

Two gunshots make holes in the door and send the officers scrambling. A third from a smaller caliber, then a response from one of the previous firearm. I don't hear the desk sergeant's body hit the ground, but I doubt they settled for a debilitating shot.

"What's going on?" an officer asks, crouched behind a desk, firearm in hand.

"Unknown." I pull Alex up and to the side. "Two assailants armed with Lar Grizzlys."

"What's that?" she asks.

".44 ammunition."

"Makes big holes," Alex says. "Dressed in expensive suits."

"Are there any important witness or prisoners that would justify sending in professionals?" I ask before Alex says anything more. The confusion plays in our favor, so now is not the time to draw anymore attention to ourselves than our suits do. Let the officers here make assumptions, rather than question what we claim.

"Not that I know of," she replied.

"We have some businessman in the back," the woman a desk behind her says. "Didn't catch what he's here for, but a couple of your colleagues got here not long ago for him."

"We'll go check in with—"

Rapid fire shreds the doors and the officers who hadn't remained down were sent there with clouds of blood.

"They aren't kidding around, are they?" Alex asks.

Some officer return fire as I urge him along the wall. The most likely scenario is that there were more of them waiting outside. Less likely, but possible, is that they had rapid fire handguns hidden on their person. The former increases the chaos, but also raised the danger of being caught by a stray bullet. The latter means it will be quickly resolved and leave us to explain ourselves to both a pair of FBI agents and a precinct full of police officer amped up on adrenaline.

Either means we need to hurry.

We are halfway when they burst in under the cover of machine gun fire. The first two go down from the return fire, but that allows four to get behind desks. Then I focus ahead of us again. We reach the back of the room, only to have three officers just and point their firearms at us.

"We're not with them," Alex states.

I show my hands. "Our weapons are holstered. Agents Malcolm and Frederick. We received intel someone planned on silencing the witness you have and were sent to inform the agents already here."

"I thought the guy was here about some corporate fraud or something."

"Would we be here if it was just fraud?" Alex says.

So much for his promise to remain silent. At least the officers are too distracted to question his statement.

"He's in three," the officer next to him says. "I don't know if they'll still be there, but Carlton grabs a few guys before the gunfire started."

"Good. Keep anyone from reaching us. There's an exit at the back?"

"Yes. One of them can swipe their ID to unlock it."

I urge Alex forward again, and we make it to the door leading to the interrogation room. I pull it open and we go in. Bullets destroy the top as it closes. Rooms one and two

are on the left and right.

“Don’t move,” someone orders ahead as we turn the corner, and four officers are blocking the way, their backs to us.

“Lower your weapons,” a woman orders in response. “This witness is under our protection.”

“We have orders to keep you here,” the man states.

“Which one of your is Carlton?” I ask, standing. The FBI agents are standing before Edwardo Aleman, guns in hand, but aimed at the floor, unlike the police officers, who all have theirs pointed at the three.

The man at the front looks over his shoulder. “You Malcolm?”

“Agent Frederick. There’s been a miscommunication. As you can hear, the danger is in the bullpen at the moment.”

“I was told these two were moles here to kidnap your witness.”

“As I said, miscommunication. I need you to go provide support to your colleagues while we assist ours. We’ll also need one of your IDs to let us out the back.”

“That’s against procedures,” Carlton says, motioning for the others to lower their weapons.

“I think you’ll agree the current situation doesn’t allow for procedures to be followed.”

“Fine. You three go and help the others. I’ll stay and unlock the door. Sorry, but we don’t hand out our IDs.”

There are protests, but eventually is it only the six of us.

“What is going on?” the lead FBI agent asks, not put at ease as much as I’d expect on seeing support. Behind them, Edwardo Aleman shows no signs of worry at seeing us again.

“We received credible information that a group was hired to eliminate your witness, and we were sent to inform you and provide support if required.”

“Didn’t anyone think of calling us?” her partner asks.

“Part of the information included that our communication lines had been compromised. We’ll escort you back to the head office.”

“Not so fast,” she says, raising a hand to stop me from advancing. “Frederick, you said your name is?”

“Charles Frederick.”

She looks at her partner, who shakes his head.

“Neither of us knows you, and if we can trust any call we place, that means we can’t confirm who you are. I appreciate the help you’re offering, but our prime concern is the safety of our witness. So what we’re going to do is that this officer is going to go open the door for us and we’ll exit while you make sure no one follows.”

Carlton looks to me, and I nod and the two FBI move out of the way, pressing Aleman against the wall as they keep themselves between him and the officer. She looks at us while her partner keeps an eye on Carlton.

“I think it’s best if we stay together,” I say. “There is no telling how many they have. They might be surrounding the precinct.”

“And if that’s the case, I’ll be sure to howler for your help. But until then, I’m not risking his safety on two men I don’t know.”

Behind her, Aleman grins at us. His expression is pure victory. He will escape us again, and he is gloating about it silently.

I keep press down on my boxes to keep them silent. Aleman is attempting to goad us into doing something that will result in us getting shot. Then he can hand over a portion of his empire to the FBI and return to running the trafficking—

The gunshot is followed by blood exploding at the back of Aleman's head and her stunned expression. Our course now committed, I pull the Glock out and shoot her in the leg, then her partner as he turns.

"He was about to get away," Alex says through clenched teeth, gun still pointed where Aleman's head had been.

I take the Glock out of her hand as she struggles to raise it through the pain and shock. Then do the same with her partner.

The second gunshot is followed by a gun clattering to the floor and the officer falling back against the wall, hand to his shoulder.

"Go make sure you didn't hit anything vital," I tell Alex as I pat her down and take her phones and the Glock in her ankle holster away. When I move to her partner, he attempts to punch me. I punch him back hard enough he loses consciousness from the impact. His backup firearm is a Smith and Wesson in a holster at the small of his back and he only has one phone.

She says nothing as I check his injury. The bullet went through cleanly. She is studying me. Memorizing my features. I cut his pant leg and use that to bandage the wound. The only expression on her face as I do the same for her gunshot is determination. Alex killed the person she thought would help them bring down the trafficking ring. As far as she's concern, we have ensured countless women, men, and children would keep being abused.

She will not let us disappear.

"He's fine," Alex says, and her head snaps in his direction. "I screwed things up, didn't I?" she will make sure both our descriptions are on the records. I doubt she will drop this, no matter how often Alex or Asyr make them disappear.

"Your actions have complicated our plans, but I think it might have been the best course. Having to pry him out from deeper within the FBI would have resulted in a level of chaos I don't think either one of us wants to deal with."

I grab her and her partner and deposit them in the interrogation room. After I take the officer's keys, Carlton joins them. We will need the time the chaos of the shootout gives us.

Because once she has access to a phone, our lives will become extremely complicated.

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