face, as though it were dancing in the breeze. He couldn't necessarily say he felt better, however her presence seemed to ease him. "Hey."

She blinked several times as though struggling to contain unshed tears. "I'm glad Blake is going to be okay."

"Yeah, me too. I don't know what I would have done if that car had killed him."

Tanya covered his fisted hand with her own. Once his relaxed in hers she leaned her head against his shoulder. "I was really scared. Some kids at my school a few months ago had disappeared only to turn up dead in some alley. The police believe that it was probably gang related but still, I was so frightened. Still am I guess."

"Some kids were killed at your school?" Chance's blue eyes hardened to ice as he spun Tanya around and gripped her arms. "Is it even safe there?"

"I'm okay, Chance. No one has threatened me, or anything of that nature," she reassured him in a soothing voice. "They lived off campus anyway."

"That still doesn't excuse a potentially dangerous environment, Tany."

"I can take care of myself." She narrowed her eyes at him defensively. "There's no need for you to drag out your cape or shining armor."

“Too bad. I thought you’d like them. I guess I’m just going to have to return them to the costume shop. I hope I can find my receipt.”

“Ha. Ha, Chance. Maybe you missed your calling. I hear people really appreciate a comedian who can talk out of his ass.”

“I’m sure it’s hard to find clothes that fit right with the stick up yours.”

“Let go of me.”

“No.”

“Chance...”

He stared at her infuriated face then smirked. She was still beautiful when she was angry. Without a word he moved to crush his lips down on hers as the world seemed to move in slow motion. One moment he was kissing Tanya, the next moment she was lying at his feet, bleeding from multiple gunshot wounds as the phantom black car speed towards him.

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Chance lurched up with a strangled gasp.

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“Chance? Are you okay?”

He jerked then swung his head to the right. There she was, concern shining in her brilliant blue-violet eyes, her hand touching his arm gently. Alive. She was still alive and breathing, sitting next to him in the waiting room. Exhausted, Chance slumped back in his chair. It was all a dream. One stupid dream more than likely stirred up by his fears.

“Yeah, fine. It was just a dream. Can’t really remember much of it.” He lied not wanting to scare her. He was terrified enough for the two of them.

“If you say so. It must have been pretty bad though. You’re all sweaty.”

“Gee, thanks, Tany.” He used the back of his sleeve to wipe off his forehead. “Any news on Blake while I was gone?”

“He’s finally stable. His right arm and leg had to be set. They had to tend to some bruised ribs. The worst was a slight concussion, but everything should heal nicely. They said he was really lucky.” Tanya paused, her eyes grew dimmer as she dropped her gaze to the floor. “I’m glad he’ll be okay.”

“Me too. I don’t know what I would have done if that car... had killed him.” Chance frowned. Somehow the conversation felt very familiar. “I think I need some air.”

“I’ll come with you.” Tanya bent down to grab her bag only to be halted as Chance shot out an arm.

“No! I-I think I want to go by myself.”

She scowled as she rose from her chair. “Okay. I’ll just walk with you then head to my car. It’s getting late.”

“No!” He bolted from his chair blocking her. He cursed himself and the coffee he had previously drank before passing out. It was either the dream or the caffeine; something had his adrenaline moving at light speed. “Don’t you want to see Blake when he wakes up? I’m sure he’ll like that.”

“Chance, what’s wrong? You seem really jumpy.” Tanya stood with her hands on her hips like a young mother who was about to scold her son for telling a fib. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

“I don’t know! I just have this odd feeling that it wouldn’t be a good idea to go outside.”

“So you want alone time. I get it. That doesn’t mean you have to hold me hostage here.”

“That’s not it.” He rubbed his head feeling a headache coming on, sending stabbing pain between his eyes. “I just ... marry me.”

“What?” Her eyes widened as she gaped at him.

He mentally kicked himself wondering what possessed him to even say a thing like that. The words just fell out of his mouth the same way a normal human being would ask for the time. Maybe he was the one with the head injury. He already felt like he had been hit by a bulldozer. “Shit. I didn’t mean it like that. It just came out. Sorry. I-I’m a bit messed up so just pretend that I had gotten hit by the car instead of Blake, okay?”

Tears flooded Tanya’s eyes, her purse crashed to the floor, forgotten. “I can’t.”

“It’s-”

“I can’t pretend that you had gotten hit by that car. Do you even know what that would do to me? It’d be like breaking every bone in my body piece by painful piece.” She sniffled, trembling fingers wiped at her streaming tears. “It would kill me. When I heard that Blake was in the hospital, all I could think about was you. Where were you? I was so afraid that they’d tell me that you had been killed that I felt like I couldn’t breathe.”

Chance stared at her unsure of what to say. He never considered what would have happened if it were him that had been hit by the car, and not Blake. He did give chase after all, but...Blake had to be hiding something. Chance refused to believe that it was a coincidence. In his world, he believed such a thing did not exist. “I-”

“Yes!”

He blinked as though awaking from a surreal dream. “Huh?”

“Yes, I will marry you!” Tanya cried out as she threw her arms around Chance, unaware that her uncle just stepped into the room and choked on his coffee.

## CHAPTER 10

What just happened? Chance stood flabbergasted as James struggled to swallow his coffee without spewing it all over the walls. He didn't mean to propose to Tanya in his moment of panic. The fact that she enthusiastically agreed in front of her uncle nonetheless made Chance hope that he was still dreaming. That was the only logical explanation for the madness that was ensuing.

“Uncle James!” Tanya spun towards him a happy glow lit up her face.

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James weakly cleared his throat. “Uh, hi, kids. So... did I hear that right? Marriage?”

Tanya held Chance’s hand, exchanging glances with him. “I guess you’re the first to find out... I mean I don’t think we’ll be getting married right away but we are planning on it. Right, Chance?”

“Um, yeah.” Chance shuffled his feet unsure of what to say. “I would have liked to talk about it with you and her parents of course, but it just well... happened.”

“So I heard,” James coughed several times, as though fighting to flush the rest of the coffee out. “Have you chosen a date or are you just flying by the seat of your pants like you usually do?”

“We haven’t thought of it yet. I’m thinking maybe after Tanya graduates if she’s okay with it.” He glanced at her speculatively; there was no backing out now.

She smiled at him, “I believe that sounds perfect.”

James’s head bobbed up and down. “That’s a good plan. I hope it works out for, you kids.”

Chance inwardly cringed. He never fathomed how much tension such a situation could create. He could tell that James was very uncomfortable. Tanya on the other hand was glowing enough to put the sun to shame. At least she was happy. That relieved some of the strain in his shoulders. “We should be just fine.”

“We *will* be fine,” his fiancée corrected beaming up at him. “At least this way we’ll have plenty of time to plan and save up. You better not disappoint me, Mr. Langley,” she added, poking Chance in the chest.

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” he squeezed her hand in reassurance.

James cleared his throat, gesturing towards the hall. “Chance, I think it’s about time we have a little talk man to man. Since you’re planning on carrying my lovely niece away, I believe it’s now overdue.”

“Okay.” Chance turned to Tanya giving her a sincere look. “Do you mind waiting for me? I’d rather you not go out to your car by yourself. It’s late.”

She slapped his arm gently. “I’ll wait for you. Don’t worry.”

Satisfied he followed James down the hall. It wasn’t until they were a good distance away that James came to a halt peering over his shoulder before he settled.

“You didn’t plan on proposing, did you? Not like that anyway.” He studied the young cop with a measuring gaze. “Don’t get me wrong, I know you love her, but there was more to it, wasn’t there.”

“Yeah,” he admitted. With a heavy sigh, he leaned against the wall. “I’m not sure why but I had a bad feeling that something would happen to her if she left. Maybe I’m just paranoid

because of what happened to Blake. I don't know. All I do know is that I wanted to grab onto her and not let go. I guess that's why I blurted out what I did."

"Are you scared about the mission?"

"No, nothing like that. My senses just flooded with dread. It was so intense that I could barely breathe." Chance shook his head, unconsciously he dragged his fingers through his hair making thick tufts that stuck up every which way. "Sometimes I wonder if I might be going crazy. Everything is happening so fast. At this point I don't know if I can keep up."

"You're just going to have to go with the flow, kid. That's the only way to get through these things." James patted his shoulder in a fatherly way that made Chance's eyes want to shed tears.

"Is that what my dad would have done?" he choked out the words then turned away in shame. "I-I don't remember him. I don't know what he was like or even what he looked like. Not really anyway."

"Your dad was a brave man who, yes, took things as they came. He also planned ahead for multiple outcomes. He never wanted to be caught with his pants down so to speak. You remind me of him in some ways. I do know that he would be proud of you, son."

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Chance stared blankly at the wall in front of him. Somehow James O'Reilly's words both soothed him and ripped him to shreds. The café owner had long since left, but assured Chance that if he ever needed someone to talk to that he would lend his ear no questions asked. Chance supposed he might take James up on the offer. He did think of the happy-go-lucky Irish man as a sort of father figure. Maybe it was just as well that he was marrying Tanya; even more of an excuse to become chummy with her family.

“Psst.”

Chance's head snapped up, alert. He peered towards a dark corner of the hall to find a darkly clothed man. “Who-”

“Shh!” The man glanced from side to side then angled his head as he crept up to the cop. “Do you want to hear me out or do you want to stay in the dark?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I don't have much time. All I know is there is some bad stuff going on. Do you want to listen or not?”

“Look, I-”

The man growled and snapped. “Do you want to know why the Grant kid ended up here? You’re buddies, aren’t you?”

“How do you-”

The man tugged down his scarf as he pulled up his cap. Chance gaped at the sight of Odin Knight, eldest son of Richard Knight, one of the council members of the Republic.

“My father is going insane. I need your help.”

## CHAPTER 11

Chance stared dumbfound at the elder Knight son. Did he hear that right? Did Odin Knight just ask for help because his father was going mad? “What do you mean?”

Odin scanned their surroundings then gestured with his head to follow him as he began walking further down the corridor. Chance silently trailed after, his mind racing with questions. There was something about the situation that troubled him. Why would Odin choose to go to him and not someone else for help? It was confounding.

“In here.” Odin held the door open to what Chance guessed was an empty office. He hesitated a moment unsure if it were some kind of trap before stepping inside.

The room looked like some sort of examination room; very stark, very clean with the scent of bleach. He immediately felt uneasy, but didn't sense anyone else lurking in the room.

“So what's this about?” The cop spun around as the door locked behind them. He relaxed once his companion removed his scarf and drew a breath himself.

“Before I say anything more, what I tell you is in confidence. You did not get any of this from me. I don't care who you take it to as long as I am an anonymous source.” Odin narrowed his eyes as though promising a painful death if he were lied to.

“You have my word,” Chance agreed.

“My father,” he began, “is not the same man as he once was. Before he was a bit high strung; strict, but honest. He put his family first. Regarded others with the utmost respect. Then he met Arthur Cranston. Since then the man I once knew has slowly been unraveling. He has an obsession with being royalty.”

“Royalty?” Chance arched an eyebrow. “There's no royalty in the Republic.”

“Right. However it seems like he's convinced in his head at least, that he has a court. The rules of the household have been tightened. Even more, he shows favoritism to one of my sisters, hostility to her twin, and neglects the youngest. My younger brothers are afraid of him yet compete for his approval. He's also been looking into family bloodlines.”

“Why? Is he researching the family tree?”

“I don’t know. It’s not just our family though; it’s the bloodlines of other families that have been of most interest to him lately. It doesn’t make sense.” Odin threw his hands up in the air, his frustration growing more apparent with each statement he gave.

“Weird.”

“Anyway, Arthur is not what he seems. I don’t know exactly what he is, but since my father has been spending more time with him then started taking those pills-”

“Pills?” Chance interrupted again; locking onto the one word as sirens went off in his head. He didn’t like where this was going. “What kind of pills?”

“I don’t know what they are. I just know that they’ve been prescribed by Arthur. He also set up this strange triangular office. It’s seems to be designed to make whoever comes inside feel really small and unimportant.” Odin rubbed his face. When he glanced at younger man, he looked a lot older than he was. It was evident that the stress was wearing on him.

“Take it easy. You don’t have to tell me everything if it makes you uncomfortable.”

Odin only shook his head. “I’m mainly sharing this with you because...I’m only 24. My father keeps insisting on sending my two sons to some sort of summer program Arthur has devised. My wife and I are very much against it despite my father’s wishes. I need you to get

my family out of here. In exchange I will give you information regarding who is responsible for the attempt on the Grant. Do we have a deal?"

Chance lost with breath. He felt like he had just been sucker punched. Did Odin really have answers on what had hit Blake? If so that meant he had info on his father as well. He could be lying though. However when Chance looked into Odin's brown eyes he could see the exhaustion and fear clearly. It wasn't a clever hoax to make him drop his guard.

It was a huge decision, but if it would give him answers. Not to mention feed his curiosity as to what was going on under the Knight household, it might be a risk worth taking. Plus, he felt bad for Odin. The guy only wanted to protect his family. He never even said a word in regards to his own life. "I have a guy who can look into this for you. Trust me." He added as the eldest Knight son became to protest. "He'll be worth investing in. It may take some time to set up..."

"Time is something that is running out for me. I'll try to give you as much as I can. That's all I can promise. Once my family is secure, you'll have your answers."

"Then we have ourselves a deal," Chance nodded praying that he wasn't going to regret his choice. There would be no turning back.

## CHAPTER 12

Chance walked back to the waiting room, very tired and concerned. Odin Knight had just confirmed what he felt in his gut; something big was about to go down that would shake the Republic to the ground. It was no longer safe in Alirodon. Unless he did something to prevent it; everything would be left in rubble.

“Are you okay?” Tanya touched his arm as he took a seat next to her.

He hesitated, unsure of what to say or do even. All he knew was that he didn't want to get her caught up in the mess that was about to occur, becoming a meaningless causality. His voice felt raw as he addressed his fiancée. "I have a favor to ask of you."

"What is it?" She blinked her blue eyes at him in wonderment. Chance struggled to keep himself from looking away.

"Could you please go back to your college tomorrow morning?"

'But-'

"I know you planned to stay longer." He pressed a hand to his face, fighting for the right words. "After what happened to Blake... I'd feel better if you were safe, away from here. I don't want to see anything happen to you."

"Chance..." Tanya blew out a breath as though unsure of what to say. She brushed her fingers gently against his cheek. "I know you're worried about Blake, but nothing is going to happen to me."

"Tanya," He grabbed her hand, squeezing it. "I can't explain, however you need to trust me on this. Go back to school. I'll send for you once everything calms down. Until then, I need you to stay as far away from here as possible."

"What's going on? You're scaring me."

“It’s mainly a precaution. I can’t tell you anymore. Promise me you’ll be careful.”

She fell silent for a moment. “What about my family? And Uncle James-”

“They should be fine.”

“Are you in some sort of trouble?”

“No, but I don’t want there to be any repercussions if my instincts are correct. I don’t want you to be involved. Go back to school. If you are going to marry me you need to trust me.”

Tears leaked from Tanya’s eyes. “I still want to marry you. I just wish you would give me an actual answer.”

“I’m... sorry.” He squeezed his eyes shut, fighting for strength. “I wish I could explain but I can’t. Just know that I would do anything to protect you.”

“Don’t,” she whispered turning away from him. “Don’t go knight in shining armor on me and say that this is for my own good. I don’t want to hear it.”

Chance rose to his feet the same time Tanya did. “Wait. I am not lying when I say that I love you and want to marry you. I just want you to be safe. Please don’t fight with me on this-”

“I’m not!” She flushed, surprised at the sharp tone in her voice. “Sorry. I just wish you took into account my feelings before you dropped something like this on me. I worry about you; have worried about you since I left for college.”

“Please trust me on this, Tanya. It would kill me if anything were to happen to you. What happened to Blake is just the tip of the iceberg.”

She turned around, giving him a sad smile. “That’s the thing that scares me most; I do trust you. I just hope that you don’t get hurt with me gone.”

“Does that mean you will leave in the morning?”

“Only if you see me off bright and early. I do love you, Chance. I only wish that you wouldn’t be so overprotective. I guess after what happened to Blake... I can’t really blame you.” She wrapped her arms around him, pressing her face into his shoulder. “Just promise me that you will be careful too.”

“I promise,” He murmured, holding Tanya close. *Even if it means I have to let go of you.*

## CHAPTER 13

Sunday, May 8th

Chance narrowed his eyes at the tall brunette man seated in the interview room. Parker Smith's blue eyes no longer looked glassed over, and the jitters of his drugged out haze were long gone. The criminal instead appeared confused, yet alert. "Nice to see he's not babbling anymore."

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Lt. Daniel Grant snorted. “It took longer than usual for the garbage to clear out of his system. I wonder what he took. Anyway, I want you to observe from here. If you notice anything, call me.”

“Sir.”

Daniel shot Chance a grin before he headed into the room. “So, Mr. Smith, are we feeling better today?”

Parker sat up, studied the man in silence who sat down across from him. He shifted his handcuffed hands on the table.

“First I’m going to read you your rights. If you wish representation-”

“Whatever. Let’s just get on with it.”

Chance blinked from behind the glass, shocked by how different Parker was behaving compared to when he was first arrested. “He’s like a totally different guy.”

Detective Heath Ronan joined him, gesturing with his coffee mug. “Kind of makes you wonder who he really is. Like if that bumbling idiot crap is all an act or something.”

“Yeah,” Chance muttered turning back to the glass. He frowned as Parker’s face blanked when Lt. Grant mentioned finding counterfeit money in a briefcase inside the stolen vehicle.

“Counterfeit? But I checked it out for myself. At least I think I did. My mind is still fuzzy.”

He squeezed his eyes shut as he shook his head.

“Don’t play dumb with me.”

“I’m not! I made a drop and exchange for fifty grand.”

“What sort of exchange?”

Parker scowled. “I didn’t inspect the merchandise for the sale. I was given the case and a loaner because my car died. I didn’t know the damn thing was stolen.”

Daniel leaned in, eyes cool. “Then why did you lie when questioned about it last time?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Do you enjoy rotting your brain cells?”

Parker raised an eyebrow. “What are you talking about?”

“You were high as a kite when we arrested you.”

“I don’t use that shit.” He growled brows knit with fury. “Someone screwed me over.”

“Yeah, because you’re usually a real genius.”

Parker glared at Daniel. “Like I said, someone double crossed me. I was not on anything when I got to the location or left it.”

“Where were you?”

“Some sort of party. I can’t remember. I was given the address. Probably got left in my car.” He squeezed his eyes shut, as though trying to force the memories to appear. “Damnit. I- was given the keys, drove off, and felt... strange. The car was acting weird too. Shifter seemed to jam every now and then. Brakes didn’t act right either.”

“You crashed at O’Reilly’s café.”

“Not intentionally.”

“No,” Daniel rose, circled the table. “Upon inspection of the vehicle, the brakes had been tampered with. You got really lucky, kid.”

Parker’s face paled then reddened as anger overrode the shock. “Tampered? Those assholes were trying to kill me?” He swore, slamming his fists on the table.

“Yes, Mr. Smith, they were. Now would you care to tell me who you made the exchange with?”

“No. I can’t. I have nothing more to say.”

“Then neither do I. Good day, Mr. Smith.” Daniel left the room, eyed Chance speculatively.

Chance watched Parker drop his head on the table. He shook his head. There was just something about the guy that had his head spinning. “I hate to say it, but I kind of believe him.”

“So do I.”

“Now what?” Heath inquired, handing Daniel a coffee cup.

“We wait.”

## CHAPTER 14

Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup>

Parker's head hurt. The trip to the penitentiary was long and seemed endless. It seemed like years since his sentence was given. Life. He could have protested but what was the use? He didn't have that much to live for anyway. No family. Hardly any friends. He simply lived mission by mission with no real goals. Since when had his life gotten so pathetic and why hadn't

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he noticed sooner? All he did was exist. There was no joy. No bliss. No satisfaction. He was worse than an office drone; they didn't usually worry about their mistakes getting them killed. He however was at risk every time he set foot outside of his door.

He held his head up as the guards led him through the stale sweat scented corridor lined with cells. Curses, threats, and various other words of intimidation were nothing more than a bunch of noise to Parker's ears.

It wasn't until his cell door slammed shut that he broke out of his daze. He blinked at the bunk bed but didn't move.

"You asleep on your feet?"

Parker's head snapped up as his eyes fell upon a scruffy looking blonde man that appeared close to his age leaning against the wall. "What's it to you?"

"This ain't no five star hotel, dude. Best to face up to reality. Makes things a bit easier to swallow."

"Whatever."

"Got a name?"

"Parker Smith and don't give me any shit about it."

The blonde smirked folding his arms in front of him. “Cody Burton. Welcome to hell. Hope you enjoy your stay.”

CHAPTER 15

Parker eyed Cody warily. He wasn't so sure about the guy. There was just something about him that put his back up. Regardless, he would have to deal and hopefully survive long enough to see his next birthday.

“So what are you in here for?” Cody inquired pushing off from the wall he was leaning on.

“Illegals, and grand theft auto to name a few.”

“Armed robbery.”

“Kill anyone?”

Cody snorted. “You?”

“I’d rather not say.” Parker shrugged.

“If you’re afraid of me trying to kick your ass, I’d rather not. I like the idea of an early parole for good behavior.”

“Deal.” Perhaps things at least with his bunkmate may not be as bad as possible. He still needed to find a way out before whoever tried to eliminate him decided to finish the job. Perhaps Cody might come in handy. All he needed to do was earn his trust.

\* \* \*

Thursday, May 18<sup>th</sup>

The next few days had passed with incidents. Some of the other inmates tried their best to intimidate the newbie Parker, but proved unsuccessful. Most of them showed disinterest in harassment or so it seemed until he finally put his guard down.

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Parker grimaced at the sloop laden tray he had been handed. He didn't remember even school cafeteria food looking and tasting as bad as the gruel they were given. Swallowing his disgust he ventured from the line to the rows of tables to find a place to attempt to eat at.

“Boss isn't pleased with you,” a deep voice growled before his tray went flying.

“What?” Parker barely mumbled before he found himself flat on his back with a broken plastic fork jabbing him in the windpipe. Fear shot through the confusion as his eyes met the deadly gaze of his bulky attacker.

“Knock it off!” A split second later the heavy weight that had pressed into his chest had vanished as a blur shot past him.

Everything became hazy as he vaguely heard someone call out his name before all went black.

CHAPTER 16

Friday, May 27th

His head was killing him.

“You awake yet Parker Smith?” A voice inquired from the distance.

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*Parker? Was that his name?* The man groaned squeezing his eyes shut against the painfully bright light. Where was he? For the life of him he couldn't remember a thing, the pounding in his head deadened any possible thoughts.

"So, you're finally awake. It hurts doesn't it, Parker."

A groan was the only response he could manage. The other guy kept calling him Parker so he supposed that was his name.

"You've been out for some time. Kinda surprised you're still alive. Can't say your cellmate faired any better."

"Cellmate?" He croaked. His throat felt like he had swallowed gravel.

"Don't tell me you have amnesia," the male voice scoffed as though the mere concept were an inconvenience to him. "Let's just say he's not gonna have to worry about parole any time soon."

Parker pressed his hand to his face. It didn't feel like anything was broken. Still, it worried him that he couldn't remember what happened. He opened one eye, squinting at the florescent bulb directly over his head. Based on all the white and the medical tools that glinted on a table, it appeared he was in some sort of hospital room. "Where am I?"

A chubby man raised a dark eyebrow at him. "The infirmary. Doc said I should probably grab him whenever you woke up. Guess now is as good a time as any."

*If those were his orders then why did he dilly dally while I laid here in agony?* Parker fought against glaring at the man and instead closed his eyes willing for the pain to stop.

A moment later the sound of squeaky hinges caught his attention as a snowy haired man entered the room.

“Hello, Mr. Smith. You have been through quite an ordeal. Don’t worry. We’ll get you fixed up in no time.”

“How long have I been out?”

The elder man looked at his watch. “A little over a week.”

“A week?”

“No need to look so concerned. Your vitals are normal and other than a bump on the head you appear to be fine.”

“You are a doctor, right?”

The older man chuckled. “Of course.”

Parker fought the urge to roll his eyes. “Then why can’t I remember anything?”

“Just a side effect. It’ll pass.”

“Side effect from what?” Parker gritted his teeth as another flash of pain struck.

“We’ll give you something to take the edge off and in a few days you should be right as rain.”

The doctor advised pulling out a syringe.

Parker stared at it, unsure of whether he should trust anyone until he got his memory back.

As the needle stabbed into his arm, he knew he would have to be cautious. There was no telling who was his enemy or foe. He couldn’t risk letting his guard down. Not for anyone.

## CHAPTER 17

Thursday, June 1st

Parker's eyes snapped open. Someone was unlocking his cell. He laid still, his senses on red alert. The foot falls of his intruder were not that of the usual guards, they were much quieter, hardly audible. A sharp click of what he guessed was a pocket knife sent his mind reeling.

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Someone really wanted him dead. He'd just have to make sure that they didn't succeed with whatever means possible.

"Too easy," a male voice chuckled.

Parker's hands flew up as the blade of the pocket knife neared his throat. He twisted the assassin's wrist, to the breaking point, snatched the knife from his grasp, and jerked him forward to stab him, the other man broke out of his hold. Parker threw himself to the ground, swept his legs out before the assassin could react. Taking no chances he pounced on his attacker and in one swift movement, broke his neck.

"Just who the hell are you and why are you trying to kill me?" He muttered as he removed the man's shirt followed by his pants. Parker squinted at name etched on the shirt, recognizing it as one of the guards. Feeling no pity he took off his shirt and slid on the uniform top.

Once he was clothed in the guard's uniform, he dragged the assassin, now clad in his prison garb onto his bunk. He'd have to move quickly. There was already one dead guard. The others may start searching the cells once they located his body.

Without a second thought he stepped out of his cell and locked the door behind him. If he acted naturally, he shouldn't draw attention to the fact that he was a prison inmate in guard's clothing. The only question was how to get out of there.

He pondered several options before settling on heading towards the morgue. Perhaps cranky old Donnie Ferguson's death wasn't a complete waste after all. The old man had suffered a heart attack during dinner. Apparently the mystery meatloaf didn't agree with him.

Parker let out a breath once he had passed through the cellblock. What time was it, anyway? It seemed peculiar that there were no sounds coming from the other inmates. Perhaps whoever tried to take him out took care of them first.

He squinted in the darkness. Something seemed very off. He had to get out of there fast. Now where was the morgue... Parker headed down the corridor at a brisk pace. He'd head towards the medical examination room. It should be near there.

“Halt!”

“Shit.” Parker took off at a sprint down the hall. The other guard chased after him. He'd have to do something fast before the guard tried to take him down. Raced into the first open door he came to. Just as he reached for the doorknob, A dull pain flashed through his head before everything went black.

CHAPTER 18

Friday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>

*Damnit. This is really starting to get old fast.* Parker groaned as he tried to lift his head. There was a foreign weight on his stomach pinning him down. A million things raced through his mind ranging from corpses to a huge, slobbering mutt. He would prefer the latter.

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Shifting to the right an inch he bit back a growling at realizing that there was some sort of barrier preventing him from moving in that direction. He'd have to try for the right and hope that he wasn't enclosed on that side either.

Parker drew a breath, slid to the left and cursed as he fell on his ass to what felt like hard pavement below. The large object that was cradled on his stomach smashed into his face and rolled a few inches away. "Ow," he winced rubbing his sore nose.

He opened his eyes then frowned. How the hell did he end up on a park bench? Wasn't he supposed to be in jail; not that he was complaining. Now he had to figure out what the hell to do next.

Parker looked at the object next to his head, scowled. It was a backpack. Whoever got him out of prison must have left it for him. Either that or a homeless was playing a practical joke. At least it didn't smell like human waste.

Pulling himself to a sitting position he grabbed the bag and opened it. At least he didn't have to worry about finding a change of clothes. That seemed to be already provided. Only one other thing was in the bag. It was a note that read, "Remember the mission, Idiot."

"Nice to know that I'm appreciated," Parker drawled crumpling the note in his fist.

He was going to have to come up with a plan. It was the only way to accomplish the mission was to have a chat with Dominic Caruso. After all it was at his party where everything went horribly wrong.

## CHAPTER 19

Chance Langley downed the rest of his cold coffee as he surveyed the Caruso residence from across the street. Could this be where Parker would go next? If only the attack at the jail hadn't ended up the way it had things would have been so much easier. Too bad Cody couldn't relay more information about Parker. Now Chance had to fish at loose strings and hope he pulled on the right one.

What if he was wrong? What if Caruso's wasn't where Parker would head to next? What if instead he'd go to his employer's, whoever they were. Debating over the matter was starting to make Chance's head hurt. He yanked on his cap as he ducked back into the shadows. Just what the hell was he doing? He wasn't qualified for this kind of mission. More than likely he was just going to get himself killed. Tanya and his mom would be very upset at him if he died. The worst part was that they wouldn't be able to find out the truth. Just like with his dad. He was already falling into his footsteps. Hopefully he wouldn't meet the same fate.

Chance drew a deep breath and straightened his shoulders. Worrying was going to get him nowhere. All he could do was wait.

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Parker Smith eyed the large house warily. What was he supposed to do now? Knock? Would Dominic Caruso willingly talk to him without putting a bullet through his skull? Maybe he should have thought things out more carefully.

"Hey! What are you doing at my house?"

Parker gulped as he spun around, his nerves felt like livewires nearing a large puddle of water. He took one look at the owner of the house and nearly wet himself. "I-I-I"

Dominic squinted in the hazy streetlights. "Parker Smith? What the hell are you doing here?"

“I could ask you the same but then again, you live here.”

The older man chuckled at the lame response. He glanced up and down at Parker then cocked his head to the door. “I think we need to have a chat.”

Parker blinked, stunned as Dominic moved past him, opened the front door and held it open.

“Well? Or are you just going to stand there like some sort of deranged statue?”

Parker swallowed as he stepped through the threshold. He supposed he was about to get his answer one way or another.

## CHAPTER 20

Parker sat on the small sofa in Dominic Caruso's office. He clutched the cup of coffee that Dominic's maid had offered him, eyeing it in suspicion. It would more than likely be best not to drink it; just in case. He had to admit, the office was very pleasant. Creamy walls with vivid landscape paintings and lush cherry wood furniture gave the room a warmth and elegance that he found inviting.

"Sorry I took so long," Dominic said as he entered the room. "Lucia, my wife, wanted to discuss our weekend plans."

“That’s okay.”

Dominic smiled as he sat behind his desk. He leaned forward, sharp dark eyes studying Parker with interest. “So, what would you like to talk about Mr. Smith? Perhaps what occurred at my party?”

Parker fought not to squirm. The dark haired older man seemed so at ease and friendly that he couldn’t decide if it was a façade or not. He had to remind himself that this could be the man that set him up. “I-”

Dominic chuckled. “Relax. I was not behind your little... adventure. However you do have a powerful enemy in the Republic. What I am about to tell you could get you killed. This is not a man you want to cross. He won’t bat an eye at putting you six feet under.”

“But if that’s the case then why am I not already dead?”

“Who knows? More than likely it was a paid job. I’ve heard through the grapevine that there is a planned power shift. They want a larger piece of the Republic and aren’t afraid to go about unethical means to get it.”

Parker frowned. He didn’t like where this was going. “What do you mean by unethical means?”

Dominic paused to pour a glass of wine. He took a sip, his face grim. “Weird experiments have been going on.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. All I know is whoever works for and crosses this guy tend to disappear. He’s a very dangerous man. You have to watch yourself around him.”

Parker’s mind drifted to Odin’s Knight’s warning. Could Odin and Dominic be talking about the same person? “Who?”

As Dominic opened his mouth to reply, all that came out was a groan as his face hit his desk. Scarlet bloomed on the back his head, painting his lush dark locks as it flooded to the surface of his desk. Dominic Caruso was dead.

CHAPTER 21

Parker stood in horror over the lifeless corpse of Dominic Caruso. What the hell was going on? He had to get out of there fast!

He turned to the window and using his jacket to cover his hands, then forced the window open quickly climbing out to safety. Or so he thought. Parker froze at the sight of a man clad in black holding a sniper rifle. “Oh shit.”

“Parker! Good job keeping the old man distracted. I couldn’t have made the shot without you, man.” The assassin praised before adding, “We better make like the wind.”

“Okay,” he replied dumbly, mind still reeling over the death before trailing after the man who took off towards a dark van.

“This should net me a nice bonus,” the man chuckled while unlocking the door. He climbed in, flexed his gloved hands. “Of course the night isn’t over yet. Got one more mouth to silence.”

Parker frowned in confusion as he got into the vehicle and fastened his seat belt. “What do you mean?”

“Dude, you’ve been away for far too long. Odin Knight. The hit is to be made tonight.”

## CHAPTER 22

Lt. Daniel Grant nearly choked on his coffee as he caught the tail end of Parker's and the assassin's conversation. Odin Knight's life was in jeopardy. Chance Langley had become the ace that Kenneth Logan promised he would be. Hopefully risking the kid's neck would be in vain.

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Grant had to move fast. He was maybe ten minutes max away from Odin's home. If he could make good timing then perhaps the young man's life would be saved.

"Heath! We need to pull together a team. There is a hit on Odin Knight. Move out immediately, that's an order!" He barked into the receiver before slamming it down and racing out the door. He hoped he wasn't going to be too late. Odin may be the only key to figuring out what the hell his father and Cranston were planning.

\* \* \*

The five minute drive seemed to take eternity. Grant swore under his breath as he blazed through a red light, sirens blaring. He thought briefly of Chance as he shut the engine off and bolted from his vehicle. The kid better not try to do anything stupid. He knew his mission, if he got found out, his death certificate would be signed and sealed.

He could see Chance had made it, swearing at the sight of the rookie across the street. Grant wouldn't be able to protect him. He'd have to take care of himself.

Things seemed promising as he reached the door until he saw the gunman inside with Odin through the frilly curtains. One minute Odin was shouting at the man. The next his brains were splattered against the cheery yellow walls.

CHAPTER 23

Chance ran his hands frantically through his hair. He had failed Odin. There was nothing more he could do for the doomed man. All he could do was try to find a way to use the information that Odin had provided to avenge him.

He thought fleetingly of Tanya. Did she make it back to school? Was she safe? Or was this chaos only the prelude of what was to come?

What about Blake? Would he recover or find himself smothered in the night? At that moment he wished that the Republic had never existed. Why had all those explorers decided to sail to the unknown continent and claim a piece as their own? After a bloody feud that lasted for decades they came to an agreement to have one official from each region to rule over the lands for four years. The other countries mocked their instability, but did not refuse the opportunity to import and export goods with the haphazardly controlled land.

Chance glanced at the side view mirror of the van. Parker's reflection brought him back from his inner turmoil. He still had a job to do.

\* \* \*

Parker jumped as the modest home of Odin Knight exploded in a blaze worthy of hell's wrath. He didn't expect that on top of the murder, they would be committing arson. "Don't you think that's a little much?"

The other man snorted as he gestured towards the van. "It sends a message to other cowards that might think to betray the boss. You're not questioning his methods, are you?"

"No! I didn't know that was part of the order."

"It's the most effective way to erase whatever evidence might have been stashed in the snitch's house without ransacking it. That would have taken too damn long." The assassin

chuckled as they slid inside the vehicle then started the engine. “I prefer efficiency over wasting time.”

Parker bobbed his head. “Well, when you put it that way, yeah, much better plan. Why did you shoot him first though? Wouldn’t just blowing up the house have been enough?”

“Had to ensure he was dead. There is no recovering from having your brains blown out.”

“Makes sense. So where are we headed now?”

The man chuckled. “Boss is very interested in seeing you.”

Parker felt all the color drain from his face as his stomach roiled. Was there a body bag with his name on it as well? “Me? Why?”

“Wouldn’t say.”

“Great. Wonderful. I love surprises.” He felt sick. The rest of the car trip went by in silence as Parker’s mind swirled with various methods of execution he would soon face varying from torture and a quick bullet to the brain. He hoped it would be as short as possible.

It seemed like seconds had passed when the van came to a halt in front of a large mansion.

“Ride’s over. Good luck,” the driver said snapping Parker out of his stupor.

“Gee, thanks,” he replied with a weak laugh. With no other choice he got out and watched the vehicle leave. “Time to face the fire.”

He clenched his shaking hand into a fist as he rang the doorbell. Death wouldn't be so bad; it was the amount of time it took to get from pain to dead that worried him.

A stern looking man answered the door. His black uniform was well starched and as stiff as his posture. “Ah, Mr. Smith, Master Cranston has been expecting you. Please come in.”

Parker hesitated before doing as the butler said. He could picture himself turning on his heel and racing out of the house as though his hair were on fire. Instead he trailed after the man, wishing he could numb the panic that zoomed through his mind.

The lush tapestries and gilded framed paintings were a blur; much like the rest of the décor. Nothing else seemed to exist outside of his fear of what was to come.

“You may go in,” the man said gesturing to a thick wooden door. Parker gulped before entering.

A thin bespectacled man glanced at him behind a walnut colored desk. He smoothed back his graying dark hair and gave a curt nod. He removed his glasses and stood up. “Parker, how nice to see you again. Did you enjoy our little test?”

“Test? What test?” He blinked in confusion.

The man merely chuckled. “You poor, unfortunate fool. So you never even suspected then...”

“What do you...” Parker frowned as everything clicked into place. “You mean the drugs, getting thrown in the slammer, and the assassinations were all part of it?”

“You must have thought I hung you out to dry...” Mr. Cranston shook his head as he circled the perimeter of the desk.

“So you aren’t going to kill me?”

“Not yet. I have a new challenge for you if you’re up to the task.”

“And that would be?”

Mr. Cranston’s lips curled into a cruel smile. “I need some pests exterminated. I want you to see that it is taken care of. You have proven your loyalty.”

Parker looked at the envelope he was being offered. It appeared that Mr. Cranston wished to unleash the chaos and it was up to Parker to light the match. This was his life and there was no going back now. “You got it, boss.”