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Dale Mayer



TERK'S GUARDIANS

LEGEND 02

LEGEND

Terk's Guardians Book 2

Dale Mayer

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Books in This Series:

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About This Book

When Legend sees his political war-mongering father heading in a direction Legend can't agree with, he walks, but walking away from his little brother Larry, can't happen. He is special in so many ways—even Clary, who helped him many times, agrees. When intel of a government uprising is confirmed, Legend swoops in to remove Larry from the danger zone. How can Legend leave behind his brother's tutor either ...

Blair has been looking after Larry for years and had expected her presence to continue for much longer, but, when Legend races in, barking orders to leave, her calm future is in sudden jeopardy. Nothing is easy or calm when Legend is around her.

As the coup fails, Legend's simple escape plan deteriorates quickly. Larry's existence is suddenly a prize for cohorts, who haven't been people who are looking for a quick escape route too. Not that Blair would let anything hurt her charge—even if it means dealing with and cooperating with the irritating Legend.

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About This Book

When Legend sees his political war-mongering father heading in a direction Legend can't agree with, he walks, but walking away from his little brother, Larry, can't happen. He is special in so many ways—even Clary, who has helped him many times, agrees. When intel of a government uprising is confirmed, Legend swoops in to remove Larry from the danger zone. It's not like Legend can leave behind his brother's tutor either ...

Blair has been looking after Larry for years and had expected her position to continue for much longer, but, when Legend races in, barking orders to leave, her calm future is in sudden jeopardy. Nothing is easy or calm about Legend when he's around her.

As the coup fails, Legend's simple escape plan deteriorates quickly, and Larry's existence is suddenly a prize for cohorts, who haven't been paid and who are looking for a quick escape route too. Not that Blair would let anyone hurt her charge—even if it means dealing with and cooperating with the very irritating Legend.

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PROLOGUE

TERK SAT AT the massive table, but the team was already trying to figure out how much bigger to make this seating arrangement. Terk stared at them. “Can you imagine that we would need something even bigger than what’s there? There’s already, what? Sixteen of us?”

“That’s not something I thought would happen,” Gage replied. “Not for a while, not so soon.”

“Right.” Terk smiled. “The thing is, we’ve done very well.”

“What about Radar?”

“Well, ... Radar will be coming on when he’s ready. He needs more training,” Terk noted, “but that will be true for anybody who isn’t in on this already.”

“Right. So we’ll need to potentially have somebody else coming on to help out. What about Riff?”

“Riff is a world unto himself,” Terk noted. “He did a great job of coming out and being in the right spot at the right time.”

“What about the woman who called you? Did she call back?”

“The sister to Riff’s dead fiancée? She only phoned once,” he said. “I suspect she’ll be here soon enough, whether we like it or not.”

“Her energy is strong, isn’t it?”

“Absolutely, but when she does get here, she’ll be a force we’ll have to deal with.”

“And dealing with her won’t be easy, especially if she’s set on helping Riff with his problem.”

“Riff will be in and out, at least for the next little while anyway,” Gage shared. “He’s got a lead on something, but he’ll be back. So, if we need him on the next job, we just have to tag him, and he’ll show up.”

“He seems to do that a lot, doesn’t he? Come and go, I mean.”

“It’s part of who he is, but, at the same time, he’s somebody we can’t desperately need to call on when we have problems.”

“What about the billing aspect of this first MI6 job?” Celia asked
joined Terk at the table. “What did Jonas do with that?”

“Not only did we get a bonus for saving the government agency
because of the double bombings and the other aspects that went into
_____ were outside the scope of the original assignment, our expenses
completely covered. Plus we got an extra 17 percent on top of a
figure out according to the calculations I worked out. They didn’t even quibble
e table. added.

1 this?? “Does that make you wonder if you’ve charged enough?” she asked
teasing voice.

At least “Of course it does.” He gave his wife a smirk. “I tossed it back at
with Ice, and she confirmed that it was a really nicely paid job and to
we do everything we can to keep MI6 in our pocket because that level
doesn’t come by all the time.”

a bit of “No, and that’ll be something we want to encourage then,” Celia
ur team “because we’re running through the cash pretty quickly, especially in
saving for our own satellite.”

n board “That is an understatement,” Terk replied. “As we start trying to get
of these higher-level things in place, we’ll need to set up some committees
helping budgeting.”

“Exactly, and there’ll be an awful lot of people here, depending
time frame that’s needed just to get that satellite.”

l. “And “Also”—Terk eyed the twin sisters with their special healing abilities
heading toward the big dining table—“when Sammy gets here, she
injured.”

have to At that, both sisters nodded. “Yes, we’ve already been working on
injuries,” Cara shared. “That deepest cut is pretty well healed and she
helping good to go. With this many people going back and forth all the time
energies could get split up pretty easily.”

,” Terk “You can’t wear yourselves down either,” Terk warned, looking at
ed him quite sternly.

They just smiled. Clary replied, “You also know that healing other
us heal ourselves, so that’s not really anything to worry about.”

ody we “Maybe not,” he conceded, “but apparently I’m worrying enough
of you.” He pointed at their obviously pregnant states.

The twins burst out laughing at that. “Maybe,” Cara admitted, “but

, as she knew you would be such a worrisome dad.”

“I didn’t even think I could be,” Terk admitted, with a headshaking but, this whole scenario has absolutely blown me away.”

“All of us, actually,” Celia noted, with a gentle smile for her husband. “But, as long as we don’t have any other jobs at the moment, we should all be good.”

Just then Terk’s phone rang. He looked down at it and frowned. “Here.” The voice at the other end was one he knew but from a long time past. “Jeremy, what the hell?” At the sound of an old friend, Terk smiled into the phone. “What’s up? ... What do you mean?” he asked, listening to the other end ramble. “Hang on, hang on. Let me put this on Speakerphone, so the team can hear.”

“You have a team?” Jeremy asked, with audible relief. “I heard you were done with the CIA.”

“Yeah, but we’ve set up in the private sector.”

“Thank God for that,” he said. “As you well know, I’m still in the black ops business, but two of our teams have been taken, and we need to do a reconnaissance mission. I’m presuming you can still stay where you’re going for that.”

“I don’t know whether we can or not. You’ll have to give us a whole lot more information than that. And, if we have to send somebody, we’ll need somebody. I do have some available people on our team who could be added, yet frowning as he looked around at everybody.

“I have one man in particular I need to bring back,” Jeremy stated. “He’s injured, and I can tell you that he’s damn good at what he does, and he took a blast, and I’m not sure what kind of ... it’s somebody you know could be ...”

“Yeah, who’s that?”

“Legend. The last we heard, he was attacked, and, after that, we lost contact. We don’t know if he’s alive or dead.”

“Holy shit.” Terk pinched the bridge of his nose. “He was unparalel to his field.”

“Yeah, and he has some of that weird stuff that you do, but we’ve lost communication from him. So, if you have any way of tracking where he is, just give us a location, so we can retrieve him. I really want to get him back again.”

“Why is that?” Terk asked, hating the suspicion evident in his tone.

will likely need to be involved.”

e. “Yet Jeremy frowned and then said, “You might as well know it all. wondering if he was involved right from the beginning. As in for the usband.side. Others are grumbling about treason, but I don’t want to believe it could be “Absolutely no way,” Terk declared.

“Good,” Jeremy replied, “then prove it. We’re hiring you and you . “Terkto get him and maybe, if needed, to prove that he’s innocent l ne ago.otherwise, as far as we can tell, that best friend of yours is guilty as hel into the Jeremy rest of

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will likely need to be involved.”

Jeremy frowned and then said, “You might as well know it all. We’re wondering if he was involved right from the beginning. As in for the wrong side. Others are grumbling about treason, but I don’t want to believe it ...”

“Absolutely no way,” Terk declared.

“Good,” Jeremy replied, “then prove it. We’re hiring you and your team to get him and maybe, if needed, to prove that he’s innocent because otherwise, as far as we can tell, that best friend of yours is guilty as hell.”

CHAPTER 1

T_{ERKEL?}

A forceful notice slammed into Terkel's brain. He straightened, dropped the stack of papers in his hands and looking around. "Clary?" There was no sign of her. Of course not. She wasn't in England.

Yes, it's me.

"What's the matter?" Terk asked out loud. Celia, sitting at his side and looking over more stacks of papers, looked over at him, one eyebrow raised. Terk shook his head to let her know that it didn't involve her—at least he didn't think so.

No, it doesn't, Clary confirmed, able to follow his thoughts, *but we do have a problem.*

"We?"

She hesitated. *Well, I would say I have a problem. However, as I'm a part of a team,* she explained, her tone hardening, *I'll assume—and risk it—so, I think—that we have a problem.*

Terk nodded. "Fair enough. What's the problem?" He could almost feel some of her tension relaxing. "Does Brody know?"

No, ... and I would just as soon he didn't.

At that, Brody broke into the conversation. *Well, that's just too bad,* he snapped in Terkel's head.

Clary groaned. *It would help a lot if you wouldn't interrupt my conversations that were not your own.*

Then pick another damn frequency, Brody declared, his tone equaling Clary's. *You do remember this is the distress call signal?*

There was a moment of silence between the newlyweds.

Terkel gently slid his fingers through Celia's, as she telepathically joined in on the conversation too.

Clary groaned. *Damn. Fine. My bad. Still, I want it known that it doesn't involve you, Brody.*

If you've got a problem, it involves me, Brody stated. *You were supposed to go for a quick visit to check up on this patient of yours. What happened?*

What do you mean, what happened? Clary asked, her tone agitated, realizing she would have to involve him after all.

Terkel tried to pour oil onto troubled waters. "We are a team, Clary, that includes Brody."

"Yes, and he's not up to full strength, but he'll still want to come dropping over here to bail me out."

At that, Terkel winced because he already heard Brody's roar through his brain. "Brody, shut it down," Terk said, turning and seeing the wide-eyed Celia's face. "Remember how this is the distress line. Everybody's slammed with that outcry of yours."

After several moments of harsh breathing, Brody finally relented. His tone backed down a few notches.

That's not helpful, Brody, Clary noted, her tone soft. *That's one of the reasons I didn't want to tell you.*

"Are you hurt? Are you in danger?" Terkel asked, before Brody could answer.

She hesitated, then said, *Not hurt. Don't think I'm in danger.*

That's not a no, Brody snapped.

No, it sure isn't. Clary hesitated again. *No, I'm pretty sure he would have told me.*

"And again," Terkel added, his voice calm but curious, "that's not how things in our world can just as quickly turn very ugly, so you may be in danger. Why don't you start at the beginning and let us know what is going on?"

She began with a warning, *Brody has to stay calm.*

Terkel's lips twitched. "Yeah, well, Brody has a bit of a volcanic temper when it comes to you, so, Brody, you'll do your best to stay calm for us, you?"

Of course, he bit off.

At that, Terk caught Celia's big grin. He rolled his eyes at her.

Clary. We just need some details. Then maybe we can do some research to see what's going on."

I came to see little Larry, she replied. *Remember? He was one of my previous patients. At four years old, I helped bring him back from the*

opposed death, and that was a good five to six years ago.

ned? “And?” Terk prodded.

*grieved, So I came for his checkup, gave him another dose of healing to help
for a while, and he is holding. That’s the good news, she confirmed, y
ry, and an anxious tone.*

“But?” Terk asked.

*re racing But something is going on in his psyche, and I think it’s coming
somebody else. Maybe something to do with his father.*

ugh his “Explain.”

*ince on His father is a Kazak national, living with Larry in Azerbaij
getting explained. Although I’m not there. Not yet. I was in France with a
patient. However, I flew back to Larry. The car will drop me off in ju
1. Fine minutes. I’m ... I’m feeling hooks, some serious energy coming fr
direction.*

*re of the “Go on,” Terkel said, continuing in the same calm vein. “Why do
involve us?”*

*er had a Because I believe that the father has enemies who are trying to k
son ill, through energy negativity.*

“When you say negativity, what does that mean to you?”

*I think somebody, like us, is using it to harm and to cause chaos
n’t hurt of good.*

*“Well, for whatever light is out there, we also know there is dark
ot a no. Terkel noted, “so that’s possible, but again, if this has something to c
y be in us, why?”*

*s going Because his father is suddenly aware that maybe something is go
with his son, and he’s asked me if there’s something I can do to stave
attack.*

temper “What kind of an attack?”

*, won’t I think energy-related, but I’m not sure, Clary replied, her voice
confidence as she spoke and described it. I think there’ll be a kidn
attempt, and I think that this energy will be used to help them. Whe
“Look, them, I mean whoever is involved in this attack will stay under c
rch and darkness and will spirit the boy away.*

“And will that kill him?” Terk asked.

*re of my No, he’s been functioning on his own just fine for quite a few
edge of However, I’m seeing something wrong in his energy. I just can’t*

describe what I'm seeing because I haven't had enough time yet to investigate. But I am certain that it's not good, she added for emphasis

old him "Okay, but you're thinking this is involved with whatever the attack is in an *I think so, but I can't be sure,* she murmured.

Terkel went silent for a moment. "What does the father say?"

He says the budget is unlimited, she repeated in a dry tone.

ing from At that, Tasha spoke up. "Good, that one's for us then," she said. "We're bleeding money at an incredible rate, trying to get everything. So the answer is absolutely yes. We can help."

an, she "But can we?" Terkel asked. "Stepping up and helping is one thing; *another* have no problem doing that, but we have to know that we can actually *st a few* some good here."

om his At that, Brody, his voice now somewhat calmer, asked, *How imminent you think this attack is?*

oes this When Clary hesitated, Terkel knew another blowup was coming. *he said* in a warning tone of voice.

leep his He sighed. *I'm listening, and I won't blow up.*

Well, you probably will, Clary noted quietly, *because I suspect it's the next forty-eight hours.*

instead Come home, Brody demanded.

Well, coming home doesn't save this little boy, and he's ... I don't know," how to explain it, *but I think Terkel would understand.*

do with "I do understand," Terk replied. "If they kill Larry, you're connected to him, aren't you, Clary?"

oing on Yes, she agreed, her voice faint. *Can I disconnect? Well, that is possible, but I just don't know how hard it'll be or how dangerous, for Larry or me.*

"It'll be very dangerous," Terkel stated, "particularly if this boy—what, ten or so now?—if he is connected to you or if you are connected to him to the depths of the edge of death."

rapping Yes, *he's definitely connected to me,* she said, her voice catching on *n I say* *We've been very close ever since.*

over of "Of course you have," Terk muttered, his voice softening. "As long as somebody you love is in danger."

What about somebody I love? Brody snapped. *Because what's the point of saying is, if that boy dies, I'll lose her too, aren't you?*

t really *Maybe not in the sense that you're thinking of it,* Clary added,

... really possible that I could lose myself to the ethers, caught between here and
... and/or possibly dead.

... k is?" In that case, Tasha joined in telepathically, her voice calm, *th*
underlines why we're doing this. We are a team, and we protect our ov

Terkel nodded absentmindedly, but his mind was already consider
logistics.

bluntly. *When the father says unlimited, he means unlimited. This is his i*
set up. son, Clary shared. *There's also another element.*

At that, Terkel winced. "There's always another element, it seems.

g, and I *He has a bastard son.*

y enact "Okay, and that's an issue, why?"

Because I think he has a lot of energy skills as well.

ment do "Now that's also interesting, but he's an issue, why?"

I'm not sure he is an issue. I just can't get a read on him. It's a
Brody, energy is completely locked down, and I can't tell one way or the other
on our side or throwing in with the other side. It could be his energy
causing the problem with Larry.

ll be in "Is anybody there you would consider an enemy?"

Somebody else is around Larry, and I'm not sure if she's an ene
not often that I meet people I can't read, but Blair is definitely one of t

't know "What's her relationship to the little boy?"

She's his nanny.

ected to "Okay, and do you see a love connection?"

Absolutely. Larry is very attached to her, and then, of course, as sc
ossible, got there, that opened to include me. It's not that it wasn't there t
for me. with. It just was under cover. Well, under the cover of energy, yes, she
-who is with a half laugh. Do you realize how absolutely bizarre it is to even
ected to you about this?

"And yet it's a blessing that we are here and that we can talk ab
n a sob. Terk reminded her.

I'm working on that reminder, she admitted. So his father is reques
rd now is planning on requesting, so I mean it shouldn't come through me, b
assistance ...

you're "What is it he's requesting?"

That we keep the boy safe.

but it's "We don't do security work," he reminded her. "At least not boc

d there, level.”

*I’m not sure that this is security that anybody else can do, Clary
that just This is definitely a case of somebody having an advantage here and u
vn. it to possibly hurt this little boy.*

ing the There was silence on the channel, and then Terkel said, “Brody?”

I’m going. I’ve already packed my bag. Such a note of finality fi
beloved tone that there was absolutely no point in arguing.

“Your job ...”

” *Is to protect Clary,* Brody stated. At that, he spoke to his wife.
*what’s the name of this man, this bastard son? Have you got any idea
going on with him?*

Only that there is some level of familiarity, Clary replied, *and I onl
his first name.*

is if his *What is it?*

r if he’s *Legend. His name is Legend.*

at play At that, Terkel closed his eyes, but a smile played around the cc
his lips. *Damn. Now that couldn’t be a coincidence.*

Seriously? Is Legend involved in this? Brody asked in shock.

my. It’s *Clary spoke up, Who is Legend?*

hem. *Legend is, ... well, Legend.*

Do you know him? Clary asked Brody. *I didn’t say he was in
involved. I just said that he’s a man of power somewhere in the picture
just don’t know how, where, or what.*

son as I At that comment came a call on Terkel’s phone. He looked down a
o began started to laugh. “I don’t know whether it’s your boy’s father or so
added, else,” Terk told them all, “but I’m getting a call, so give me a minute.
talk to he quickly disconnected from their telepathic distress channel.

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level.”

I’m not sure that this is security that anybody else can do, Clary noted. This is definitely a case of somebody having an advantage here and utilizing it to possibly hurt this little boy.

There was silence on the channel, and then Terkel said, “Brody?”

I’m going. I’ve already packed my bag. Such a note of finality filled his tone that there was absolutely no point in arguing.

“Your job ...”

Is to protect Clary, Brody stated. At that, he spoke to his wife. Clary, what’s the name of this man, this bastard son? Have you got any idea what’s going on with him?

Only that there is some level of familiarity, Clary replied, and I only know his first name.

What is it?

Legend. His name is Legend.

At that, Terkel closed his eyes, but a smile played around the corner of his lips. *Damn. Now that couldn’t be a coincidence.*

Seriously? Is Legend involved in this? Brody asked in shock.

Clary spoke up, *Who is Legend?*

Legend is, ... well, Legend.

Do you know him? Clary asked Brody. *I didn’t say he was involved, involved. I just said that he’s a man of power somewhere in the picture, and I just don’t know how, where, or what.*

At that comment came a call on Terkel’s phone. He looked down at it and started to laugh. “I don’t know whether it’s your boy’s father or someone else,” Terk told them all, “but I’m getting a call, so give me a minute.” Then he quickly disconnected from their telepathic distress channel.

CHAPTER 2

LEGEND STARED DOWN at his damn phone. Terk was always busy. Son almost impossible to get through to. As if on purpose. “Answer, will he muttered in frustration. But instead, Terkel’s voice slammed into his ear. *Well, I would, but maybe you should be answering your own calls.*

Legend shifted in his armchair and stared up at the ceiling. “I always have to be unconventional?” he called out to the empty room.

It saves time and energy.

“This takes a lot of energy,” Legend snapped. Still he laid his head against one of the high wingbacks and smiled. There was none like Never would be anyone again.

Terkel laughed. *Well, it does require lots of energy, unless you let to portion it off.*

“Yeah, well, I’ve never been very good at that.”

No, you and Brody have always been more like steamrollers when to energy.

“Brody? As in the Brody I know?”

Yeah, that Brody.

“Well, shit. I would ask you all kinds of good questions about his few other people we know in common,” he began, “but I don’t have I’ve got a problem.”

Yeah, you do. Your little half-brother Larry is in trouble.

There was shock on the other end. “What the hell?” he snapped.

Clary, Terkel stated carefully, is part of my team.

After another moment of absolute shock, Legend started to laugh. the hell? Of course she is. Jesus Christ, is she really as good as my says?”

Ah, yeah, every bit and more, Terk confirmed, and, yes, she brought little brother back from death some five years or so ago.

“Good God,” Legend muttered, shaking his head at the thought of how you hear about something like that, and, being an energy person myself, you wonder just how far we can take this, but I just had no ... his voice dropped off. He shook his head, as he continued to stare at the ceiling. “So, where do we stand?”

“That’s a good question,” Terkel noted. *I gather you also have problems sometimes* “My father has made a lot of enemies,” Legend said, his voice dropping. “I’ve done a lot to stay out of the problems, but, once it involved Larry’s brain, it became a whole different story.”

I understand, Terkel replied. *Larry’s been through a lot.* “He’s been through too damn much. The kid just wants to have a life, but it seems impossible to give it to him.”

How is his health now? “Perfect. I mean, whatever Clary did, or is doing, seems to be one of those magic potions,” he muttered. “I just wish I understood from what he was doing it.”

I already told you, Terkel reminded him. “Yeah, I know. I’m still getting my brain wrapped around it though. My father is very involved in politics and the government—and not necessarily the current government,” he snapped.

At that, Terkel winced. *Right, so he’s made some powerful enemies which legally are probably in the right.* More silence then Legend said, “As much as anybody over here, the current government is in the right, but yes. According to the existing laws, that be, whatever my father is doing is getting him and the family in a bit of shit.”

Anybody else in the family? “No, not alive anymore. Both my mother, whom he never married, and his first wife passed away several years ago. His second wife walked away, and, when Larry got so sick, his third wife committed suicide.” Now there was silence on the other end of his brain.

So, this little boy’s been to hell and back. So, what is it you think you need?

“I need backup and help. I wasn’t necessarily thinking of strong-arm people, but potentially ...”

How are your skills? Terkel asked, only half curious, suspecting

“You knew the answer.”

“Top-notch of course,” Legend stated. “Knowing where my interests lie, I can always be a target so can’t let my guard down—even at my own team. Once people find out the familial connection, it will be shown. So, most people don’t know, and I like to keep it that way.”

Are you close to your father?

“Hell no, not after my mother passed away, especially since I suspect it was because of him. I don’t have time for that kind of emotional turmoil, and, while the world’s gone to hell in a handbasket, I’m just on my part to stay sane and to keep little Larry safe. But I also work, so when this came up suddenly, when I wasn’t expecting it. You may have heard rumors already, of my capture and escape. Neither is true. I just need to get free and to get to Larry without encumbrances. Whether we survive or we kill ourselves off in the next Ice Age, I don’t know.”

Sounds like that Ice Age is coming a whole lot faster than we expected.

“Whatever it is, there sure as hell is something going on here. My eyes are up-to-date. I’m just not sure how many people I’m up against, and if Clary is one of yours ...”

Clary is definitely one of mine, and her partner is on the way to you now to help her, as well as to help you.

There was a moment of shock, as images filtered through Legend’s mind and then he laughed. “Good God, Brody married to Clary? Bullshit.”

Yeah, and believe me, they make a heck of a pair.

“Well, Clary’s never struck me as a pushover,” Legend shared, “but not the few times I’ve met her. But couldn’t Brody stay where you can help out?”

No way you’ll keep Brody from Clary right now, Terkel noted.

“Fine,” Legend replied in resignation. “I’m not too sure just what’s going on here, so he’s walking into an ugly situation.”

He’s used to that, and we’re always on the ready and available to help him out.

“Does that help extend to me?”

If you need it, yes. I’ve been trying to get you to come work for us a long time.

“Yeah, about that. I’ll never be government material,” he admitted. “I know that.”

No, but what you should probably know is that we're private now.
father's "You're what?" Now that was a shock. He'd been concerned then with was government in the first place but yet felt it was okay in some way a shit Legend couldn't explain.

Yeah, it's a long story that I don't have time to share right now but I'll obviously need to jump in on this case, but, if we help you, I hope I can highly consider coming to work for me here.

notional "Well shit," Legend muttered, finding all his former arguments not doing the same merit as they would have had before.

some of "We'll talk about it later," Terkel said. *Right now, you've got some heard problems.*

d to get "Yes, I've got to get Larry out of here."

this or "What about his nurse?" Terkel asked. *Or babysitter, or nanny, or who she is?*

it. At that, Legend's voice changed. "Yeah, then there's *her*," he said. *My skillstone suddenly hard.*

I can't "What does that mean?"

"I don't know exactly what role she's playing here. I don't really know anything about this. As far as I know, she's yet another innocent who's crushed by my father's politics," Legend muttered. Yet he also knew about her than he should. At least his heart did. He'd taken a short walk in that direction—enough to know the sweetest of kisses and so much awaited but also knowing his brother needed Blair at such a deep level that at least Legend had chosen to back off. In the ensuing years she'd been sniping at him ever since. He understood but remained adamant.

Well, you might want to consider that she may need a quick exit too.
"Right, so now we're running a nanny service, are we?" He said that because no way would he leave her behind regardless. She likely had no idea what was going on right now either. He hadn't told her, and no way his help would have either.

It's not like you to leave her behind anyway.

"I wasn't planning on it," he replied in disgust. "But she ..."

is for a "She what?"

"She irritates the hell out of me," he snapped. That much was true. "You then he added, "Tell Brody to get in contact when he lands in Azerb

don't want him coming to the house unannounced. He's likely to get at TerkAnd, with that, Legend disconnected from Terkel.

ray that Legend stared out the window for a long moment, then shook his

“Well, hell.” On the inside though, he felt a measurable chill. It was or because to deal with all the shit going on alone, and he would handle it because you'll way he wouldn't handle it, but to know that Clary was part of Terkel

was huge. Now he really wanted to pick her brain about how that had without about and what the hell she was doing with Larry, and for him, that conversation would have to wait.

enough Whether she knew that Brody was on his way or not, she needed to more problems were going on than she actually understood, and would have to be the one to tell her. On that note he got up and headed hatever the other room, looking for her.

As he walked into the playroom, where Larry liked to hang out during aid, his day, Legend found it completely empty. Frowning, he stepped forward, looked out over the gardens but still no sign of Larry. Legend closed his eyes and sent out a probe, something that he'd managed to do quite a few years ago since he had learned to lock down his own energy. He noted energy around the room, but only one source coming from Larry's bedroom. With that, he turned on his heel and went more to confirm that the little boy was okay.

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BLAIR LOOKED UP at Legend's sudden arrival and glared. “According to Kartal, you're not welcome here.” Legend didn't even give her a glance. She stepped up beside her charge.

Larry reached out a hand and squeezed her fingers, adding, “It's fine.” Legend looked up at Legend. “Is it time?”

Legend's eyebrows shot up. “Time for what?”

“To leave,” Larry said simply.

Legend glanced over at Clary, who stood quietly on the other side of the room, studying him with a knowing look. He shrugged.

“It's obvious something's going on,” Clary noted. “Now, seeing that it means trouble.”

t shot.” Legend sighed. “We have some visitors coming. I was hoping until they arrived, but maybe it’s better if we leave now.” He asked s head. “How close is Brody?”

ie thing She winced. “Brody should be here fairly quickly,” she noted, with ause noroll.

’s team “Of course he will.”

d come Clary looked down at Larry, ignoring Legend. “Maybe we should g out thatyou a bag.”

“That’s a good idea,” Larry agreed but turned to Blair. “Do you o knowdo my clothes? I’ll pack up my school books instead.”

Legend At that, knowing she’d been dismissed but unsure why Lege led intoinvolved, Blair turned and headed to Larry’s closet. She quickly too suitcase and started packing several outfits.

ring the “Cut it in half,” Legend said from the doorway. “Backpacks only. ard andknow how hard our run will be.”

his eyes She stiffened and turned to face him. She masked her expression v timesand nodded.

id more Legend walked to the closet, pulled out a large backpack, and n a fast“Something like this will work.”

She didn’t say a word because there was absolutely no point in v the energy. When Legend spoke, he tended to expect everybody t instead of asking how high, not even bothering to be polite, presumi would be told what they needed on the way. She didn’t do so well w regimented attitude, but her job meant following orders, so she packe to Mr. would be clothes for a week, surprised at how quickly the rucksack di worthy up. “It’s surprisingly large,” she muttered, but Legend was not bothere

ne.” He “He’s a little boy. His clothes are small.”

She nodded, then went over and grabbed his chargers and packed t for his tablet and his phone.

At that, Legend said, “Phone only.”

e of the “He uses his tablet for a lot of his schoolwork.”

Legend hesitated, then nodded. “Fine.”

you, ... Then she went into the bathroom, grabbed the basics for his p hygiene—toothbrush, toothpaste. When she came back out again, the t still surprisingly empty. She grabbed the book that he had been read looked around. “Is he allowed a second rucksack for his schoolwork?”

to wait At that, Legend nodded. “School is important to him, isn’t it?”
l Clary, “He lost a lot of time,” she replied smoothly. “So, he’s been worki
to catch up again.”

i an eye “In four years he hasn’t caught up?” he asked.

 “He has caught up and exceeded,” she proudly admitted, “but he
appreciate it if I tell you that.”

go pack “Why?”

 “His father doesn’t look at his educational aspirations with any fon
want toshe murmured, “and, of course, there’s always the chance that yo
tattle.”

nd was At that, his gaze narrowed, and his lips thinned.

k out a She gave him a sunny smile. “You did once.”

 “Hardly. That was different, and you know it.”

I don’t She shrugged. “Not to him.” Okay, so maybe not quite true, but
 had told Larry’s father that Blair was too interested in Larry and th
quicklygotten her a dressing down from Mr. Kartal, blaming her for keeping
away from him. It was partly true, but Blair and Legend had made a d
noted,to not move forward with a relationship for Larry’s sake.

 It had hurt at the time, but every time since it had been worse. It
wastinghave gotten easier over time, but it hadn’t. She tended to get snip
o jumpirritated when Legend was around. Not because of what he’d reporte
ng theyfather—which she couldn’t trust his version of the truth either—but l
ith thatshe still cared for Legend and knew that he cared for her too. And th
ed whather off. Big-time.

dn’t fill She walked back out to the classroom that they used for his studies
d. Larry standing there, with a stack of books essentially too big for his b

 “There’s a little bit of room in this one,” Blair offered.

hem up Larry saw that and grinned, quickly stuffing the rest of his books
making sure his tablet was in there. “Did you get my charger?” he
impatiently.

 “Yes, and seven days of clothes, but ...” She quickly reme
something and raced back into his bedroom, grabbed his favorite p
ersonaland returned to the classroom, where she stuffed the PJs into the bag a

oag was Clary looked over at her. “You’ve probably got about thirty mir
ing andgrab your stuff.” Clary’s tone was plain and final.

 “You too?” Blair asked Clary.

“Yes, I’m doing the same.”

Leaving Larry with Legend, the two women split. Blair headed to her room, where she probably had more than a backpack full but knew she would leave behind the rest. She didn’t bring much in the way of clothing, and she won’t kept to more of a uniform attire every day. Then, on the weekends, when she was supposedly allowed free time, she didn’t actually get free time because she was looking after Larry all the time, so she preferred jeans.

She quickly packed her jeans and left the uniforms behind, realizing she would go home with almost nothing. Such a scarcity of any clothing was in her bag since she’d never added much to what she’d originally brought. Thus she left in, as long as she left behind the work clothing. With that out of the way, she quickly grabbed her chargers, her tablet, and her laptop, her bag now so full to the point that it would be hard to close.

Managing to get it closed, she headed back to the classroom and placed her bag to the other two sitting there on the floor. Clary’s was there in a matter of seconds of hers.

Blair turned, looked at Larry, ignoring Legend, and asked, “What’s your majesty now?” She was obviously referring to Legend.

Larry shrugged. “Legend says he’s waiting for somebody.”

“Of course he is.” At that, she turned, glared at Legend, and asked, “Has your friend contacted you yet?”

He shook his head. “Not yet.”

Blair eyed him, catching him wince, as something slammed into his back.

She looked over at Clary to see a smile sliding through her face. “Obviously, you guys know something I don’t,” Blair noted, “but I will arrange to get you some outerwear and shoes, just in case. Come on, Larry.” And, with that, she grabbed two of the backpacks, while Larry grabbed his schoolbooks, and slipped them into it, under the weight. She quickly traded him for the lighter pack, then she asked Larry to hand her schoolbooks over her shoulder, and said, “Let’s get shoes.”

“I guess we’re only bringing one pair of shoes,” Larry muttered, “I don’t have room for anything else.”

“I have a little more room in mine,” Clary offered behind them. Larry nodded, with a big smile.

Down at the front door, Blair opened the coat closet, grabbed her bag, and pulled out the only one she had brought with her, noting that Clary had grabbed

then Blair assessed the outerwear choices for Larry. He still got cold a lot, but she didn't know if they would spend much time outside.

However, Larry took the decision away from her by grabbing a jacket with sleeves and a lining that could be zipped out, if need be. It was when she could be very versatile. He put that over his arm, as he stared at the sneakers because "I'll take my sneakers," he announced, grabbing them. He sat on the bench seat and quickly put them on.

Blair watched his energy, but he constantly surprised her at how he handled different situations. She didn't understand in many ways, but it all fit meeting Clary, a lot of it had become more obvious. Clary stood at the doorway, and Legend was still in the middle of the great hall, waiting for the stuff to finish packing. Blair turned, looked from Clary to Legend, and said, "Which way?"

Legend pointed. "This way."

Clary rounded on him. "Not yet."

Blair sighed. "Anytime you two want to tell me what's going on, it says his be nice."

"We will," Clary replied, "just not yet."

And that was as good as it would get. Blair looked down at Larry as he tied off his shoes. Then he bounced to his feet and shouldered his backpack, then walked over to Legend and stood at his side.

Looking back at the women, Larry asked, "Are you guys coming?" Clary and Legend were both very important elements in his life, the only two women he had a serious relationship with, and, in both cases, each was warm, caring, and strong. Blair looked over at Clary, who was leaning against the door, and her look on her face was one of concentration. "How long?" Blair asked Clary.

She looked up, smiled, and replied, "Ten minutes."

"Ten minutes, okay then." Blair now sat on the entryway bench, rearranged a few items in the backpack she was carrying, and managed to find a heavier pair of shoes for Larry. He loved the ones that he had on, but they wouldn't hold up to heavy running. Then, if she had to carry these back to Larry, she wouldn't hold up all that long either. Though she had a few tricks up her sleeve to make that happen too. She walked over to Legend and handed him the spare backpack. He quickly picked it up, shouldered it, and she returned to her. He didn't have a bag of his own. "Do you not have any belongings here?" Blair asked. He shrugged. "Everything I need, I can pick up somewhere else."

lot, yet She nodded, then turned back to Clary, who was holding up one h
her fingers splayed, then folding down a thumb, the next finger, three
i jacketone, and the door opened silently beside her.

arm but The man who stepped in entered with such force, yet his movemen
closet.calm and subtle.

nearby Blair stared at him, then looked at Clary, who turned to her
chuckle.

well he “Right on time.”

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ie frontafter kissing her thoroughly, he kept her behind him and walked
them toLegend, where the two monster-men stood staring at each other, shari
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Blair’s jaw dropped, as she studied the silent war going on between

Clary smiled at Blair and explained, “It’s fine.” Then Clary turned
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“There’s no war,” Clary noted. “The conquest has already happen
7 to seehas his queen, and, as long as everybody else knows that, he’ll be fine.

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” Theythe show on the road.” Then, with a smile, she headed to the basem
he hadthat she already knew about. Everyone silently followed.

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She nodded, then turned back to Clary, who was holding up one hand, all her fingers splayed, then folding down a thumb, the next finger, three, two, one, and the door opened silently beside her.

The man who stepped in entered with such force, yet his movements were calm and subtle.

Blair stared at him, then looked at Clary, who turned to her with a chuckle.

“Right on time.”

The man strode to Clary, picked her up in his arms in a bear hug, and, after kissing her thoroughly, he kept her behind him and walked over to Legend, where the two monster-men stood staring at each other, sharing hard glances.

Blair’s jaw dropped, as she studied the silent war going on between them.

Clary smiled at Blair and explained, “It’s fine.” Then Clary turned to her husband. “He’s fine, Brody.”

Blair stared at both men, wide-eyed. “Sure it’s fine, as long as you’re okay with the war of the Titans.”

“There’s no war,” Clary noted. “The conquest has already happened. He has his queen, and, as long as everybody else knows that, he’ll be fine.”

With that, Blair understood what was going on and started to laugh. She walked past Legend, smacked him hard on the shoulder, and said, “Let’s get the show on the road.” Then, with a smile, she headed to the basement exit that she already knew about. Everyone silently followed.

They had yet to know that the current battle had just begun.

CHAPTER 3

BLAIR RACED DOWN the stairs, quickly being overtaken by Leger. He stopped to see that Larry was trying hard to keep up. He was right behind Clary and Brody. Blair hadn't had much chance to assess the man, but he kept very close to Clary. Blair smiled at Clary as they caught up. "How does it feel to be part of a strong-man competition?"

Clary rolled her eyes. "He's just protective, that's all," she muttered.

"You called me, saying you were in trouble," Brody declared. "What do you expect?"

"No, I called Terkel," she corrected, then smiled up at him, "but welcome to stay as long as you want."

"Why not call me directly?" he asked, looking at her in confusion.

"Because, if I'd called you, you would have been in much worse shape."

He sighed. "You're the only one who makes me turn stupid like this," he muttered.

"That's because you love me," she noted.

He gave a curt nod. "That I do." And he kissed her long and hard.

The exchange was sincere, passionate, and hot, and Blair was charmed. Legend was a man who could admit he was silly and sick with love over a good girl. Legend made him a great man in Blair's book.

As Blair caught up to Legend, he looked back at the pair and mumbled, "If you guys are done ..."

Clary chuckled. "Your time will come."

"Yeah, I can wait," Legend replied in exasperation. "Do we have a timeline, Clary?"

"Five minutes. I'm expecting them already."

"I passed one vehicle broken down on the road," Brody shared. "When I ditched my vehicle and hid it in the brush, I heard a fair bit of commotion soon afterward."

At that, Legend looked at him in surprise. "You passed them?"

He shrugged. "I might have."

Legend narrowed his gaze. "Might have?"

"Yes, might have," Brody growled. "It's not as if I've got any id
you're after or who's after you, potentially after all of us now."

"No, of course not," Legend agreed.

Knowing that something substantial was happening that nobo
id. She thought to let her in on, Blair walked over to Larry and asked him
between ready for this?"

but he He shrugged. "Why not? I mean, all I can do is die." Then he l
w does adding, "Again."

"Doesn't mean I can save you again," Clary declared, her tone fir
d. don't do anything foolish."

What did Blair looked back at Clary and admitted, "Larry's mentioned that
times."

you're Clary nodded. "Despite the fact that he knows he's not supposed t
faced Larry in warning, who, while abashed, still nodded.

"I'm sorry, Clary," he said. "It's just, well, it's a rather delicious st
rape."

and that puts a certain level of danger out there that we don't
Particularly for me."

"I get it," Larry agreed.

med. A "Well, if you got it," Legend snapped, "you wouldn't be saying it."
woman Immediately Larry's face fell.

declared. Blair looked over at Legend and frowned. "Stop picking on him,
declared.

uttered, Legend groaned. "Why is reminding him of this, *picking on him?*"

"Because it wasn't for you to do, and he'd already been corrected
explained in exasperation. "Better to let it go."

have a "Well, look at you, Miss Perfect, in the raising of kids. He needs t
get it, get it, and, if you like kids so much," he stared at her, one e
raised, "why don't you go have your own?"

l, "and, "If I thought any man left on this planet was worth using for a
arguing donor, I might consider it," she snapped back.

At that came a moment of silence, and Brody started to laugh an
and laugh. "Oh my God," he said, in between fits of laughte

happening, isn't it?" He looked over at Clary, who just gave him a win
nod. "Wow, even here."

ea who "I won't even ask what that means." Blair glared at the two o
"Considering you've all chosen to leave here, we need to have some
conversations when we get back."

dy had "Yeah, you're not kidding," Brody noted, with a wry look.

i, "You "Conversations about what?" Legend asked, as he opened up t
door in front of him.

aughed, "Did you actually do a run to make sure nobody was hiding out
Blair asked, ignoring his question. Besides he likely already kn
m. "So answer.

"Yes, when I last checked, nobody was there. Right now though,
several tell you that it remains safe because it's taken so long to get you g
far."

o." She "Well, that was a matter of getting Brody here," Blair point
looking back at Brody. "Not that we were expecting him."

ory." "Well, seeing as how I disabled their car," Brody replied, '
rstands, welcome."

t want. Legend gave a short snort at that. "Well then, let's get the hell out
before they make up for lost time." And he quickly stepped out and
quick scan of the area and then pulled out Blair, followed by Larr
' Clary and Brody bringing up the rear. The door was closed and locked
them.

," Blair Brody stepped up beside Legend. "Split up or stay together?"

"Yeah, that's a problem. I suggest we stay together."

Clary's voice came crisp and clear. "We're staying together. Abs
," Blair no way we're splitting up." Then she glared at the two men. "So you
that through your heads right now." And, with that, she put an arm
o really Larry's shoulders, reached out a hand toward Blair, and said, "Come o
yebrowled the way forward, leaving the men to bring up the rear.

Blair laughed. "At least you know how to deal with them."

i sperm "Yeah, you will learn quickly. They're much like children," she si
and then she laughed. "But now you can understand where they cor
d laugh and why."

r, "it's "Got it," Blair noted. "I thought that was more of a discussion thou
"Sure it was, but it was also more of a testing to see who would c

and with a better idea and with the proper reasoning.”

“Hey, you know we’re allowed to discuss things,” Legend noted. Blair looked over at Brody. “Seriously? This is what you put up with all the serious” “Absolutely. Or at least whenever I step sideways,” he muttered.

At that, Legend started to laugh. “Wow, how the mighty has fallen” “Says you. I don’t consider it falling a bit.”

“Of course not. You’re *in love*.”

But Legend said the words in such a twisted tone that Blair took up here?” “Just because you’ve never been in love and have never cared for a few thebut yourself, don’t go mocking it.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Where did that come from?” “Whatever,” Blair muttered, with a casual wave of her hand. This pissed her off in ways she didn’t want to examine too closely.

Almost immediately Clary grabbed Blair’s hand. “Watch that thing ed out, weapon.” Blair stared at her in surprise. “You don’t realize,” Clary “We so need to have a talk and soon.”

“About what?” “Keeping it in control,” she murmured, her voice low. “It’s of here, something we want to talk about right now, but, when you’re upset, y made asend out quite a punch.”

“I know,” she admitted. “And I *am* trying to keep it under control.” “You know?” Clary asked, looking at Blair with a searching gaze.

“To a certain extent. I’m just not, ... not very good at it, ... the thing.”

“Umm-hmm,” Clary replied. “Anybody in particular send it flying?” At that, Blair glared at her, knowing Clary was clearly laughing just get “It’s that obvious, *huh?*”

“Yeah, on both sides though,” Clary noted cheerfully.

“Nothing is funny about all this.”

Just then, a shot rang out. The men quickly urged them into th where they were immediately sequestered.

“Was that just an aimless shot or did we get seen?” Blair asked.

“I think it was a shot within the mansion for a target within,” stated.

“Who was left inside?” Brody asked, looking at the women.

“The kitchen staff,” Clary noted.

“The butler,” Blair added shakily.

Then he “Right, everybody was in there,” Larry murmured quietly, and his
time?” lip started to tremble.

“Easy, we don’t know that there’s been anything other than a v
.” shot fired,” Legend stated in a quiet tone. “Let’s not borrow trouble.”

The boy took a deep breath and nodded. “They better not have l
butler. He’s one of the good guys.”

nbrage. “Good,” Clary added. “Then his life isn’t in vain, is it?” At that
nybody turned and looked up at her, and she shook her head. “No, I won’t
look. I won’t do anything at all at this point in time. I’m not getting a
for help, and I won’t go help without that call. We have enough on ou
Legend right now.”

“But you can keep him alive.”

g. It’s a “And she could get shot in the process,” Brody added, his voice h
added.unrelenting. “There are times, and there are places, plus we need an
go in that direction.”

Larry wasn’t easily convinced, but, by the time they had him
hardly again and a vehicle arranged to pick them up in a while, he was quiet.

you can “You also don’t know that anything has actually happened to him,
said beside him.

’ “But you could check.”

“I could, but it’s energy that I’m not prepared to put out right now.

control “Why not?” Larry asked, frowning at her.

” “Because we’re in danger, and I think somebody is tracking
signatures. They’re looking for us.”

at her. Larry frowned at her and shook his head. “How is that even a thing

“It’s not only a thing, it’s a done deal, and I’m not prepared to
attention to us.”

He sighed. “Will I ever learn how to do this?”

e trees, “Maybe. Do you want to?”

“Of course I want to, if for no other reason than to not be so vulne
this world that’s so hell-bent on being nasty.”

Legend “Don’t swear,” Blair stated, but the boy just glared at her. She sh
“I get it, but you know there’s no need for that kind of language whil
out here.”

“Surely that’s when the language should be okay,” he snapped

Then he crossed his arms and continued to glare. She smiled at him. “Bottom a sign of being in control to swear. It’s a sign of being out of control.”

“It’s also a sign of letting off steam,” Larry added, still glaring at her. “That’s fine, and, when I’m not under your father’s orders to keep from swearing, then that’s something you can talk about, but, meantime, no swearing is part of my instructions.”

“It’s not fair,” Larry grumbled. “Everybody else swears.”

“When you are an adult, you can do what you want to do in that regard,” Blair suggested, “but, for the moment, that’s not the case. By the way, anybody contacted his father?”

“Not yet,” Legend replied. “I did talk to him last night, when I told him that we were heading into ugly times.”

“What did he say?”

“That he didn’t believe me,” he snapped.

“Of course he said that,” Larry muttered under his breath. “He’s trying to overthrow the government, so what does anybody care about but the fact that, the adults turned and looked at him. “Do you really think I don’t know what’s going on or how my father feels about all this?”

Legend looked between him and Blair, then scanned the others and shook his head.

Larry continued. “It’s not easy being a child, but it’s even harder at *this* age, where everybody looks at you like you’re some sort of a wallflower and can’t be trusted with anything,” Larry shared his frustration. “Certainly not my father.”

“Your father loves you,” Blair told him softly. “Regardless of what happens, remember that.”

“Just not enough to quit going to war.”

“In his mind,” Blair explained, “and I’m not saying he’s right or wrong, but, in his mind, he’s trying to help more than a few people and more than just his son.”

At that, Larry frowned. “I wonder,” he replied contemplatively. “Do you think he’s just about money and power?”

“I’m sorry,” Blair whispered. “Those are not questions that any of us should ask of his parents.”

“Parents? I don’t even know about the other half of my parentage,” Larry muttered. “I figure that’ll have to wait a few years, and then I’ll

It's not whether I want to go deeper."

"You do that," Blair agreed. "Now, a lot of effort has gone into keeping you alive, so let's make sure that we continue to do that."

"But not just you," Larry pointed out. "Clary is the one who put in the effort in."

"And then," Clary interrupted, "you need to realize that Blair has a hell of a job keeping you healthy and safe. She is the one looking after you, day in and day out."

He groaned. "I'm not trying to be mean," he muttered.

Blair heard his tone break. She reached out her hand and said, "We're all warned sweetie. We all understand."

He put his hand in hers and squeezed. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

She smiled at him. "I'm not insulted. You're right, and it's okay."

"No, it's not okay," Larry apologized. "I didn't mean to make it seem like I didn't need you too, because I do."

"It's okay," Blair repeated firmly. "Life sometimes gives us surprises that we don't know up to us as to how we deal with them, even when they're not pleasant."

As Larry continued to walk in the woods away from his home, he shook his head knowing what was ahead of him, the fact that he was even cognizant of his own real-world problems and capable of talking about any of it was amazing. It was a relief being then, as Blair had come to discover, this little boy had an awful lot of delicate and amazing traits to offer the world.

Bitterly. He had a very philosophical attitude, one that his father could never understand in any way. If his father would say, *Go to war*, this little boy would say, *Why? Peace would make the world go round*. If his father would laugh at him, Larry would say, *You can laugh, but the world is not just your world. It's everybody's world*.

She'd been on the outside of many arguments Larry had had with his father, where she had been given a harsh tongue-lashing afterward, while Larry had been unhappy at his son's ability to argue in a clear, logical manner, stating the error of his father's ways. Mr. Kartal had felt that Larry should be following his own methodologies and thought processes, and his 17-year-old son wasn't to be wrong.

Kartal had been unhappy at his son's ability to argue in a clear, logical manner, stating the error of his father's ways. Mr. Kartal had felt that Larry should be following his own methodologies and thought processes, and his 17-year-old son wasn't to be wrong.

There was no way to brainwash this child who'd already been through so much. Larry had already proven to have a sharp and creative mind of his own, along with a compassionate heart.

much else. He was a very special child, and Blair didn't want that be-
keeping of him, no matter how much his father wanted Larry to be there at
when they overtook the capital. Because, in her heart of hearts, she did
all that like taking the capital was a good idea to begin with and was no plac
child—certainly not *this* child.

done a But her personal political opinions weren't part of her nanny job,
ter you for the first time she did worry about the type of work she took on
she became so attached to the children who weren't her own. But, as
had reminded her, she should have her own. And, like her reply, the
e know, for a perfect person for her were sadly lacking. She hadn't found any
far.

When they'd hiked for a good forty minutes, she stopped, looked
others, and asked, "How much longer?" Larry looked up at her and
t sound She reached down, tousled his hair. "I knew you would ask that questi
I decided to jump in before you."

ses. It's "And that's because you didn't want to make it look like I'm not d
ones." well." He laughed at her.

ne, not She smiled. "And here comes that wise old man locked inside tha
of these body."

ng. But "Yet," he stated, staring at her intently. "It doesn't bother you?"

lot of "After all these years? No, it doesn't bother me at all," she
"because I know the truth."

lid not At that, Legend stepped forward and announced, "We have a
tle boy meeting us just around the bend up here."

ould "Good enough," Blair replied and stepped back. "Go ahead an
st your them." Legend frowned at her. "You go on ahead first," Blair instruc
anybody gets shot, it's you." He glared at her then, and she smiled.

with his don't want anything to happen to Larry."

en Mr. "He's my brother, you know?" Legend snapped.

concise "He's your half-brother, from a father who hasn't recognize
his son lineage."

, but it



ough so

have a

and so

Legend stared at her, a muscle twitching in the corner of his mouth, his sidegave him a flat stare right back. "That's quite true," he admitted, "but I can't feel least. Though my father is perfectly aware of who I am and what the relationship is."

She nodded. "Just so we're clear."

Legend said, "You mean, clear that you don't trust me?" Then why would she?

"Clearly you have secrets that I'm not sure I can trust. Awfully interesting of you to see that," she muttered.

There was something about this woman; she just never backed down. Sometimes he wished she would. "As long as Brody is staying here with me,

I will be quite happy to go check for our ride." Shooting her a hard look, Legend issued a word of warning, "Look after my brother." Then he disappeared into the trees.

He stepped out to the side of the road but stayed hidden behind embankments of rocks and watched. He'd been tracking the vehicle for some time, knowing they were close, just not close enough. It was always *close enough* that bothered him. Particularly after hearing the shooting at the young mansion. When he saw no sign of the vehicle, and its arrival time had passed and gone, he sent out an alert, but there was nothing. Swearing at himself, he quickly returned to the group and shook his head.

"The vehicle stopped tracking. I don't know where it is, but it's not coming. I've got no message saying what's going on, so we're flying blind in the dark."

Brody frowned at that. "I can go get a vehicle." He searched for a place to meet behind them. "We're forty-five minutes from the house, and nothing is even close to where we are right now."

"I just don't know," Legend said. "This is one of the more deserted roads. A couple properties are out there, but nobody I know," Legend offered.

Brody nodded. "I can certainly steal a vehicle to get us out of here, but I don't want to set off any police alarms for a theft."

"No, we can't have that." Blair looked around. "Not exactly where we can hitch a ride or can call for help around here."

"No." At that, Legend continued to study his phone, as he sent a second message. When his phone rang, he answered it quickly. "Right, that's not good news, but thanks." He turned to face the others. "The vehicle coming our way was found in a ditch about three miles from here, near the

, as she far from the time period that it should have picked us up. It should have picked us up five minutes ago, waiting for us, but it's pointed in the opposite direction."

"So, the bad guys were expecting it?" Blair asked.

"Or somebody found it and decided to deal with it in the process."

"What are you not telling me?" Larry asked, staring up at him. Blair put his hand on his shoulder and squeezed gently. "I presume the driver's decision was..."

Legend nodded quickly. "If Father never told you how serious this is, be right now, that event should prove it."

At that, Larry slowly sagged to the ground. "All of this, just to keep me alive?"

"Not to keep you alive but to pressure your father," Clary explained. "If they caught you, they would use you to get your father to do what they want." He looked up at her, and tears pooled in the corner of his eyes, almost on the verge of spilling over. "You know that's not what I want," he whispered. "We know that, and we also know that it has nothing to do with you. These are adult games that should never get played, yet are played out in the real world all the time," Legend stated, squatting in front of him. "I'll deal with this."

Larry nodded. "Sure you will," he grouched. Then he stopped, shaking his head, and reached out a hand, palm up. "I know you will, but I'm tired," he admitted.

"Of course you are. We've walked at a fair clip, and you're carrying a good-size bag," Legend noted, motioning at the bag. "Take it off a while you can."

Blair stepped forward and handed him a granola bar. "Munch on that." He snatched it from her hand. "You've got food?" He ripped it open. "What?"

She chuckled and pulled out black licorice. "I've got some food, a place enough to get us forward for another mile or two."

"Good," Larry said. "I hate to say it, but is the car drivable?"

Legend nodded. "It will be coming our way soon."

"Was the driver killed in it?" Larry asked.

"No, he was dragged out and shot on the road."

"What about forensics?" Brody asked.

ve been Legend shrugged. “What can I say? They’ll find the body on the opposite road, and nobody will really have any idea.”

“Right,” Brody replied. “Secret service?”

“Definitely one of the good guys,” Legend muttered. “Believe it or not, I’m not feeling very happy about his death either.”

Blair put a hand to her forehead. “Of course not,” Blair added. Then she turned, looked around. “Is there anything else?”

He frowned at her, startled—since he didn’t hear it first—then checked his phone and nodded. “Sounds like the vehicle is coming toward us.”

As it was, the vehicle glided to a stop not very far from them.

“There’s no driver,” Blair pointed out.

“No, there isn’t,” Legend agreed, “not at this point. We didn’t dare take a chance with a second one. I’ll be back in a minute.” They watched the vehicle as he approached the vehicle cautiously. When there was no one in the vehicle, he used his phone to quickly shut down the engine. Again using his phone, all the doors opened, including the trunk, and Legend ran a thorough check, underneath the tranny as well as under the hood and across the trunk. Then he let out a whistle.

Brody whispered, “Come on. It’s clear. Let’s go.” Moving quickly, they raced through the trees, up onto the road, and everybody got into the car. Larry sat in the middle of the back seat. Blair and Clary took either side of Larry, getting with the two men in the front seat. The vehicle very quickly started and drove forward.

“So, this is an AGV?” Larry asked in awe.

“It is, but I’ve taken control for now,” Legend said. “We will also need to get up the plates.”

“As soon as we get to civilization, we can do that,” Brody murmured.

“I also need food,” Larry cried out.

“You’ve got food,” Blair reminded him, handing him licorice.

“This is hardly food,” he argued. “I could use a couple burgers, about some fries? I mean, if we’re having a road trip, let’s make it a road trip.”

Clary burst out laughing. “I forgot what fun you are. I saw a lot of you as a sickly boy, not necessarily one who was happy to be out on an adventure.”

“Well, that sickly boy lost a lot of years,” Larry stated, with more

side of adult seriousness than anybody expected. “Right now, any adventure like a good thing.”

Clary smiled at him. “Got it, yet, at the same time, it’s so good. I’m your happy voice. And we can get food as soon as we hit civilization to

“And civilization isn’t very far away. I mean, we used to send Jace to get food for us all the time,” Larry muttered, around the licorice.

“We won’t choose any close towns,” Legend shared. “We can’t take the chance.”

Larry sagged back. “Got it,” he muttered.

Legend looked over at Brody. “Not sure what you can do, but if you put up a shield or a guard or sensors or anything ...”

At that, Larry leaned forward. “What was that?”

“I was just asking Brody about guarding the car,” Legend said cautiously.

Larry gave him an odd look. “Didn’t sound like that.”

“Well, that’s what it was,” Legend snapped. He drove in silence for a bit.

“And honestly, coffee sounds like a great idea,” Clary added cheerfully, they

Larry smiled at her. “So does pop.”

“Pop is bad for you,” Blair replied.

He sighed. “You’re really such a downer sometimes.”

“Yeah, well, it’s all the joys of being the one who has to help you set the rules.”

“Rules are meant to be broken,” Larry declared.

“That’s what got your father in trouble,” Blair noted.

With a sigh, Larry quieted and sat back. “There is that, too,” he said sadly.

She winced. Legend looked at her through the rearview mirror, and she shrugged. “Sorry about that,” she apologized to him. “I didn’t mean to bring up any reminders.”

“There will be lots of reminders,” Legend said. “We can’t get away from it, not with the situation we’re in now. So, all of us are better off understanding that this is the result of our father’s actions, and the sooner we get over it and figure out how to get clear of it, the better.”

Legend said that

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CHAPTER 4

BLAIR WATCHED AS the next town came into view, and Legend pulled into a gas station, where he quickly filled up the tank. “So, it’s not electric,” she asked him, as she stepped out.

“It’s a hybrid.” He looked down at the sleeping Larry. “How’s he doing?”

“Better than expected,” Blair stated. “His resilience always amazes me.”

Legend nodded at that. “Something is very unique about him. When he was born, I wanted to hate him—and hated myself for wanting to protect that child, so innocent and completely unaware of what was going on around him—but I couldn’t even do that.” He shook his head and laughed. “Larry is just too sweet. Too sweet, too good, almost too angelic for the world we’re in,” he murmured. “Ever since then, well, I’ve kind of become an unwilling guardian.”

At that he got a hard look from Brody. Legend stared back. “What’s the problem?”

“Just your choice of terminology,” he replied.

“Why?” Legend asked.

Such honest confusion filled his voice that Blair turned to Brody and asked him, “The word *guardian* upset you?”

He smiled. “It didn’t upset me.”

But she caught something between him and Clary. “It’s a term that neither of us actually can relate to, I see.”

Brody shrugged. “We can relate to all kinds of terms. It doesn’t matter what they are.”

“Ah,” she murmured and let him off the hook with it. “I guess when it comes to this kind of stuff, there’s just so much out there that we never know who’s on which side,” Blair murmured.

At that, Legend nodded. “Even you, even now.”

Blair frowned at him. “Even now?” she asked in surprise.

Once more Legend nodded. “I still don’t really know who you are.”

She pondered that and then shrugged. “Good point, and I don’t know who you are either. I know that you’re important to Larry, that I think about you incessantly, always with a certain reverence,” she added in a teasing voice.

Legend groaned at that. “The last thing I need is hero worship.”

“Don’t worry. The last thing you’ll get here is hero worship,” she said. He glared at her, and she just laughed. “He’s a good kid, but he’s different. His way of looking at life, his philosophy, all of it is very unique for somebody his age. It’s almost as if he’s one of the Masters reborn.” She got a hard look from Legend again. She shrugged. “Maybe it’s because of everything he’s been through. I don’t know, but he has a fairly unique way of looking at life.”

“He does, indeed,” Clary confirmed. “And a lot of that is because of everything he’s been through.”

At that, Blair looked over at her. “Did you ...” Then she hesitated, not even sure what she wanted to ask.

“Did I what?” Clary asked, with a gentleness that made Blair even more uncomfortable.

“I don’t know, just something about the work that you did with him before.”

“What about it?” she prodded carefully.

“Any chance that it affected him in some way?”

“Absolutely it affected him,” Clary agreed, with a smile, “and he came out in a good way.”

Blair wasn’t sure what to say to that, so she just nodded. “Still, it’s weird to think of him almost dying, yet look at him now.”

“A lot went into keeping him alive,” Brody added, “and, for that, you have to thank Clary.”

Blair didn’t say anything to that because what could she say? She wasn’t exactly sure what to believe, given all the stories. How much of it was really real, and how much of it wasn’t?

“Don’t worry about it,” Clary noted. “It was just important at the time to try and save him.”

“A job?”

“Well, that’s what it started out as, yes, doesn’t it always?” she said, giving Blair a wry look. “When you look after somebody at this

It really whether they are your own child or not, it becomes a connection that he talks can't really walk away from."

He said in a "I know," Blair agreed, sliding a look over at her young charge. "One of the reasons why I do what I do."

At that, Clary seemed to understand, but Legend was the opposite. He vowed. "Why, because you can't have children of your own?"

Different. Blair didn't bristle at his question, although she would have, maybe for another scenario. "I've never tried, but I would imagine I can. I've not. At that, to the point of even contemplating such a thing." Then she shook her head just step out of something like a trance. "He will need food when he wakes up the way of "He can do without for a time," Legend said mildly.

She smiled. "Yes, absolutely, but regardless of the adult attitude of whatever else going on in his head, remember that he's still a boy, and he will regret causing that young boy to come out. He may sound old and tired, not but that boy can throw a tantrum like you have never seen in an adult."

He laughed. "Yeah, you're right. He's still a boy, and he's still my little brother." There was such genuine affection in his tone that she looked at Legend, surprised. He raised an eyebrow. "What? You think I'm just like him, a asshole who storms through his life with bad news all the time?" He shook his head. "He's a good kid and doesn't deserve what my father did to none of us do."

"That's very true," Blair agreed. "And there will always be people who will happily take the brunt of others' actions."

Legend shrugged. "It is what it is, and I can't say that I care anymore. It seems like you've have "He's not responsible for my father's actions," he stated.

"I'm glad to hear that. And he still needs food."

"Message received." He looked over at her. "When this is done, will you do?"

"I have no idea. I don't even know if your father is still paying attention whether that's even been brought up."

Legend frowned at that. "When I talked to him last, he told me he had a severance package for you."

Her heart clenched. "Ah, that would have been nice to know. I pointed out idea any of this was planned," she muttered, as she looked around. "I'm level, I'm being fired."

that you “I don’t think that’s the term. I just think it’s more a case of he wants to make sure you got paid.”

It’s one “Versus not getting paid?” She shook her head at that. “I haven’t had anything. Wish I’d been told.”

“I believe there may be some sort of notification for you in your email.” She nodded a little grimly. “Maybe. It’s a good thing that I haven’t lost any money for the last while, isn’t it then?”

He gotten He stared at her. “You really didn’t know, did you?”

head to “No, I sure didn’t, but, hey, your father’s been a surprise from day after day.”

“How long have you worked for him?”

“Four, five years, just after Clary,” Blair replied.

side and “That’ll be hard on Larry too,” Legend muttered. “He’s obviously very close to you.”

at times, “That’s what happens, and then it’s like being torn apart, when it’s hard to separate. Particularly when there’s no time to adjust. Like now, find out what my plans were made, and I wasn’t included and losing my position to boot.”

Legend shook her head. “I suggest we don’t bring it up with Larry right now, just to get enough to deal with.”

Legend shook “Agreed,” Legend muttered. “As soon as we fill up here, we’ll head out, town and get some food. I’ll take a look and see if I can connect with my father, see if he’s got any plans or places we can use.”

Legend who “You mean, like secret hideouts?”

“Yeah.”

Legend “But, if he has them, won’t other people know about them?”

Legend pondered that. “Well, I’ll see if I can connect with him somehow, trying to avoid the news because of Larry.”

“Got it. I can’t say I really want him hearing what’s going on on either side of that will either. I pretty well kept him off all media as much as I could, but news events are still an important part of learning.”

Legend “They are, but they’re also dangerous, particularly for a young boy like him.”

Legend that he “Any dangers I should know about?” she asked.

Legend shrugged. “All of this is bad news. We’re just trying to do what we can to keep him safe. But we don’t know more than you.”

Legend “Well, it’s all I’m trying to do too,” she murmured, “but I guess that’s all that’s coming to an end.” She tried hard to keep the dismal tone from her voice.

anted to but it wasn't working. She always got attached to her charges. She knew she shouldn't, but how did one not? And, in this case, they'd been through a lot, but she hadn't heard much, and Larry was a hell of a good kid. Plus hearing about her late husband this way, ...well, it was an even bigger shock.

"Don't disappear on him right now," Legend muttered. "We'll see what we can do."

"There's nothing anybody can do," she replied, with a weak smile. "I just wasn't expecting it right now."

He studied her features for a long moment, then nodded. "Try not to make any quick decisions."

"Yeah, and why not?" she challenged.

He laughed. "You really don't take orders well, do you?"

"No, I sure don't, and, if that was an order, I didn't receive it," she muttered.

"Got it," he said.

Just then Clary joined them outside the vehicle. "Are you two talking about him? He's squibbling?"

"Almost," Legend replied, as he checked the gas pump racking up the bill. "As soon as we're done here, my thought was to make some phone calls to see where we're at, and get some food."

"Good idea," Clary noted. "As for phone calls, Brody and I have a laptop online to see where the world is at. It's gone to hell in a handbasket. The coup is underway, and it appears your father is in the middle of it." Legend shared, studying Legend carefully.

"Of course he is," he muttered. "And, no, I don't want anything to do with it. I didn't have anything to do with it, and, just for the record, it's not my thing."

"I get it. I'm just not sure what his expectation is in terms of his actions and when he actually manages to overthrow the government."

At that, Legend frowned. "Meaning?"

"Meaning, is he expecting Larry to go into Parliament with him?"

"I have no idea." Legend swore. "I sure as hell didn't need that kind of help brought up."

"And yet it must be considered."

"Sure it does." He scrubbed his face. "Father would be selfish enough to do that."

ew she “As Larry’s father, he’ll do whatever he thinks is best,” she stated.
ough so “No, that’s not what’s best for Larry, but my father will do it :
yoff inbecause he thinks being a family man will look better to the public.”

“Well, maybe it will. Is he ...” Clary hesitated.

ae what “What?” he asked her. “Just come out with it.”

“Is he dangerous?”

nile. “I “He’s planning to overthrow the government. I’m sure many peop
he’s plenty dangerous. I didn’t know his plans until they were underw
o makehe refused to listen to reason. Besides, I think everybody’s dangerou
right circumstances.”

“Will he get away with this? A successful coup doesn’t necessaril
successful in the long-term.”

it,” she “I really don’t know. There is an awful lot of opposition, and h
necessarily being the smartest about it.”

“Of course not,” she acknowledged, with half a smile. “When was
o doneever smart?”

He nodded. “Still, I had hoped and still hope that he keeps Larry o
up theat least until things stabilize.” Just then his phone rang. He looked at it
ie calls,again. “Speak of the devil.” He looked back at the gas pump.

“Go,” Clary urged.

checked Blair stepped to the still flowing fuel pump. “I’ll take care of this. (
locally.with him.” And, with that, Legend took several steps away and answe
it,” shephone. She looked back at Clary. “How long are you involved in this?”

“What do you mean?” Clary asked, clearly more interested in wh
g to dogoing on with the phone call.

it’s not “According to what Legend just told me, his father has termina
employment.” She kept her voice low in case Larry woke up, but it w
son, ifto hide her anger and distress.

At that announcement, Clary stared at her in shock.

Blair nodded. “Not exactly the news I was really expecting right no

“Yet ...”

thought “Yet it kind of makes sense, I know. Except, if I’m done, who is
after Larry now—as in right this instant? Did his father even consid
Wouldn’t laying me off when the coup was over and the country stabil
ough toa better time for Larry? I’m the one constant in Larry’s life. More so t

father. And he's not even here to take over. Still, the timing is anyway awkward."

At that, Clary nodded. "I would very much like to ask you to stay. I don't have any means to do that," she muttered.

"Well, I'm not sure exactly when my severance package comes through," she added in a mocking tone. "I'm supposed to be getting some final communication from him, according to Legend. I presume it'll give me a day, and weeks or something. At least I hope it does. But the terminations are in the immediate."

"Any severance pay would be good," Clary muttered, the cloudy meanface clearing. "Larry really loves you."

"Well, we've become quite close," she shared, "at least since you left. It's not like I had to leave in order to help others."

"I know. I get that," she said. "It's just such a fascinating look at the world from a coup; you don't really think about it."

"No, I understand. Even I spent so much time looking after Larry. But it's not just about him; it will always be a big part of my life, and I know that you are one person who will understand that."

"Yeah, I sure do. It's odd, suddenly finding out that you're laid off and looking at where we're at." She waved her arms around. "I'm stuck here, wondering what I'm supposed to do now."

"I'm sorry," Clary said. "That's the last thing anybody needs right now."

"It's tough, but I'll survive. We just have to make sure that Larry's safe." Blair's voice broke a bit, as she turned and glanced back at her charge.

"Hopefully we can get him somewhere safe."

"I'm more concerned as to whether he'll be sent to join his father as hard capital, if and when this all goes well."

"It won't go well," Clary declared, and then she winced.

"Seriously?"

"Sorry, I don't have any reason to say that," she added instantly.

"No, but you know so much already that I don't know what I'm supposed to say to your comment, except that it's not good news."

"No, it's not good news," Clary agreed. "It's also something that I tried to tell my father about, but he wouldn't listen. I keep coming back to the fact that he didn't know if this stubbornness is more about his belief that a new leader was actually needed or the lure of the power grab."

a little “That’s a hard one for any of us to decide, isn’t it?” At that
motioned toward Legend coming back. They turned to face Legend
on, but strode across the parking area toward them, and he was glaring so
furious. “So, not good news,” Blair muttered.

rough,” “For my father, it’s the usual. The coup is underway, regardless of
kind of anybody else has to say. He’s excited, thriving, in his element. He
me two should be in the bag by tonight, and we’re to find a place to lay low, in
ition is calls for us later.”

“And me?”

on her He looked at Blair apologetically. “He didn’t really say anything
you, except that the status quo is to continue.” She hated that relief
eft.” through her at that because really it was just postponing the inevitable.
I can certainly hang around for another day or two,” she stated.

life that “He didn’t actually come out and tell me that you were laid off,
you didn’t get that email notice, maybe he never did send a severance.”

that he “Well, I guess I’ll find out, won’t I?” she muttered.

on who He winced. “I’m really not happy that I’m the one who told you I
maybe his plans changed.”

off, and “Maybe, but, if he thought about it then, it’s something that he’s pr
k here, still thinking about, and it’s best that I know.”

“That’s not true. Right now he’s not thinking about anything ex
now.” staying out of his way, keeping Larry safe, and him doing his thing.”

is okay.” And it didn’t take much to contemplate how much danger doing h
would be for the rest of them. “Did you tell him what happened?” Blair
Legend.

r in the “I did. He swore, told me to take care of it, and that he’d stay in tou

Clary nodded. “That sounds like the man I know,” she murmured.
turned and looked down at Larry, who was still sleeping. “He sleeps v
innocence of a child.”

“Of course.” Legend sighed. “In the meantime, good government
opposed thinking that they are defending their own leader, are dying right no
said, his voice harsh. “And, once again, my father is right in the middle

warned “What if he doesn’t make it through?” Clary asked. “Has he ma
ct that I provisions for Larry?”

reader is “I have no idea,” Legend admitted in frustration, as he faced her. ‘
is not exactly in my father’s vocabulary.”

t, Blair “I get that, as a leader, as an invader or conqueror, you know, it’s
l, as heor-nothing thing, but, in his position, he’s got a young boy to look aft
nethingwhat happens ...” Clary stopped. “I guess there’s no answer fo
happens.”

of what “No, but he is my brother, so I will make sure he’s okay.”

says it “I’m glad to hear that,” Clary noted cheerfully, as she got back i
until hevehicle. “In that case you might want to start thinking about food t
he’ll wake up soon.”

He peered into the back. “No way, he’s sound asleep.”

g about She looked up at him. “Sure, for the moment, but he’ll be awake
washedthought about it—“in five minutes, I would say?” She looked over a
“Well, “What do you think?”

“Possibly less,” she added cheerfully.

and, if Legend groaned, looked at the two of them. “And now you t
” colluding against me?”

“No collusion required,” Clary noted, with a laughing smile. “\
becauseknow what this boy is like.”

“Right.” Legend stared down at Larry wistfully. “You’ve actua
robablymore time with him recently than I have.”

“We also worked with him a lot more when he was sick.” Clary sr
cept ushim. “That may not have been something you could do anything about

“Sometimes I wonder.” He eyed her curiously. “Sometimes I won
is thinghow much you did. Nobody ever talks to me about it.”

r asked “No, I don’t talk to anybody about a lot of it,” Clary admitted. ‘
when this is over, if you have some questions, I can answer them.
ich.” meantime, I’m all about keeping Larry safe so he gets a future,
ed. Shenobody else around your father does.”

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at men,

ow,” he

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“Defeat

what that was. He recognized that the others were all trying to protec

IT HIT LEGEND on the hard side to realize that, if something happened
father, which was entirely possible given this nightmare, Legend’s
could end up as an orphan. Not something anybody wanted to think
Something was so special about Larry, even though Legend didn’t
what that was. He recognized that the others were all trying to protec

is an all—beyond him being an innocent child. The more time Legend spent with his little brother, the more Legend understood that the boy had a certain grasp on life, a unique outlook, and that, if he was ever to do anything in terms of the world or on a global level, Larry needed to survive. Surviving right now was something Legend had been tasked with making into what his brother did.

Because for himself, Legend had been raised without his father, and maybe that had been for the best. Maybe even after a lifetime of wishing he had a father in his life, it was a good thing it hadn't happened. It was one of those things you could just never know, until now as an adult, when Legend was sitting around and realized what a shitty situation *living with Father* was. Getting the short end of the stick, Larry could end up alone in all this.

Not with Legend here, however.

When everybody was packed up in the vehicle, Larry rose right out of his seat, unfortunately confirming that these women knew a whole lot more about him than Legend did. They headed into town, and, once they passed a couple of fast-food chains, Larry was wide awake, pointing out each one of the places they could stop at. But Legend hadn't managed to stay alive himself all this time by making foolish decisions, and he only stopped when he came to a complete halt.

Soon he pulled into the back of a promising spot, or at least one that didn't look too risky. He spoke to the passengers in the back seat. "Stay here while I check this out first." After all three nodded, Legend and Brody got out of the vehicle.

They regrouped not too far from the others. Legend looked over at Brody. "Food?" Legend asked.

Brody nodded. "Sounds good. Any particular concerns?"

"All of it," Legend snapped. "I don't like anything about this. The fact that we've already had the one vehicle taken out is huge. The fact that my father has actually gone ahead, and the coup is underway, means that anything and everything will be up for grabs as far as people are concerned, and that's not good. Someone will be looking to grab the kid to use as leverage. The bottom line is, I don't want my brother involved in anything I can do with my father on either side of any of his dealings, at this point."

At that, Brody nodded. "You won't get any argument out of me. Even if we'd have the women to deal with if we let anything happen to Larry."

nt time Legend let out a bark of laughter at that. “Isn’t that the truth? So specialmy brother has managed to get some pretty powerful champions.”
hing in “You’re not kidding, and you really don’t know the half of it.”
e. Thuscomes to the champions on his side. The minute Clary got in
ng sureeverything changed.”

“Well, I’d really like to find out the details, so I can understand
be thatway and how, when this is all over with.”

had his “In that case, maybe you want to consider Terkel’s offer.”

of those “I’m still struggling to believe that you guys are private.”

looked “We’re private because our own government tried to blow us up.”

is, and, At that news, Legend stared at him in shock. “What?”

“We don’t really have time for it right now—particularly since we
be here long for food, then have to move on—but believe me when I t
n time,it got ugly. And this is our solution—coming out the other side.”

out this “Did you need a solution?”

assed a “Well, the problem remains,” Brody explained, with half a smile.
ne theydo people like us do if we don’t have each other? This is a very
is timeopportunity to stay together as a team with Terk, and our abilit
one thatgrowing constantly.”

Legend shot him another hard look. “Are you serious? Growing?”

not so “Very seriously.” Brody nodded. “Yours will too, if you join us.”

Brody “I don’t know. I’m not sure I’m up for it.”

7 exited “Well, you’ll have to make that decision at some point in time,
definitely not today.”

Brody. “Why? What happens if I don’t make the decision you want? Yo
me?”

Brody looked at him and laughed. “Don’t have to. By the time
he factdone this job, and you realize what it’s like to work with people who
hat mysame as you, you’ll be begging for the job.”

ns that “Yeah, I doubt it,” Legend replied, with a laugh.

cerned, “Or maybe, when you realize just how much that woman can do a
use asmuch she means to you, you’ll be looking to do more.”

thing to Startled, Legend looked back to where Blair was helping Larry ou
vehicle. “What Blair can do?” he repeated, clearly bewildered.

besides, “Yeah. I’m not exactly sure what she’s doing, but believe me. Sh
, some serious energy power. It’s all protective, and it’s all good, wrap

me how bound up in keeping Larry safe.”

“Well, maybe my father wasn’t such a fool to hire her then.”
when it continued to stare at her.

involved, “I can feel the waves of power coming off her, but she seems
unaware. Clary would probably agree with that, but you know? In
whenever awareness sets in, she becomes a very powerful engine all on her own.
Sure when that ride comes along, you’re on it.”

Legend laughed. “Not likely. That’s like mixing oil and water,
doesn’t sound like a great combination to me.”

“When it happens, you won’t know what hit you.”

Legend shook his head, frowning at him.

He won’t Brody nodded. “I know firsthand because that’s exactly what happened
to you, Clary and me. We’re as well matched as I could ever have thought possible
and the connection is way deeper than emotional.” He hesitated. “It’s
shrugged as he lacked a lack of word for it. “I know it’ll sound foolish.
“What we’re aligned on an energy level, two of the same frequency. The stuff
we can do together and the stuff we can do with the team are all fantastic
things are unbelievable.”

“Well, now you’ve got me intrigued,” Legend admitted, “but I just
deal with it now.”

“No, you sure can’t. Just keep it in mind.”

“So what are you? An advance scout for Terkel now?” Legend asked
but it’s a bit nervous.

“If I thought it would work, I sure would. However, the bottom line is
you’ll kill that you have to want something like this. It won’t work any other way.”

“No, that’s true. I suppose it’s not that easy to find guys like us, is it?”
you’ve “Not only is it not easy, it’s downright impossible. Then, when you
are they do show up, you’re all ornery, cranky, and contentious.”

At that Legend burst out laughing, as he followed the women into
the restaurant. “You mean, just like you?”

Brody shot him a look. “Yeah, and I’m sure Clary would agree.”

Clary tapped him on the shoulder and nodded. “Clary definitely
it of the but right now? Both of you shut your energy down. I know you’ve got
there searching for energy and danger, but, in this place, it’s because
there’s got to be something, and it’s starting to attract attention.” And, with that, she
glared and both a hard look and snapped, “Now.”

Both men automatically shut down their energy, bringing their aura in line.

As Legend looked around, he asked, "What is this place?"

"Well, it's the restaurant that you brought us to," she replied, with a touch of humor. "What did you think you were doing?"

"I'm not sure, but damn. I mean, as far as places go, it's very powerful." "It is. This place was built on a forgotten graveyard a long time ago," she murmured. "I can feel the spirits still moving."

He shuddered at that. "Why do people do shit like that?" Legend asked, looking around. "Don't they know that those people can get up and walk?"

At that, she burst out laughing. "Well, sometimes they do it just because of a reason. Yet, in their world, that's not what people are doing."

"Well, then they're just not being aware enough," Legend said, "I mean, it's possible, but damn. That's definitely what they're doing." At that, he walked in, smiling, but saw his brother bouncing about Blair, asking questions of life and death. "He's definitely got a full spirit, doesn't he?"

"He's got a very happy-go-lucky spirit," Clary confirmed. "He's got a very strong healing spirit, and that in itself causes trouble." Legend's face couldn't frown. She shrugged. "I did what I could to shut it down, but there's not much I can do when you have somebody as pure as he is. People are naturally attracted to it—but not for the right reasons."

Legend groaned. "Don't tell me that my brother himself will be the reason that we end up in trouble."

She smiled. "Well, hopefully, with all of us here, we'll manage to get him out of it, but I would definitely be alert for any trouble coming our way because of him. I don't know how much anybody actually knows about your guys' energy or about what he's like as a child, or whether they're calling him special, *special*, but he is special in ways that nobody can even account for."

"Did you make him that way?" he asked, staring at her.

"*Make* him that way?" She shook her head. "No, I didn't *make* him that way, but I might have helped bring it out. I might have unlearned something. ... Only time will tell."

It it out
ounding
re them

Both men automatically shut down their energy, bringing their auras back in line.

As Legend looked around, he asked, “What is this place?”

“Well, it’s the restaurant that you brought us to,” she replied, with a note of humor. “What did you think you were doing?”

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CHAPTER 5

BLAIR STRAIGHTENED IN her chair, a tingling sensation running along the back of her neck. She quickly glanced over at Legend to see a frown on his face and his gaze darting around the room. She got the message and looked at Larry. “Hurry up and eat. We have to run.”

He nodded, popped the last of his hamburger in his mouth, and picked up a handful of fries. Pushing his chair back, he announced, “I’m ready to go.”

She laughed. “Well, at least let’s grab a napkin or something for the mess.” She pointed out the ketchup on his chin. As it was, a waitress came by with a small takeout container, and they quickly loaded up the remnants of the meal. Everybody’s leftovers for Larry to munch on in the car. Then, paying the bill, Legend added several bottles of water and rushed everybody out of the restaurant vehicle.

As Blair was last to get in, she looked at him and asked, “What was the reason?” “I’m not sure,” he admitted, his voice low, “but somebody was definitely watching us.” As he got into the vehicle, his phone rang. He looked at the caller ID, but instead of a call, a text came through. “Change of plans, everybody. We’re switching vehicles. Get ready to transfer in about two minutes.”

At that, Larry gave him a big fat grin. “Well, I hope it’s sort of decent. It’s a little squishy back here.” The two women stared at him. “I’m used to having my own space. You know? Where I can stretch and sleep.”

“Well, you might,” Blair noted, “but don’t expect it next time.” Within a few seconds of the words falling from her lips, a vehicle pulled up beside them and all the doors immediately opened up. On Legend’s cue, they scrambled into the large SUV. As he walked around to the driver’s side, Blair saw him talking with somebody. She leaned forward and took a close look, but didn’t recognize the new arrival.

Brody stepped out, clearly startled. “Riff?”

Riff lifted a hand and then, without a word, quickly disappeared into the shadows.

Blair leaned forward and asked, "Who was that?"

"That was Riff," Brody said, his tone odd, as they drove out of the parking lot.

"Friend or foe?" she demanded.

He laughed. "Yeah, we're all still trying to figure that out."

She stared at him in shock. "Please tell me that was a poor attention over at joke."

"Oh, it's definitely not a joking matter, and I didn't mean it that way," he apologized. "Riff definitely would be considered friend more than foe. He is definitely ... different."

"Different, *huh*. Did he even say anything to you?"

"Yeah, he told me to be careful."

She nodded. "Well, I guess it could be worse."

"What could be worse?" he asked, looking at her.

"He could have mentioned we have somebody on our back."

"Well, we do, and we all know it, including you."

She shrugged. "Yes, I know. It would be nice if we had a safe place to go."

"That's coming eventually too," Brody replied. He looked at her. "Legend. Unless you have a bolt-hole."

"I have a place I was thinking of heading to. Is it the best place?" she asked. "I can't answer, but it is a place."

"Well, we can head in that direction and go from there," Brody suggested. "This was hardly part of our mandate."

"Yet, wasn't it though, really?" Clary asked. "My concern was getting Larry out of here, safe and sound."

"I'm out now," Larry piped up, "so how about a nice hotel?"

"Or, maybe not, maybe camping or something equally uncomfortable," she said. Clary noted in a dry tone.

He glared at her. "Hey, I'm up for some interesting experience. I haven't really roughed it much."

"But you're always talking about wanting to go camping."

He nodded solemnly. "I just wonder how your version of camping compares to mine."

into the She laughed. "Right now, you don't want anybody to know what your father is or what your father is involved in," she explained quietly, "at least like what you had before is the best choice."

of the "Right." Larry nodded. "There's always that reminder, isn't there?"

"Yes, at this point in time there must be." She smiled at him. "You're hardly suffering."

"No, I have a full belly, something to snack on, and a little money in my pocket at my room, so it's all good."

"In that case," Brody said, "I suggest we head as far away from civilization as possible."

, but he "But we can't just hide away," Blair muttered. "I mean, unless we're planning on hiding away until this coup is over and see on whose side we end up in Kartal lands." At that, the discussion turned to the pros and cons of heading out to the middle of nowhere.

Finally Clary interrupted, "How about we just rent a cabin somewhere in a place where nobody knows us and under an assumed name? We can stay there a few days, while hopefully some things will get resolved, and we'll be at the bottom of it all."

place to "We also have to stop for groceries," Brody reminded her. "You know you eat like a bird, but I sure don't."

over at At that, Legend snorted. "Neither do I, and, if we rent a cabin somewhere, does anybody have any ideas on where?"

' That I "Maybe," Brody suggested, then he quickly gave Legend directions to another district. "What we don't know is whether they have any room available."

uggested. "Maybe give a call ahead to see."

At that, Brody quickly got on the phone, and, within minutes, he was getting "Okay, they have one large cabin left. The prices aren't terribly low, but who the hell's paying for all this anyway? Are we actually getting paid for it?"

"According to my instructions, yes," Clary replied, "but, if he's not willing to be paid around to pay for it, is a question I don't know the answer to."

At that, Larry sighed.

s, but I She clapped her hand over her mouth. "Oh, Larry, I'm so stupid. I shouldn't have said that."

"It's fine. I get that my father has put himself in danger. Does everything always come back to money?" he asked in a small voice.

"At this point, it kind of does," Brody replied. "You can't rent a cabin"

to your cookies.”

“so the “Well, that would be an interesting industry to start up then, would
Larry proposed, with a laugh, prompting a chuckle from everyone,
” awkward moment had passed.

“Plus, Relieved, Brody turned and asked Clary, “Is there someone back
base who could check on that? Celia maybe?”

ore leg “I’m on it,” she replied, already sending a message on her phone.
about half an hour before she got a response back. “Looks like we’ve a
y from already been paid for a large portion of it,” she said, “or maybe all o
have to take a closer look at the accounting. It’s kind of a lot of money

you’re “Well, it’s kind of a lot of money for you, but that doesn’t mean i
ide Mr. of money, not considering the larger picture happening the whole tim
reading out on a job like this,” Brody reminded her.

“Understood. Must consider the business angle.”

ere? In “A lot of people are involved, a lot of expenses at this poi
1 spend murmured.

I get to Legend looked over at him. “Are you guys doing okay for mone
you’ve gone private?”

1 might “We are, but we’re still setting up as much as we possibly can. S
those initial expenditures are huge, and it will be a long time bef
ewhere, realize any kind of return on it all.”

“Got it.” Legend glanced at him. “But do you even need men?”

ions to “Well, I would cheerfully be home with Clary if we had more m
for us.” in this case, she is the driver behind the job, so it wouldn’t matter he
honestly people like Riff and you tend to not operate terribly well wit
shared, structure of a team, but we always need extra guys on short notice, so
but ... a few more people will help, especially since the teams and the assign
l?” tend to be fluid.”

ie’ll be Legend laughed. “Well, that’s one way to say it. I would think th
of us don’t like authority at this point.”

“No, but it’s not even about authority really. It’s about teamwork
sorry. If following team mandates, and about looking after the other part of you
even if things are dicey,” he murmured.

rything “Agreed,” Legend replied. “I don’t have a problem with teamwo
saved me more than a few times,” he muttered.

bins for “Will you go work for them, Legend?” Larry asked in an excited

“That would be so awesome if you did.”

“Isn’t it?” “Yeah? What would be so awesome about it?” he asked, looking at the half-brother in the mirror.

“I don’t know. I just think whatever Clary does is pretty cool. So if she could do something like that, it would be really sweet.” Larry looked at Clary. “Did you ever tell him what you do?”

It took a moment for Clary to answer. “I sure didn’t, Larry. I don’t talk about it with most people. Remember, I’m actually a healer. “No, of course not, and besides, it’s kind of hard to describe, isn’t it. I’ll mean, you take on really sick people and help them get better.” He shrugs. “I don’t know, but I think my brother can do that.” then frowned and looked worried. “That’s not really what I think my brother can do though.”

“You don’t know everything about your brother,” Clary noted, with a smile in his direction. “I think you’ll find he is very capable of doing all kinds of things.”

“But not something like that,” Larry disagreed immediately and with conviction that she twisted to look at Larry.

Even Blair leaned closer. “Yeah, and why is that?” she asked him.

“Because I think you have to completely detach from everything and work on a very different level to do the kind of healing you’re doing,” Larry explained. “I know that Blair can do it, but I’m not so sure about my brother though. He’s always been much more about action instead of just sitting back and relaxing in place.”

“Very true,” Legend agreed from the front seat, stunned at what he heard from his little brother. “That doesn’t mean I can’t learn to do it though.”

“Oh, I think you could learn to do it,” Larry confirmed, his voice soft. “I just don’t think you would particularly want to.”

Legend burst out laughing at that. “Well, that may be true, but it’s not our problem right now.”

“I’m not so sure,” Larry replied. “We’ve got a lot of problems. How many if some of these can be solved—as we figure out everybody’s roles and responsibilities, about the team—it will be easier.”

Blair looked over at Larry, and her lips twitched.

“You’re looking at me like I’m a child again,” he pointed out, with a self-important air of an almost adult who thinks he should be treated as such.

“You’re very mature for your age,” she stated. “However, there’s still a lot of things such a thing as life experience that’s missing.”

“Yeah, but every time I try to get life experience, you guys tell me it’s not safe.”

She laughed. “Depends on the life experience you’re looking for, if you chuckle. “Some things in life you do have to be older to experience.”

He shrugged. “Whatever. Can I have those leftovers now?”

With a laugh, Clary handed over the container from lunch. “Have a nibble?” she said, trying to suppress a smile.

With that, he dug into the fries and added, “I don’t care where we’re camping, camping would be cool.”

“It won’t be camping so much as *cabining*,” Blair clarified, continuing the word on the spot.

Larry rolled it around in his mouth, mouthed it, and nodded. “*Cabining* all like it.”

She smiled over at him. “You are so very easy to please.”

“Sunshine, blue sky, and fresh air,” he noted, making the switch very prophetic in a heartbeat. “You know that there’s an awful lot to be said about the simplicity in that.”

“There’s an awful lot to be said about it, all right,” Clary agreed. “It doesn’t always work out for everyone.”

“No, of course not,” he murmured. “I could never conceive of just sitting back and relaxing in life. He says that, if you’re not doing something or building something, then you’re a waste of space and air. That’s what bothered me because is that how he thought of my mother? Is that how he thought of Legend’s mom? I mean, are we all only here to do something serious, create something better? And who decides?”

Nobody spoke, and he continued. “I guess maybe we’re not using our resources if we’re not doing something like that,” he added in a contemplative voice, “but it seemed very harsh to me.”

“Your father would be one of very few people who would even be on that line,” Blair noted.

“He does believe that everybody has a job to do, and, if you didn’t have a job to do, you were nothing,” he pointed out.

“Yes, I know,” Blair shared, “because I’ve been on the backside of that thought process a few times looking after you. Although he needs to do that job, it has changed as you’ve gotten older. Somehow, to

it's not degenerated into it being not much of a job in his mind, so I wasn't much of a person."

"She said that," Blair said. At that, Clary looked over at Blair in surprise.

She shrugged. "He has an unusual outlook on people in life."

"I don't think I've ever had a conversation like that with him," she said. "I mentioned it to the group."

"No, and, unless you actually had a specific purpose or reason for going to see him, but come up with him, it wouldn't be something he would ever bring up."

"I've had some insufferable discussions with him, particularly over the way he's running things here. His father has very strict rules about our purposes in life, and, if you're not trying to be somebody better, if you're not trying to do something better, then you're nobody. Basically, if you're nobody, you're wasting his time."

"And, if you're wasting his time, you're wasting everybody's time. So he would go so far to say that wasting oxygen should be a crime because it should be out there doing something with your life. If not for humanity, it should be for the economy." She laughed. "There was a whole lot more to it, and maybe I'm not presenting it all correctly, but he had very strict rules about it."

"It's just about it."

"Wow," Legend muttered. "I don't think I've ever had that kind of conversation with him either."

"I think he was trying to put Blair in her place," Larry explained. "I always made a comment about how I wanted her to stay around, but Dad felt that how he was somebody who was only looking after me was more like a mother running things, so since Blair wasn't my mother, she couldn't be in that role. Therefore, she had nothing else to offer outside of babysitting or tutoring services, so she wasn't really of any value."

"Ouch," Legend said. He looked at Blair through the rearview mirror. "That right?"

"Somewhat," she agreed, with a crooked smile. "I said, he had very distinct views on the value of individual humans, based on what you do. I've never had to do anything in life. Clary was in the clear because she had a very special healing gift that made her one of those who were valuable to him in the eyes of his father. That it kept his son alive. But, for me, as a babysitter, even though I did my job effectively as his teacher, tutor, and surrogate mother, among other things, it wasn't good enough. It wasn't a role that he could accept as having any value, outside of the fact that he needed my services for the time being."

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ich of a At that, Larry gripped her fingers and said, “He might not have
would be lost without you.”

She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. “It’s been a great ric
murmured.

” Clary “Is it over?” Larry asked, with the suddenness of that adult i
child’s body.

that to “Well, apparently I’m to be laid off at some point along the line h
). But I soon enough, it will be, yes.” At that, Larry sank back, just staring
r Larry “I’m sure it’s a direct outcome of this mess we’re in right now
you’ reexplained, “but, if you think I’ll just jump out and leave you, you’re w
ng big, He nodded. “No, you wouldn’t do that.” He studied her, as if h
is time more than she did. “Is my father really expecting that this will go so w
netimes I can join him?” he asked, with such detached curiosity that eve
use you wondered what he could possibly be thinking.

imity, it “It’s possible, yes,” Legend answered. “You know he’s alway
re to it, extremely positive about any potential outcome that he’s involved in.”

at ideas “Even though so many of them didn’t go well?” Larry asked, now
thought.

kind of “I don’t know that it was so much that they didn’t go well, as
doesn’t pursue small and reasonable goals,” Legend noted carefully.

“I had “Do you agree with what he’s doing?” Larry challenged.

felt like “Me? No, not at all,” Legend declared. “I’m absolutely against it.
ole. So, a government voted in by the people. Is it a good government? May
, if she but it’s the government that they have. To overthrow the governme
to him, coup like this, well, it feels wrong. It’s the kind of thing that happens
the world all the time, but, for me, it doesn’t feel like it’s the way to g
ror. “Is making change.”

Larry was quiet for a long moment, and then he agreed. “You’re ri
id very “I’m right from my way of thinking,” Legend clarified, “but I
did and trying to turn you against what he’s doing or anything else. However,
special Father does puts people in danger, I’m not sure it has the value that he
e sense to think it has.”

1 I was Larry added, “He always says, it’s not about me or us, but it’s ab
oles, it greater good.”

enough “The things that people do in the name of *the greater good*, all c
.” world,” Blair pointed out in a quiet tone, “is often not what anybo

e, but I would consider for the greater good.”

Larry turned to look at her. “Now that’s the problem, isn’t it,” she whispered. He leaned back, closed his eyes, and muttered, “I just need to think for a bit.”

She didn’t say anything but looked over at Clary with a raised eyebrow because Clary was staring at him, with a worried look on her face.

“You just take it easy, buddy,” Clary said. “This situation is about making decisions that you didn’t have any input into. Those decisions aren’t necessarily ones that you’ll be happy with, or want to live with, but you haven’t been given a choice. So, in this case, the best that you can do is to relax and let things play out.”

“Even if it kills my father?”

“Even if it kills your father,” she stated, “because your father has made this decision, this choice. Although most of us tried to talk him out of it, he wouldn’t listen. His mind was made up, and nothing any of us did could change it.”

Larry gave her a long soul-searching look and whispered, “That’s true, but it still doesn’t mean I like it.”

And, with that, he closed his eyes and went quiet.



This is
Legend listened to the conversation in surprise. These were adult topics, but he wouldn’t have suspected his brother to be involved in, but Larry did have a very unique point of view. Legend wasn’t so sure about the decision to leave the cabin; it seemed to him that they were essentially stepping out of the picture, hoping things would calm down in the government turmoil, and that they could bring his brother back home. But what if the coup didn’t go to plan? What if his father had hoped? Had he made any kind of arrangements for the future after this?

With his brother now sleeping in the back seat, he looked over at her. “Do you know of any arrangements he may have made for the long-term?”

“I was actually just thinking about that, and I don’t really have any answers.”

“Right, and that’s something we will have to figure out,” Legend said.

Brody shot him a look. "Instincts?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's already mostly over."

"Sorry about that."

"He's nothing if not hard-headed and always very directed toward eyebrow moves," Legend stated. "It's made it very difficult to be around him, particularly when, if you're not with him, he considers you against him. It's not that adults we're so very different. He considers me weak because of it."

"Really?" Brody asked, frowning. "It's hardly weak to have ethics."

"It is if you are on the other side of life," Legend clarified. "That's not always true. It can get pretty steep and difficult, especially if it's not the kind of divergence your Father wants to see. Most fathers expect to have certain disagreements with their sons as they grow up, but I always stuck to my guns, and he couldn't really twist me to his way of thinking."

"Was he even planning on overthrowing the government back then?"

"I think he's always been planning on taking power, and, if he could do it legitimately, he would do it any way he could," Legend shared. "I fought to keep Larry out of his father's world when it became obvious he was heading in that direction, insisting that he keep Larry out of it because he was too weak physically to handle the stress. Father did agree to a certain extent, but we had many battles about it."

"I'm glad you stood up and fought against the type of things he was doing."

"He expected Larry to stay in the same house and just be a part of it."

However, since he'd already planned to kidnap one of his children as a pawn himself, Dad noted it could happen in reverse."

"Jesus. Did he go through with it?"

"No, because I put the kibosh on it. Believe me, it was only one of many fights we've had. He didn't see the point of wasting leverage like that until I pointed out that his own son would become that same kind of leverage and, with Larry's health issues, that kind of leverage would kill him."

"Did it bother him or did he really not give a damn?"

"I think in his own way he cares about Larry, more than he expected. It's the only reason he backed off that time," Legend murmured.

"I've definitely one of those lessons for me, a chance to clearly see who my father had become. It's one of the reasons I've only been there in Father's life in a peripheral way. I just couldn't stomach his politics and his method of handling disputes. As far as I know, he hasn't actually crossed any of those lines."

major lines, but, if he had and I had known, I would have tossed him myself in a heartbeat.”

“Yet you didn’t do anything about this coup, or did you?”

“He actually kept his plans from me until the very end, until it was too late. I’d heard on my own that someone was coming to snatch Larry and to use him as a pawn. When I pressed him, he finally told me what was happening, and that plans were already underway and couldn’t be stopped and that it was my job to look after Larry.”

“Forever and a day?”

“Apparently. Obviously he didn’t seem to even care that I was his best option for Larry.”

“You’re his brother.”

“Sure, but look at the work I do. It’s hardly a safe haven for a child, that, a phone rang in the back seat. He looked back and asked, “Whose couldn’tis that?”

“It’s mine,” Blair replied and then answered it. Almost immediately she stared at the others. “Oh my God,” she whispered. “Yes. No, I understand. When she got off the phone, she stared down at it, then quickly checked to see Larry still slumbered. She lifted her gaze to Legend. Shakily, she said,

“That was your father’s property manager. He’s just received word that your father has been taken by the police.”

At that, Legend swore under his breath. “Okay, do we know anything about what that means?”

“No, but he did mention that he’s sending me a package via email. He didn’t say it was severance or anything, just a package. He also mentioned he’s sending you one as well.”

“Well, that’s great. I’m not exactly in a position to sit here and argue, it. I’ve got to drive.”

“If you want to pull over and trade, I can drive,” Brody offered.

“No, we’re almost there, but we’ll need to stop for groceries too.”

“There’s a small grocery store just before we get there. Plus, I know it was a small store but only for convenience items, like maybe a few things.”

“Right, so that’ll be another no.”

“A small town is up ahead. Let’s go grab some groceries there and then the cabin.”

in jail Legend nodded. "Then we can sit down and go through whatever sent." At that, he took a quick right and then a series of turns getting town, where he found a good-size grocery store.

became At that, Blair hopped out with Legend. She looked back at the other nobody "Are you okay to stay here with Larry?"

Father, Both of them nodded, and the other two walked into the store. derway grabbed a cart and started filling it with fresh fruits and vegetables. "A how many days we're talking?" she asked in a low voice.

rdly the "No, plus we have no idea what will be in these damn email packages. "I know, but, if anybody is out trying to find Larry, that's a different story."

"The problem is, if somebody decides that they need some leverage to hold." At against my father, then my brother makes the cut. And, if they decide phone father needs to be completely annihilated, then my brother will go too.

"Did you ever think that you might be on the leverage list as well?" ely she He frowned at first, then shrugged. "I wouldn't be surprised if my stand." had more than half-a-dozen bastard children somewhere. I know that cked to acknowledged me, though not necessarily publicly. Larry is his re said, legitimate son."

at your "Right, so you're hoping that nobody else knows."

"Yes, that's exactly what I'm hoping, but honestly, I hadn't given anything thought. But now that you raised the point, it's a possibility that we'll consider as well."

ail. He She walked through the store, grabbed steaks, burgers, adding some mentioned dogs and other quick-cooking foods, then went to the cereals, snacks goods, as well as bacon, eggs, and bread.

ue with "Is there anything you want me to go grab from other sections?" asked.

She shrugged. "If you can think of anything we need, just add it to the basket."

ow the "I know we'll need coffee," he muttered.

milk or "Good point," she agreed. "Grab some tea and hot chocolate too. have anything for drinks yet." By the time they were done and heading to the check stand area, after the fastest trip that she could manage, the shelf had get to cart was overloaded.

They checked out, restacking all the bags into the cart, and walked

's been the car. She stopped and stared, nudging Legend, who was on his
ng into "Where's the car?"

He raised his gaze and started swearing. "God damn it."
er two. "Yeah."

Just then the vehicle came whipping forward in front of them,
re. She driven from the shadows. Brody hopped out from the driver's sid
ny ideamoving quickly, put all the groceries in the back. "Jump in. We've got
he said, and, with that, they took off.

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the car. She stopped and stared, nudging Legend, who was on his phone.
“Where’s the car?”

He raised his gaze and started swearing. “God damn it.”

“Yeah.”

Just then the vehicle came whipping forward in front of them, clearly driven from the shadows. Brody hopped out from the driver’s side, and, moving quickly, put all the groceries in the back. “Jump in. We’ve got to go,” he said, and, with that, they took off.

CHAPTER 6

BLAIR HATED TO say she was damn sick of being in this car, but she was damn sick of being in the car. They'd gone on a discombobulated ride through town, trying to shake off whoever had come into the grocery store parking lot looking for them. "Are you sure they were looking for us?" Blair asked Clary. Clary just nodded.

Then Blair looked over at Larry and frowned. "He's been sleeping awfully long time."

"I'm trying to keep him in that state," Clary admitted. "I don't want to have any idea of what's going on. Not yet at least."

"Right, I'm surprised you could do that for so long. I mean, it's a little thing if you're a mother."

At that, Clary laughed. "Well, I'll be a mother soon enough."

Blair openly stared at Clary. "Are you pregnant?"

She smiled and nodded, gently patting her tummy. "Yes, my sister and I. We're twins, and we're both carrying twins."

"Wow," Blair muttered in shock. "On the other hand, you're so good with Larry, I'm sure you'll have an absolutely wonderful time."

"I don't know about that." Clary chuckled.

"I think we're pretty safe right now," Brody announced, making a series of quick turns, sending them careening off to one side.

"That move doesn't feel like it's very safe." Blair gasped.

"Maybe not," he admitted, with a chuckle. "I just had to reroute them onto our pathway."

"If you say so," Blair muttered. But, sure enough, within about five minutes, they pulled through the open gate of a small resort, where they drove around to one of the cabins at the far end.

"Here is where we'll stay."

"If you say so," Blair replied, "but I, for one, am just very grateful to be getting out of this car."

“You and me both,” Clary agreed, with feeling. At that, she nudged Larry. “Wake up, buddy.”

He woke up, looked over at her with sleepy eyes, and asked, “Where are we here?”

“We’re here,” she said, smiling.

He looked around, still rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. “Oh, look. It’s on a lake.” He sounded absolutely ecstatic.

Blair chuckled. “So, it meets with your approval then?” she asked in a teasing voice.

“Be hard for it not to. I’ve been wanting to go to a lake for a real time. Can you teach me to swim?” He switched his gaze to his brother over to Brody. “Can somebody teach me to swim?”

“Sure,” Legend agreed. “I didn’t know you didn’t know how.”

“It’s one of those things Dad didn’t think I needed to know.”

“Why is that?” he asked.

“He was never planning on taking me any place where I would need help.”

“Oh, right. I’d forgotten. He hates the water, doesn’t he?”

“Absolutely,” Larry noted in a cheerful voice. “But not me. I love it. And, with that, he raced to the lake’s edge.

“If you guys want to unpack, I’ll go to the lake with him, Legend suggested, then took off after him.

“I’ll come with you,” Legend stated, immediately aligning with her.

She turned and looked at the other two, asking, “Are you okay if I go?”

“Absolutely,” Brody agreed. “Go keep an eye on Larry. We’ll put away the groceries. As a matter of fact, we might even start cooking something.”

Legend added, “Good. I bought stuff for hamburgers, hot dogs, and other choices, including some pasta.”

“Good enough,” Blair said cheerfully. And, with that, she raced to the lake, leaving Larry, who was already getting in the water. “You want to wait for me?”

“Larry?” she cried out in exasperation but knew he was exuberant and didn’t care. She didn’t want to do anything to hold him back when so much was going on in his world right now. He needed any moments of joy he could get.

She laughed as he waited on the shallow end of the water, shoes and sandals on his hands, with a big grin on his face.

“I love the feel of it,” he exclaimed, as he turned around in circles.

gently fell, sitting down on the edge of the water. He laughed and laughed. beautiful," he murmured. "How could he not like the water?"

Are we "A lot of people don't," Blair noted, "but generally it's related to a He looked up and nodded. "I think his mom drowned."

"Your grandmother?"

, wow. He nodded. "I think so."

"Well, that would explain it then," Blair replied. "However, the ed in you. That's your father. You, on the other hand, get to start with a clea and we'll begin with your lessons today."

lly long "I don't have a swimsuit," he replied, looking up at her in horror.

er, then "Surely we can find something that would work just as well. I suggest shorts," she said, with a shrug. "That's what a lot of guys d looked over at Legend, hoping he would back her up, and Legend nod

"Shorts work just fine," he agreed.

At that, Larry beamed. "Can we start now? I really want to just div d it."

Legend shook his head, while chuckling. "Maybe for a minute spend some time here right now and then start your lessons in the m ove it!"Everybody's pretty tired."

"Well, you guys are all tired. I'm not because I slept lots."

" Blair And Blair realized just how true that was. He had slept a lot. Just : else got any rest.

r. "Maybe we can go see what we can find to get changed into if we doffered. "Then I'll come down with you."

"Promise?" Larry asked in excitement.

it away "Promise," she vowed, "but I also have some paperwork from you ng." that I have to deal with."

id other "Ooh, paperwork," he repeated, with a wave of his hand. "That sounds ominous."

behind "Yeah, sometimes it's a little more ominous than other times. As for me, we get back up to the cabin, I'll take a look at that first."

l full of He nodded. They stayed for another twenty minutes, maybe half a ch was and then Larry asked, "Is there any food?"

uld get. She laughed. "There is, but I don't know if it's ready to eat. Let' ocks in and take a look. You haven't even checked out the cabin yet."

And, with that, Larry raced ahead.

until he "Have you got any idea what's in the package that you got?"

“It’s soaked her, as they walked slowly to the cabin.

“No, but I suspect it’s my walking papers,” she noted, “and that fear.” me feel terrible.”

“Well, let’s not borrow trouble until we get there,” he said, then he “Did my father really think of you that way?”

“Absolutely. I never really made any attempt to dissuade him. It’s not though, so I’m not sure it’s all his fault.” Legend stared at her intent in slate, she shrugged. “Your father is pretty determined to see what he wants and I never really saw him ever make an effort to bend or to give in any way.”

would “No, it isn’t really part of his makeup, is it?” Legend noted though o.” She “Even now, I know there’s a good chance that he won’t live to see 1 ded. and it just brings up all kinds of strange emotions.”

“Well, he is your father,” she stated.

e in.” “He is, but, once he went down this pathway, it could end only one

. We’ll “Seriously? Did you always think this venture was such a lost caus

orning. “Absolutely. I told him so, but he wasn’t prepared to listen.”

“So many times they aren’t, are they?” Blair noted. “Anyway, I take a look at our respective paperwork, so we both have an understand nobody where we’re at. Then I’ll have to make some decisions.”

He nodded. “I was hoping that you wouldn’t leave him right away.

o,” she “I wasn’t planning on it,” she said, “but I’m also a liability as lo stay here.” She faced him. “We’re too many people to effectively hide.

“I was wondering about that too,” Legend admitted, pushing his r father his face. “We need a plan.”

“Yeah, but we also need to know what the status is and whether always brother is actually in danger or if maybe this is over with and it’s a now.”

soon as “And then what? As a young boy, Larry can hardly be expected back and live in that place all on his own.” She didn’t know what to n hour, that. By the time they reached the cabin, Clary was busy making chocolate for Larry.

s go up Blair sat off to the side and quickly opened her laptop. Using the code, she brought up her email and downloaded the paperwork that had in for her. When she opened it, she was surprised to see a missive from Legend employer. It was formal, telling her that she had been given three w

severance pay and that her employment had been terminated immediately. She sat back and stared at it. It's kind of what she had expected, even though she didn't really understand why he would do something like that in the middle of this turmoil.

Yet there it was in the email. As she read further, in the event of a fire either happening to him, he was attempting to separate from all known persons in order to keep Larry safe. That made his firing of her a little easier to see, understandable, but what had he done in terms of keeping Larry safe, not in looking over at Legend to see a look of shock on his face. "Obviously, we weren't expecting whatever you got either."

Legend glanced over at Larry and then back at her, shook his head and in a low voice asked, "What did you get?"

"My walking papers," she stated. "Apparently, in the event of this going as planned, he would cut ties with everyone associated with his way of course, was part of that group."

Legend just stared at her and finally blinked. "Interesting tactic."

"Yeah, particularly since he didn't explain just what the plan was, let's go to Larry's care."

"No, of course not," Legend agreed, "but, if he'd asked, I would have said no."

"Asked what?"

"I've been given guardianship over him."

"Are you surprised?" she asked curiously. "You are his only relative."

"Maybe, but generally you would ask somebody if you wanted to do something like that," he replied. "This is hardly what I would have expected out of my life at this point in time, and I definitely would have refused at least to this extent. I do work, and all of my work is dangerous."

She pondered that. "What if you went to work with Terkel?"

"That's dangerous work too," he pointed out, "and I would still have to have a home base for Larry. I'd planned to make sure he was okay regarding this is a step further than I thought my father would go."

She nodded. "It's all a bit of a shock, isn't it? On the other hand, Kartal knows how much you care about your little brother and trusts me to keep Larry safe."

"And for me? Well, look at the situation I'm in here. It's not as if

diately just turn around and walk away from him and say, *Okay, I'm done.* I thought we can't even get out of here safely."

in the Blair scrubbed her face and muttered, "I need to sleep on this."

"Yeah, you and me both," he replied in an odd tone.

nything She looked up at him. "Why? What are you thinking?"

annel in He shrugged. "I don't know what I'm thinking, but, like you, I need more just let this settle for a bit." He got up and, in a sudden move, told Blair, "I need to head outside for a few minutes and clear my head." Wisely ignoring Larry's call out to him, Legend quickly stepped outside.

Clary walked over, sat down beside Blair, and whispered, "What's going on, and in on?"

"Well, I've been fired—however you want to look at it," she shared in a low tone. "Effective immediately, with a three-week severance package. I, of basically told *Get out of our lives.* Apparently Legend's been given guardianship." She kept her voice even lower so that Larry couldn't hear. "Without asking Legend first."

was for At that, Clary's gaze widened. "Interesting choice."

"His only living relative is probably the reason," Blair guessed, but she wouldn't really know. There was an explanation, saying that, should the worst come wrong over this, then he was cutting ties with everybody, and my term is part of that, I imagine."

"That would make sense—probably everybody at the mansion and the living Yet, depending on how the coup goes, his properties could all be forfeited."

Blair nodded. "I just don't know what I'm supposed to do about this."

Expected Clary studied her. "If you were still over there, and you received the news, at what would you be doing?"

"Arranging a way to leave," Blair replied, "not that I'm exactly sure where I'd go, maybe visit some family," she muttered. She wanted to cry, but she needed to get a grip. This was no time for tears, and she didn't dare look at Larry. "It's the net effect of doing this kind of work, isn't it?" she asked after a moment.

"It absolutely is," Clary agreed. "We give everything of ourselves to the job, and Mr. charges, so how is it we're supposed to not care when we lose it? You to somebody for as long as we have? It's an occupational hazard."

"Yes, and the fact of the matter is, now I'm to have zero to do with it. How do I tell him that? He won't necessarily understand."

I mean, “I think he’ll understand, but it’ll be the worst-case scenario for him because he’s now losing you at the same time he’s also losing his father.”

“His father didn’t seem to think that was an issue,” she noted in a soft, steady tone.

“It doesn’t seem to me that his father thought beyond his own personal needs and agenda,” Clary stated, with a harder tone than Blair was expecting.

Clary nodded and smiled. “Very true,” she muttered. “Anyway, I’m not going to get that, well out of it, and now I need to find a way to catch a lift somewhere and get a ticket for someplace,” she whispered, staring off in the distance.

“Where would that someplace be?”

“I’ll go back to England, I guess,” she replied. “I have family and friends there I could visit, and then I’ll have to figure out what I want to do next. I don’t know if I’m even sure I want to do this work anymore,” she said, looking down at her clenched fists. “It’s ...” She just let her voice trail off.

“Traumatizing? That’s the word I think of, but, if your charges are anything like the ones I’ve seen, quite so cute and adorable, it might be easier to separate.”

Blair laughed at that. “Larry’s been special right from the beginning, but you well know, since you had a hand in it.”

“Maybe,” Clary murmured, “but I also had something absolutely wonderful to work with.”

“Of course, and look at us now. We’re all sitting here, doing our best to keep Larry alive and safe—mentally and physically—but apparently that’s not working out so well. I’m no longer one I’m associated with.” Blair knew she sounded *off* at that. “Excuse me. I just need a few minutes.”

She got up and stepped outside, then headed to the lake. She saw nothing of Legend anywhere, and she *was* feeling off. Yet that wasn’t even the worst part. She wasn’t stunned because, to a certain extent, she’d known that this day would come, and, in the midst of this mess, it made even more sense. It would happen now. But she just hadn’t allowed herself to think about the repercussions it would have, and now there was nothing else to be done but to deal with it.

She sat near the water for a long moment, her face buried in her hands. Hearing a sudden sound, she looked up, expecting to see Legend. Realizing she was alone, she gave him a half smile, she was slammed in the head and knew no more about him.

for him
er.”



n a dry

LEGEND WALKED BACK into the cabin, sniffed the air, and asked, “Burger

political

At that, Brody nodded. Clary came up and asked, “Can you go get
for dinner?”

n pretty

He looked at her, surprised. “Sure. Where did she go?”

and buy

“Down to the lake. She was pretty upset.”

He nodded. “Yeah, my father, in his usual smooth manner, com-
surprised her.”

friends

“I think in some ways she was expecting it, yet wasn’t truly prepared
what it really means.”

I’m not

n at her

“We’re expecting all kinds of things, but it’s a shock when it actually
happens,” Legend stated. “I’ll go talk to her and bring her back for a

weren’t

At that, he turned and walked back out of the cabin.

ing, as

Lifting a hand against the bright sunshine, he looked for the best place
that she may have taken. Not seeing much, he headed toward the lake
they’d been with Larry. As soon as he got down there, he saw her footprints

olutely

and where she’d been sitting but saw no sign of her now. He wandered
and down, but he saw nothing, except for multiple prints. As soon as he
determined a second set was from heavy work boots, he froze, turned
senses, and studied the energy around him.

best to

that job

nd odd.

*Definitely hunters, definitely somebody was here. Now the question was
where is she?* He quickly searched the beach areas, then headed to the
line. When he couldn’t find anything, he quickly raced back to the cabin
catching sight of Brody outside on the deck. Legend gave a sharp whistle
and Brody spun and looked at him, so Legend motioned him over.

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Brody raced down to join him. “What’s the matter?”

“She’s gone,” Legend said. “Found tracks at the beach, heavy boots
need to keep an eye on them here, just in case it’s connected, and
what we’ve been through so far, I don’t see how it couldn’t be.”

r arms.

eady to

“Go find her,” Brody said urgently.

With that, Legend headed into the trees, searching. He followed the signs
into the wooded area, but, at that point in time, the signs were much harder
find. A broken branch, a tiny bit of thread, but he kept following it, knowing
that the sun was starting to go down.

When he heard a noise up ahead, he slipped behind a tree and watched a man stepped out from behind another tree and slipped across to star cabin. The stranger then pulled out his phone, took several photos, and text.

Swearing and wishing he'd nabbed him before he sent anything, Legend was on him in seconds. And, with a quick hard fist to his jaw, the stranger was down. Legend grabbed the guy's phone, checked the last text, and quickly sent another. *I was mistaken.*

With that, Legend pocketed the guy's phone and tied up the stranger, leaving him wrapped around the tree. Then Legend backtracked, and off to the side in a lump, was Blair.

He quickly untied her, picked her up, and, gently cradling her in his arms, he raced to the cabin. As he burst in through the door, Clary exclaimed, "I think he hit her over the head." Legend turned to Blair and said, "Did you find anything?"

He shook his head. "I've put up a guard, although you just punched her in it."

"I'll have to punch another one," he stated. "I've got the guard who attacked her tied up down there. I'll be back with him in a minute."

And, with that, Legend quickly returned to where he'd left the area. He stepped into the area, only to find his prisoner gone. Swearing, he pulled out his phone, called Brody, and warned him, "Watch out. The guy is gone." "What do you mean he's gone?" Brody snapped.

"I left him unconscious and tied up, so either he's not alone or he has a very hard head and managed to get up and carry on, which I am sure he will. I'll do a full search of the woods to confirm there's no vehicle or someone else out here waiting."

With that, he disconnected and dove into the woods around him, looking for the attacker. It didn't take long to realize that whoever had been his prisoner was now gone. That also meant that Legend and the others must be on their own as well because this guy would just return, bringing backup, and the area would be teeming with bad guys. Legend didn't know what a *guard* meant as far as Brody was concerned, but Legend couldn't take the chance that some *guard* was all they needed.

grateful

ched as He raced back to the cabin. As he burst in through the door, he ca
e at the skittering stop at the sight of two men with guns. One was held
d sent a Brody, and one was held against Larry. "What the hell is this?"
bellowed.

Legend "We're friends of your father's."

stranger "If you were friends of my father, you sure as hell wouldn't be
nd the guns to people in this house."

"Well, sometimes you have to get a little bit inventive," said the o
tranger, glaring at him. "Wait. ... Are you the one who hit me?"

d there, "I have no idea what you're talking about. I was outside and th
heard noises."

is arms, The guy looked at him suspiciously, then shook his head. "I'm t
ied and you're the one who hit me," he declared, turning the gun toward him.

Brody. "If that's the case, I would only have done it with cause. Were
one who knocked out poor Blair here?" He looked down to see Blair
d a hole up at him, her bottom lip trembling. He tried to give her a reassuring
but things were not the way he wanted them. "What are you guys doi
y who anyway?"

"Your father won't pay us."

ttacker. "You mean Larry's father won't pay you," Legend stated, mak
e pulled distinction clear. "I'm not sure what you expect from him though. He
gone." got much now."

"How do you know he won't pay you?" Clary asked in confusion.

's got a "What happened to him?" Blair was shaken but recovering.

is bull. At that, the first man looked down at her. "He's been taken into c
nobody and he's been shot."

Larry's eyes widened, and he looked like he was about to cry.

looking Blair reached across and said, "It's okay, buddy."

ere was He stared at her and squeezed her fingers. "I gather whatever
e moved doing didn't go the way he planned," he whispered.

oon the The other man gave a short laugh. "No, it sure as hell didn't," he si
t guard "And we need to get paid, so we can get the hell out of town."

chance "What's that got to do me?" Larry asked, staring at him. "I don
any money."

"No, but your father did."

"But once they start investigating his life, they'll seize everythi

me to areplied quietly. "I've got nothing."

against "We need money to get out of here," the man repeated, yelling now

Legend "Well then, you need to go see his property manager, if Dad ow
money," Larry declared, stating the facts. "I can't even sign checks
don't even know where the money is."

holding At that, the kidnapper looked at him suspiciously and then over
adults. "Which one of you has guardianship?"

ie man, "None of us at the moment. His father obviously made sure o

Legend snapped in disgust. "Did you really think a child would give
ought Imoney?"

They frowned at him. "Well, one of you cares about this child, s
hinkingmake sure that whoever it is pays in order to keep him alive."

"You can get your money back from your dad," the other one pitc
you thewith a smile, pointing his gun at Larry.

staring "What makes you think that if anything happens to the father, tha
, smile,will have any money?" Blair asked them. "If the government
ng hereeverything, he'll have nothing, and he'll be the same as you."

"I'm sure his father has hidden away money for the kid's care som
along the line," the second man suggested.

ing the Blair twisted and looked up at him. "Really? The man who you k
e hasn'twell? Do you really think he secured any money for his son's future?
he put it all into this losing venture?"

The man's eyes widened, as he stared at her. "You really do kno
don't you?"

ustody, "I've looked after his son for quite a few years," Blair shared
"and it seems to me that his father is an all-or-nothing kind o
completely committed and certain of success at every turn. I highly d
set aside any money for Larry's care."

he was At that, the two men stared at each other, as if unsure what to do w
information. The first guy spoke up eventually. "Well, somebody her
napped.to fork out the money, so we can get somewhere safe. If the authorit
out that we're still alive, you can bet they'll be after us too."

it have "Did you do anything wrong?" Blair asked.

He stared at her. "Well, we were involved in the coup to overthi
damn government. What do you think?" he snapped.

ng," he "I think you bet on the wrong horse," Blair replied, equally snappy

He took steps toward her, his fist back, as if to hit her, but she stood
v. confront him.

ves you “Go ahead. Hit me. That’s who you are, right? Somebody who uses
s, and I to take things, whether it belongs to you or not,” she muttered. “So, are
you’re concerned, if you can beat me up to get two pennies off me, you
r at their.”

“Do you have two pennies?”

f that,” “No, I don’t,” she declared. “I’ve been working as a nanny, so
you theyou think?” He winced at that. “And a nanny for *him* above all, so
really think he was generous?”

o we’ll “Hell no, he wasn’t generous with us either. That’s why we
something.”

ched in, “We have a vehicle out there, but that’s all I can tell you.” Her voice
hoarse. “Nobody here has any money. Not the kind of money you’re
it Larryabout.”

seizes “What kind of money do you have?” the second man asked suspiciously.
She pulled her pockets inside out and said, “Like ten bucks.”

ewhere “God,” he mumbled in shock, then turned and looked at his buds.
you really think he would have left his son broke?”

now so “It wasn’t so much that he left his son broke,” Legend clarified. “I
Or did doubt he thought that far in the future or even considered the possibility
losing.”

ow him, At that, the first man started to swear.

“On the other hand, there are properties and probably a lot of valuables
quietly, inside,” Blair noted. “So you might get something from there.”

of guy, At that, the men stared at each other, as if wondering. “I don’t
doubt he man. I’m not about to start lifting silver and trying to find a pawn shop
explained. “It has to be big money. Otherwise there’s no point.”

with that The other man agreed. “Well, we can always kidnap someone
e needs suggested, looking back at them. “Which one of you has the most im
ies find family?”

“Larry, of course,” Legend stated, “but we all know how that’ll work
for you.”

row the “Doesn’t he have any other family?”

“No,” Clary replied, “neither do we.” She looked toward Brody.

“What about you?” the kidnapper asked, turning to Blair.

nd up to She shook her head. "I'm the nanny. I have no family. It's kin requirement for working for him. You probably don't have family eit es forceif you work for Mr. Kartal."

s far as He stared at her and nodded. "I never thought of that, but you'r ou'll doWhy is that?"

"Because, if we have no one, we're disposable."

"*Disposable.*" At that the first man sucked back his breath ar vhat doslowly nodded. "That son of a bitch. If he thought that far ahead, su do youwould have thought about his son."

"Only if his father has money after this coup, and, even if his e needdead, Larry can't even access anything. He is a minor."

"Well, crap." The two men looked at each other and stepped back. ice washave a little talk here, so you just keep to yourselves and don't do a talkingstupid."

Clary looked over at Brody, raising one eyebrow.

ously. Legend wasn't exactly sure what that look meant, but he presumed something along the lines of *What will we do?*

ly. "Do

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She shook her head. "I'm the nanny. I have no family. It's kind of a requirement for working for him. You probably don't have family either, not if you work for Mr. Kartal."

He stared at her and nodded. "I never thought of that, but you're right. Why is that?"

"Because, if we have no one, we're disposable."

"*Disposable.*" At that the first man sucked back his breath and then slowly nodded. "That son of a bitch. If he thought that far ahead, surely he would have thought about his son."

"Only if his father has money after this coup, and, even if his father's dead, Larry can't even access anything. He is a minor."

"Well, crap." The two men looked at each other and stepped back. "We'll have a little talk here, so you just keep to yourselves and don't do anything stupid."

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Legend wasn't exactly sure what that look meant, but he presumed it was something along the lines of *What will we do?*

CHAPTER 7

BLAIR STOOD, COMPLETELY ignoring the gunmen, and announced, “We’ll talk about it, I’ll finish the burgers.” They stared at her. As she walked through the kitchen, still visible to them in the same open front room, she continued to carry on with the food prep.

“You don’t appear to be too bothered by anything,” said one of the gunmen.

“Well, you’ve just basically told me that I don’t have a job. If my father’s been picked up, then I have my own nightmare to deal with on top of not going hungry.”

At that, the one guy snorted. “Everybody who works for him now has a job. Anybody who had any kind of dealings with him is now under suspicion, and anybody who had business plans with him is now out of luck,” he stated flatly.

“I guess in some ways that is to be expected, given the type of person he was,” she noted quietly, as she finished slicing the tomatoes and vigorously pulled the lettuce leaves off the core, as she quickly finished the prep work for the burgers.

“What will you do with those?” the gunman asked, coming up behind her. “I want you to go sit down.”

“What? And waste good food? No,” she replied with finality. “You’re planning on shooting *all of us*,” she said with emphasis, “people who need to eat. We’re all tired. We’re fed up. I, for one, have a bad headache, and I’m giving it to one of you. Plus, now you’ve just dropped a bombshell that will have pretty strong consequences for all of us.” And, with that, she slapped the burger patties together and put them on plates. “If you’re expecting a burger, you need to tell me right now, so I can put on a few more.”

The gunman glared at her, and she shrugged. “If you’re not, that’s better because we don’t really have that many.” She kept on working, ignoring the armed men altogether.

Frustrated, he turned and moved away, leaving her alone in the area. As he walked off, she heard him mutter something about *the broad*.

She shrugged. From his choice of words, he was probably British too, just her luck. She may run into him again in England. Shaking her head, she wasn't so much upset about losing her job. It was all about losing her connection to Larry, and yet, as she'd already acknowledged, she knew termination would be coming at some point.

She looked over at Larry to see him sitting rather frozen off to one side beside Clary. She had her hand on him, and even Blair could see the flow of energy from one to the other. Clary was one of those people who always be grateful to be here to try and help, and Blair was really grateful Larry's Clary was here too. With Blair out of the picture, Larry would have a hard time coming up, but it was also not something that Clary could take on longer. Time, not with her married now, and pregnant with twins, and working under Terk too. Blair wasn't even sure that Legend could handle it either. Having full-time parent wasn't the same as being a part-time parent. Having responsibility for a child was a completely different situation.

She looked over at Legend. "What do you want on your burger?" Legend frowned at her. She snapped, "Hey, I'm eating. If anybody else wants a burger, then come over and grab one. I've got most of them made up, but there are a few other things you want on yours."

Legend rose and came over, and the gunmen just kept an eye on him. "Interesting move on your part," he whispered.

"Well, my life's just been tossed into the gutter right now," Legend murmured, "so whatever. At least we can eat." She handed him a plate with two big burgers.

He looked at it appreciatively and smiled. "It'll be okay, you know." "Well, some of it will be," she said in exasperation. "The rest of it is up to that remains to be seen."

"I'm sorry. My father was nothing if not very focused."

"He's always been intensely focused," she agreed quietly, "and I can't really blame the man for that. It's really all my fault for getting too attached to Larry. I knew it was happening, though I couldn't have really stopped it. It was a good thing for Larry at the time, but now? Well—"

"It's still a good thing for me," Larry bellowed, glaring at her.

kitchen because this has happened, it doesn't mean I want you to disappear." she crazy "I know that," she said, softening her tone. "I'm not made of though, and I have to work for a living, so ..." She shrugged. "I don't know how I can make it work."

her head, "Well, let's not worry about it right now," Clary noted. "I think you're handling the bigger problems." She tipped her head toward the two gunmen.

Clary saw Blair snort at that. "You think? These guys are looking for a way to make money, just like I am. I don't have anything to offer them. I don't have two pennies to pull together myself," she muttered. Then she turned, and she addressed Brody. "Brody, your turn. I've got two burritos for you." She walked over and handed him the plate. He accepted it in surprise, looking over at the gunmen, staring, standing off to the side, letting their captives eat.

Brody shrugged. "Good enough." Then he started munching away. Clary looked at Legend to see the surprised look on his face and then she saw acceptance, as if to say this was a moment that they would take, and they would eat because they didn't know if they would get another moment so. She smiled at Clary. "Your turn," she said cheerfully.

Clary nodded and asked, "You want to come sit here with him?" She nodded, then walked over to Larry, sat down, and put an arm over his shoulders. "Buck up," she told him. "You'll be fine." He looked up at her and she saw the tears wanting to pour. "I promise. It will be okay." "Yeah? You can't promise that. If my father's dead, everything would just flip."

"That's quite possible," she agreed quietly, "and there will be people with you, as we well know. However, if you don't have any money, and you don't have anything to give them, maybe they won't feel the need to take you."

He gave her that look and replied, "You know that, in many ways, I've already overstayed my welcome in this world."

She froze, looked at him, and asked, "What do you mean by that?"

"Well, I wasn't supposed to live this long, so, if I die now, ... I can't guess that's just the way the world rebalances itself."

She winced. "Don't even think like that," she snapped, glaring at him. "You have just as much right to a full and healthy life as anybody else."

He gave her a ghost of a smile. "You all can work as hard as you want. Just keep me alive, but you still can't make sure of it."

At that, one of the gunmen stepped over and asked, “What are you money about?”

She sighed. “We almost lost Larry not all that long ago. He was very ill. He’s still not back to full health, so this is definitely not we have him.”

“Well, so sorry,” he said in a mocking tone. “We’re trying to figure out what to do.”

“I get that, but it’s not our problem—and certainly not Larry’s,” she snapped, “As far as I know, Mr. Kartal had money, but, if he’s been here, we don’t know how it stands with his assets. The onsite property manager accepted the possibility. However, I doubt any cash remains or that it’s negotiable.”

“Who is the property manager?” the one guy asked.

She gave him the name. “But honestly I don’t know if he can do anything like this or if he’s just from an accounting firm in London.”

At that, the guy winced. “With our luck that would be exactly what we need them to do,” he muttered. “The bastard.”

She stared at him. “So, did you just not get paid or were you supposed to get a portion out of the proceedings?”

“Both,” he said. “Not that it’ll help now.”

She nodded and didn’t say anything. Sometimes it’s better to just run. At that a phone rang. She looked around, startled to realize it was her phone.

She got up and walked over to the kitchen ledge where she had left it, but in the process one of the gunmen snatched it from her hand.

“Who is it?” he snapped into the phone. When nobody answered on the other end, he turned and asked her, “What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything,” she declared, staring at him. “What are you asking me for? For all you know, it’s my girlfriend.”

He glared at her and asked, “Why didn’t she answer?”

“Well, because no man should be answering my phone,” she declared. “Now what you’ve done is alerted her that I could be in trouble, and she’ll be well, I’m worried.”

He tossed the phone to her and stated, “Call her back and tell her everything is fine. Say convincingly that you’re busy.” When she hung up, he pressed the gun against Larry’s head.

Larry looked over at her, and she nodded. “If you harm Larry, I can guarantee that you will never get a dime.” Not only was her tone

talking intimidating, but she stepped closer to the gunman, who backed up a step.

With that, Larry smirked, and the gunman lowered his gun.

is very, She hit Redial on her phone, recognizing Terkel's number, and, before helping could say anything, she told him, "I'm fine, baby. Everything's okay. I

really busy. I'll call you back when I have a chance." And, with three seconds, the gunman's face purple outended the call. She looked over at Brody to see an odd look on his face of concentration though, and she realized something was going on that she didn't understand.

taken, I But then they all seemed to have skills and abilities that she'd never seen before. Even as she looked over at Legend, she saw something odd on his face. as he looked at her. She smiled down at Larry. "It's okay, buddy. Just stay calm. It's okay."

nothing He looked at her and smiled. "You always say that. You always sound like everything will be just fine."

at he's "Because it is," she stated. "Besides, life is way too stressful. I'm not worrying about it right now."

osed to Larry gave a short, stuttered laugh. "There's nothing I can even do. My father is dead," he cried out, clearly in such pain that she immediately stepped forward, wrapped her arms and wrapped them around him, hugging him close.

cut and "I know, kid. Even if he isn't yet, he will be soon," the gunman said, looking over at him. "Sorry, kid, but your dad bet on a particular person, but one and it wasn't any good."

on the holding a gun to my face?" Larry nodded. "If it had been good, would you still be standing there holding a gun to my face?"

The gunman stared at him, then slowly shook his head. "No, because your dad would have paid me."

He nodded but winced. "Maybe he would have paid you," Larry said sadly. "But you should know that he has history of not paying people."

At that, the gunman frowned. "How do you know that?"

he'll be "I've just heard things as people were yelling on the phone some time ago," he replied. "People get angry because they expected something and didn't get it. I'll tell her it."

sitated, At that, the gunman looked over at his buddy nervously. "Is that true?" "I don't know," he muttered, staring at the kid. "Anything in particular?"

; I can Larry shrugged. "Not really. He just seemed to always have angry people around the phone."

ep. “Yeah, I wonder why,” snapped one of the gunmen, “if it’s not people.”

efore he “Have you worked for him long?” Blair asked him.

l’m just The gunman turned his gaze back to her. “How come you didn’t eat, sheburger?”

ce, one “Because I came over here to comfort Larry,” she said quietly, on that shelying. She’d come over to let Clary go to the kitchen, away from them. She wasn’t sure what was going on between her and Brody, but, with them

er seentgether, they looked different. She asked Larry, “Do you want a burger on his He shook his head. “No,” he whispered. “I can’t eat right now.”

ly. Just She nodded. “I get it,” she muttered. “I’m so sorry.”

He gave a shuddering nod and then said, “I would take an apple though.” She made it She laughed. “An apple would be good.” She got up, walked into the kitchen, where all the groceries were, and fished out an apple from one of the bags. She washed it and patted it dry and then brought it back to him.

Crunch into that.”

do. My “What good will an apple do if he doesn’t want to eat?” asked one of the gunmen, suspiciously looking at her.

“Well, he gets blood sugar issues, and sometimes, when his stress is bad, his jaw can lock up, so an apple helps him to destress.” The gunman didn’t quite know what to say to that, but then he apparently didn’t know what to say where kids were concerned at all. She looked over at the gunman, hoping that they would come up with a plan pretty-damn soon because she was getting tired of this.

se your As she sat back down with Larry, he told her, “Go get yourself a burger. I’ll have the apple.”

y noted She hesitated, then nodded. “I’ll go grab one.” She rose and snatched a burger, standing at the counter as she plowed into it. “That’s good.”

times,” “How can you eat like that right now?” the gunman asked, staring at her curiously. “Most women would be far too upset.”

“Maybe so,” she murmured, “but sometimes life is hard, and you’re caught up in all these dramas, and there is just no way out. I don’t know what your plans are. You could be set on killing us, for all I know, but, if you’re anywhere, who knows when we’ll get food again.”

“I don’t have any plans on killing you,” the first gunman stated,

paying you give me a reason.”

She eyed him and then slowly nodded. “Wasn’t planning on it,” she murmured.

“Good.” He glared at her. “It’s just weird that you’re all sitting around us though.”

“Hey, I offered you a burger,” she pointed out. “Still a couple minutes. Blair here, if you want one.”

He stared at her, snorted, and walked away. “God, they’re weird here?”

And that seemed to be all he had to say about it. She looked back at the others to see Legend munching away on his burgers, studying the gun. When finished eating, he walked over and put his empty plate in the sink.

The gunman immediately turned, holding his gun at the ready.

Legend shrugged. “Hey, just returning my plate.” And he stepped a few feet back. “Here.”

At that, the gunman sighed. “I don’t know why the hell you guys are all panicked.”

“I don’t think panic will help much,” Blair noted.

“It doesn’t matter if it’ll help much or not,” the gunman argued. “It’s not normal behavior. It’s as if you guys are waiting for something, although I don’t know what the hell that could be, certainly not a rescue.”

“No, of course not,” Blair seemingly agreed. She turned, filled the sink with hot soapy water, and started doing the dishes. She figured the cause of the gunman’s behavior was the mundaneness of it all was driving that one kidnapper nuts. All Blair was doing was giving the others a chance to formulate some sort of a plan.

Blair needed them to do it faster because she was quickly running through ideas. If they somehow thought she had a plan, well, she really didn’t want to wait.

Then she stared down at the hot soapy water and looked over at the other gunman. “Pretty good,” she said.

Legend, who was studying the other gunman closely, but trying not to look at her, looked like he was. She smiled at that, then looked at Brody to see if he was studying her.

She shrugged, picked up the bowl with the hot soapy water, then in a smooth move, she flung it in the nearest gunman’s face. He roared in pain even before he had a chance to do anything, Legend had tackled him.

Brody was on the other gunman. It was all over in a matter of seconds. “unless”



it,” she

g here, LEGEND LOOKED OVER at her. “Interesting timing.”

re over She shrugged. “I was waiting for you guys to choose the time explained, “and, when that didn’t seem to be happening, I figured distraction might help.”

re.” “It did. We were just trying to sort out who and what they were

k at the Brody added, as he tied up his unconscious gunman.

unmen. “Yeah?”

kitchen “Well, unless you guys want to open up that pathway of commur and fill me in, I’m on my own here,” Blair told them. “I didn’t have a what you were up to. I figured you were waiting for something, but I know what that something was.”

away. Legend laughed. “It’s all good. Besides, it’s the same result. We aren’t at the gunmen, and now we can decide on what happens next.”

“Yeah?” Blair asked. “So what do you want to do? Is the government looking for these guys as part of the overthrow attempt?”

‘This is hough I idea.” At that, Legend looked at her with respect and nodded. “That’s no idea.”

he sink Just then a phone rang.

omplete “Terkel, yeah. I know. It’s fine,” Brody said, speaking into the air was “We’ve got the gunmen under control. Thanks for the help by the way lan, but finished the call.

out of Blair looked over at him, one eyebrow raised. “Thanks for what he

He laughed. “I’ll explain later, but just be assured that we weren’t on this, and we were trying to figure out who these people were and where they had others outside, before we took them down.”

the two back at “Well, can’t you do that now that they’re unconscious?”

o make ee him “There is only so much information we can get while interrogating when they’re unconscious,” Brody quipped. “It’s much better if turned. awake because that’s when they’re actively thinking, and we can read minds.”

ed, but, im, and “Oh,” Blair muttered, her heart sinking, as she stared at him. “I think of that.”

Legend walked over, wrapped an arm around her shoulders, and said, "It doesn't matter. You did good."

"So, you knew about it too?" she asked Legend.

"I knew they were up to something, and I had a good idea just because of the odd look on Clary's face," he revealed, with a smile. "Not exactly, but that's a different story."

"As long as I didn't mess it up."

Hearing an odd sound, Legend turned to see Larry getting up, now frozen in place. Then, racing forward, he threw his arms around Blair in a hug.

She held him close and whispered, "It's okay, buddy. I told you it would be okay." He looked up at her, and she saw the tears in his eyes. "Pretty tough day for you."

"Is Dad dead, do you think?"

"I'm afraid he may be, yes," Blair replied, with a nod, "but again, we have to wait for confirmation of that." She looked over at the others and saw the same look on their faces too. "I think all of us suspect he is, but ..." Blair shrugged. "You know as well as I do how that isn't necessarily the truth."

"It feels like Dad's dead," Larry announced suddenly.

"That's why I'm telling you what I think too," she murmured. "None of us is telling a lie. It feels very much like he's already gone."

phone.
ay." He



lp?"

JUST THEN LEGEND'S phone rang. He fished it out and checked the ID screen. "Jacoby, what's up? ... It is, is it? ... Fine," he murmured. "I had a chance to get through too much of the paperwork yet. ... Not aware. It would have been nice if he'd discussed it with me first." Legend's gaze went to his brother.

At that, Jacoby added, his voice somber, "There is money, and thank you for your little bit of time, but we'll have to move on this right now. It was always his plans to provide for his boy, but I am still transferring all the property to him. I didn't move some of it before this happened, when he jumped up the time on me."

"Of course," Legend noted.

said, “It “Whatever there is, as soon as everything is secured in Larry’s we’ll sell it anyway,” he explained. “Larry needs a new start.” By th they finished discussing the business side of things, and Legend en cause of call, he turned to face his brother and then nodded. “Your father tly sure escape. He felt sure he had the support of the military and that they back him up, but it appears that wasn’t true. Anyway, during the attempt, he was shot, and your father is dead.”

no longer Larry looked at him and stiffened. “He was your father too,” he in a big out.

At that, Legend closed his eyes briefly and nodded. “Our father t that it deceased.”

his eyes. Larry sniffled, looked up at Blair. “We were right, weren’t we, just “Yes, we were. Remember that intuitive part? It’s often right.”

“I know. I just didn’t want it to be right.”

and we’ll “Of course not,” she whispered, hugging him close. “He was your

and saw Larry nodded. “Now I just feel guilty.”

rugged. “Why do you feel guilty?”

“Because the pressure is over,” he replied. “That pressure to be son I’m not, to always be something different from what I am because that to point Dad wanted. It was never what I wanted, and I could never be that Now that he’s gone, I wish I was that person so he would have been p me, at least just a little.”

“Oh, sweetie, your father was proud of you, just as you were—even you proved to be smarter than him—and you have nothing to feel about,” she whispered and held him close.

on the Legend felt a muscle in his jaw twitch at Larry’s words because haven’t certainly understood the pressure to be something his father wanted. o, I am what Blair just said, Legend had never managed to succeed in mak Legend’s father proud of him. His father was just not one of those people wh ever give a compliment or even the time of day to somebody wh ere is a different than him. He despised those who had different beliefs and ways in Legend and his father had come to blows more than a few times, bu rty. We the end had actually come, his father had left him in charge of his son. e frame could be seen as both a compliment, yet, at the same time, a huge chall

He gently ruffled Larry’s hair. “We’ll get through this, buddy.” turned and looked up at him, so Legend opened his arms and swu

his name, around and just held him. Together, they walked over to the window, and the two of them just hung on to each other for a long moment, acknowledging that what had happened was something they had both known would be tried. Both had tried to dissuade their father, but there was no stopping it. Now their father had put things in motion.

escape “He wasn’t easy,” Larry whispered.

 “No, he sure wasn’t. Yet he was your father, and we’ll honor that.”

pointed “He was your father too, but you don’t see him like that.”

 “I know. Sometimes it’s easier to forget.”

is now “Because you had a different mother?”

 “My mother wasn’t any happier,” he shared. “I’m not sure our father then?” the ability to make anybody happy.”

 “I don’t think he cared enough to try,” Larry noted, with one of those adult comments that had startled Legend time and time again.

father.” “Maybe not, but that doesn’t mean we have to live that way any longer.”

 “What about the gunmen?”

 “Somebody is coming to pick them up,” Legend told him. “The men are part of the team who went to overthrow the government, so it’s not as if they’re taken back to face justice.”

person. “What if that means they’ll get shot too?”

around of Legend faced his younger brother. “I get that, but they must face the consequences of their actions. Is this how you want them acting when they’re around the world if they’re free instead of jailed? Kidnapping people, holding them hostage, and trying to get money?”

 At that, Larry winced. “No. I definitely don’t.”

Legend “If they’re given a trial and a chance to defend themselves, that’s the best for everyone, and you’ll see it. However, right now? There is a lot of heartache and pain for everybody involved in this whole mess.”

so could As Legend laid Larry down to sleep quite a bit later, Legend stared at his little brother for a long moment, watching him doze. Blair came up to him, gently patted him on the back, and whispered, “You’ll make a good father.”

Which “It’s not a role I expected to play,” he replied, his voice harsher than he wanted.

” Larry “No, and I get that. I’m just not sure we have a choice sometimes.”

ng him He looked over at her and smiled. “Even if I did have a choice, I

and then not sure I would have chosen fatherhood.”

ledging “Because of what you’ve seen in life?” she questioned.

l occur. “My father wasn’t easy, and I always worried I would be too much for him.”

“I don’t think you can blame your father for that,” she replied. “It’s a common-enough problem with all men. They worry about not being a good-enough father or that the influence of the terrible parental figures they had themselves would make them not good father material. However, women have the same problems. Some of us have terrible upbringings and we wonder if we should ever be allowed to procreate—in case those of us who have bad habits procreate as well,” she muttered.

He considered her for a moment, then nodded. “That’s the real reason those of us who haven’t pursued having a family, isn’t it?”

“Well, it’s not as if I have a herd sire,” she added, with a pointed finger. “At least not one who I cared to go in that direction with. Still, I didn’t have a good upbringing, no.”

se men “Any particular reason?”

best if “My mother was on drugs most of her life. It was always drugs or alcohol and most of the time it was both,” she stated bluntly. “Not exactly the best way to raise a child. I was put into foster care when I was twelve, and my father died of an overdose, and believe me. That wasn’t any easier.”

n going “I’m sorry. We never really know what somebody else is going through in life or what they’ve gone through in the past, do we?”

“Well, the fact that we even get to adulthood with our sanity is sort of a miracle in itself.”

will be He chuckled at that. “I won’t argue with that because it makes sense, just so much sense.”

“The fact of the matter is that this is what you’ve been dealt with,” he stated, “and I’m not sure how you’ll handle it.” He ushered her behind the other room.

a great “After having one quick conversation with the lawyer handling my father’s estate, it seems there is a certain amount of property. Some of it is being moved right now into Larry’s name, and some of it is being retained. Whatever is retained will ultimately be sold, and the proceeds will go into Larry’s care,” Legend explained.

’m still “Good, that will help, and he’ll need that—although I think he’ll

father figure far more than he needs money.”

Legend laughed. “Honest to God, I hear that time and time again. I like needing a father figure, and then you see what there is for a father, and you realize that maybe you didn’t need that father figure after all.”

“I think that goes back to the conversation we just had,” she said, with a smile. Legend asked, “I guess what I’m wondering is, if you’re interested in looking after him?”

I think She stared at him, then sank into a nearby chair.

“What I’m really asking is, do you want a job?” Legend added.

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“That goes back to the conversation we just had,” she said, with a nod.

Legend asked, “I guess what I’m wondering is, if you’re interested in still looking after him?”

She stared at him, then sank into a nearby chair.

“What I’m really asking is, do you want a job?” Legend added.

CHAPTER 8

“WELL, THAT’S NOT what I expected you to say.” Blair stared at I but, inside, her heart swelled at the opportunity being tossed her way. She wouldn’t have to separate from Larry right away. It would help all of them.

“And it’s not a bad answer right now,” Clary noted, joining in. “Stability alone, it would be a good idea. Larry can’t keep losing people.”

“Puts my life on hold,” Legend noted.

“Puts my life on hold too,” Blair stated, with a shrug. “I’m not sure what I want to do or where that would be. Now that I have the termination freedom in one way, I have to take another look at my life too.” Tl stared in the direction where Larry was sleeping. “I could certainly do it on a temporary basis to help him get settled somewhere, somehow. I’m not sure about long-term.”

Legend nodded. “Well, if you could even do short-term,” Legend said. “I would appreciate it.”

She sighed. “A couple months kind of short-term?”

“How about a year?” he offered. “Then we can reevaluate.”

She glared at him. “How about we compromise at six months?”

He grinned. “I figure by then that Larry will have you convinced that you need to stay.”

“Listen. I’m not his mama,” Blair stated, “so there is that to consider. If you get married or maybe settle down with someone at some point, me in the midst of it wouldn’t help Larry bond with someone new in his life.”

Legend snorted. “Yeah, do you see anybody lining up for that job?”

At that, Brody burst out laughing, joining them for the moment. “Good luck with that. You know that there is an underlying thread here that’s absolutely hilarious.”

Clary reached over and pinched her husband. He glared at her. “What for?” But she just shook her head at him and gave him a pointed look. She tucked her under him and continued. “Hey, we all went through this. It’s only fair.”

Blair looked at him in confusion.

Brody sighed, as he glanced at the couple before him, then spoke to Legend, wife. “It will be much more fun when they understand.”

ay. She “Yes,” Clary agreed, “but they’re not there yet.”

hree of “Maybe not,” Brody concurred, “but, if she doesn’t agree, they won’t be there either.”

n. “For At that, Blair glared at him. “What are you two talking about?”

.” Brody raised both hands in frustration. “Never mind. I’ll go outside for a bit.”

what I “You do that,” Legend agreed, “and keep an eye out.”

on, and At that, Brody froze, then turned toward him. “What are you thinking?”

hen she “I’m thinking that where there was one group, there could be others. It should be shared. “And, no, I don’t know for sure that anybody will still be a boy, but we can’t be sure.”

it on a just not boy, but we can’t be sure.”

replied, “Fine,” Brody replied. “I’ll do a reconnaissance mission and confirm all clear for the night at least.”

hat you “And then,” Clary spoke up, “we’ll have to have a talk about what we’re doing next time because, as much as we might want to think it’s over, I’m not convinced Larry is safe. Even if you guys think so, I’ll stick around him for at least the next few days to ensure he holds up okay. I don’t want him disappearing out of life because it’s become too hard.”

At that, Blair gasped. “He wouldn’t do that, would he?”

sider. If “He’s really strong, much stronger than when he was younger, but his spirit is suffering right now,” Clary explained. “As anybody would know, Legend has just lost their one and only parent, but you also know how he feels about being a burden, and that’ll play into this as well.”

” Blair winced and shook her head. “Yeah, we really didn’t need this conversation to happen, but hopefully he didn’t hear anything.”

t I find “It doesn’t matter whether he heard or not, he’ll know on an instinctive level.”

At that, Blair wandered back to the bedroom to check on Larry. He smiled reassuringly as he slept. She returned to the other room and

hat was “Six months for sure, and then we’ll see,” she declared, with a gl
ok. He Legend.

I think “Fine,” Legend said. “I’ll take it.”

“Good,” she muttered, then looked over at Clary. “What a
thinking? What does Larry need?”

e to his Clary hesitated, then spoke. “Well, I would say that you guys n
well come back to our place, but I don’t know what stage of reconst
we have back at headquarters.”

on’t get “Is it safe?” Blair asked.

Clary looked at Brody sideways. He shrugged and said, “Safer tha
places.” Again, Clary pinched him.

de for a “Why would you want to do that? To bring us back if that’s the
Blair asked them.

“Well, for one thing, I know that the team would like Legend to w
ing?” us, but we don’t want to pressure him into it.”

ers,” he Legend snorted. “I’m not sure Terk even knows what I can and
fter the do.”

“Do *you* even know what you can and cannot do?” Clary asked
irm it’s seen an awful lot of energy emanating from you. For example, tha
crazier drive when Brody was at the wheel than when you were
at to do because you were cloaking the car, weren’t you?”

l’m not He frowned. “Did you notice that?”

n for at “I didn’t notice it until Brody was driving and realized that he c
ropping cloak the vehicle. Yet, because you weren’t driving, you weren’t
after it. What’s the connection to when and how you can cloak?”

“It’s just easier for me if I’m an extension of the vehicle.”

but his “But you were in the vehicle anyway,” she noted, “so ...”

be who He shrugged. “I’m never a passenger. It just wasn’t the same thing

s about She nodded. “I wondered if it was something like that. Anyway,
know that Brody himself figured it out, but maybe you should do the
ed that from now on.” Brody frowned at her, opening his mouth, but she
pinch him again, and he held up both hands in mock surrender.

ntuitive Legend gave her a half smile. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Also,” she added, looking over at Blair, “you can’t protect Larri
rry and everything.”

nodded. “I know that.” Blair gave her a lopsided grin. “You’re also t

ance at protecting him.”

“I was keeping him asleep, trying to divert some of this nightmare from him, but we can’t keep it all away from him. Right about now you probably knows more than any child of that age should. But the fact of the matter is, you are still protecting him, and he needs to develop some sort of protective spirit himself.”

“Fine, but do you really think he needs it reduced *now*, with all this going on?”

At that, Clary gave her a warm caring smile. “It’s one of the reasons I’m most wondering about bringing the whole lot of you my way. I need to talk to the others about it.”

“The last thing you need is to have me and Larry there,” Blair noted. “One thing if Larry and I have a home someplace, where he can get some work for school and his studies and slowly heal. However, it’s another thing entirely to throw us into the mix because they want Legend.”

“I think it’s very important that Legend is still in Larry’s life,” she stated.

“I’ve got to go,” Blair agreed. “So maybe Larry needs to go with Legend a little without me.”

Legend immediately protested. “I’m not sure just what Clary’s suggesting here, other than that you come for a visit.”

“I would be your brother’s caregiver,” Blair stated, “and I don’t think they wouldn’t have the room, time, or energy for me to come in that capacity.”

At that, Clary laughed. “Oh, there’s definitely the energy,” she quipped, “but it’s probably scattered all to hell and gone by now,” she murmured. “Anyway, let’s all get some sleep, and we’ll talk in the morning.”

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LEGEND, AFTER THE two gunmen had been picked up and removed, sat in the darkness. Hearing a sound beside him, he shifted his senses and realized it was Brody. “One of us needs to get some sleep,” he murmured.

“I was thinking you would stand watch,” Brody said, “but I want to double-check.”

“I’m not feeling quite comfortable enough to ignore the fact that there away could be other attackers,” Legend admitted.

Now he “No, me neither,” Brody agreed, “and I heard the women talking about a similar possibility.”

of that “Of course,” Legend grumbled. “As much as we want to think that over, my father commanded many millions of dollars, and there will be people going of people who think they deserve a piece of the pie, now that he’s a prisoner.”

is I was “Not a prisoner anymore.” “Damn, I forgot,” he muttered under his breath. “Now that he’s deceased.”

ed. “It’s “I’m sorry, man. Despite how it went, he was your father.” “He was, but he wasn’t someone I could ever agree with, and we’ll never come to any kind of a meeting of the minds. You have no idea how directly toward I tried to convince him to stop this foolishness, but he was adamant that victory was his.”

” Clary “Was he just delusional?” “I don’t know.” Legend gave a wave of his hand. “At some point in his life, and he had some psychic tell him that he would rule the world, and I think that may have gone to his head.”

gesting “Yeah,” Brody agreed. “That is the kind of thing some psychic would say, but not necessarily what anybody needs to hear.”

ink that “Particularly somebody who is already power hungry,” Legend murmured. He glanced back inside. “Is everybody asleep?”

ipped, “They are. That brother of yours is sure something, and, according to the women, he’s even more special because of how ill he’d been.”

uttered. “I guess whatever methods were used to keep him alive ... changed him somehow.”

“Yes, I understand from Clary that he’s picked up quite a bit of the healing energy, and he’s connected to her in many ways.”

Legend didn’t say anything. What could he say? It made sense, and it was a hazard of the kind of work the woman did.

outside “She also seems to think that you’re extremely powerful as well.” Legend

Legend snorted at that. “Now that just gives me shudders and memories of my father’s words.”

nted to “Right. Sorry, I didn’t quite mean it that way.”

“Good thing,” he declared, his tone turning hard, “because I am de

at there not like my father.”

“Neither is your brother.”

earlier “Absolutely not, and it about killed me when Larry admitted to guilty for being relieved to be free to just be himself. Relief from t this is pressure to be someone he is not. I totally get it and honestly feel th be a lot way.”

isoner.” “Nothing quite like parents to mess us up.”

“I think a huge part of our whole experience in this lifetime has to at he’s learning from all the screwups that happened while we were ch Legend shared.

“I hadn’t considered that.” Brody stepped forward, sniffed the a e could muttered, “It seems calm.”

ea how “Yeah, but I don’t trust it.”

ant that “I know. I’ll go catch four, and I’ll come back and relieve you Without waiting for an acknowledgment, Brody turned and heade inside.

in time, It was a matter of trust, as in realizing that, if Brody were needed, ink that would call him. So, since Brody wasn’t needed at the moment, he wo Legend take first watch, and Brody would relieve Legend on the next uld say was a system that each of them had always used, but Legend had worked with Brody before. Yet it had been natural for Legend to step Legend to take first watch. Some things you just didn’t let go of. Besides, La his brother, and that was not something Legend would forget easily.

g to the He got up and wandered toward the lake a few feet, his own senses upturned, as he listened for any intruders or for anything else that may be disrupt the peace and quiet of the night. The conversation and question the cops had been kept to a minimum, once they realized who the kidn at same had been, and the gunmen were quickly bundled up and taken away.

Everything was on a hush-hush basis, so that the current gove d it was could minimize the political fallout from people finding out that actually been a coup attempt. Legend had listened in on the news, ar was definitely some coverage, more so now that it had been app e morie squashed, but Legend wished he could get the actual truth.

It wouldn’t happen, and he knew that, but it still pissed him off that, no matter what government it was out there, there was still cor nifinitely still coverups, or anything else you wanted to call it. He headed back

the trees, taking a moment to examine the area around them, then see the cabin and the surrounding areas.

feeling There was a disquiet, just a whisper of unease rifling through his all that yet he couldn't see any reason for it, couldn't see a direction. He was the same just what value his brother would be to somebody else and what that would be an ongoing concern. Would there actually be an end in sight to this? What the hell was Legend supposed to do as a guardian?

do with He was glad Blair had agreed to stay on at least for a time, but, although children, the back of his mind, he knew how badly he needed her to maintain consistency with his brother. That Legend didn't have a place on the air, and anymore was a whole different story. After he had skipped out without word or a note for his former team to rescue his brother, Legend knew well that he was no longer welcome back there. For all he knew, they had then, have thought he was captured or even helping his father with his bid back. Legend sighed.

Consistency meant having a home, a place where Larry felt safe. Legend they wouldn't be looking at everybody else possibly attacking them. could let find that, and to set it up, wouldn't be easy. It would be a whole different story. With Legend being footloose and fancy-free, none of that had mattered never to him, ... until now. He kept a small apartment in London as a base out and wasn't big enough for two of them, no matter three of them. Yet Larry could see that, with a ten-year-old, it would be a whole different ball game.

He continued to walk around the cabin area, looking to find what was highly disturbed him, but again, it was just a whisper, just that brush of hair would across the nape of his neck, making the hair stand up, telling him something was going on, something he didn't like one bit. Just on the off chance, he snappers his phone on Silent, so nobody would disturb him or give away his position.

Then he shifted and came around to the front of the property. Other cabins were here, other people, yet they seemed to be on hold there'd the hard-partying crowd. So far, Legend and the others here hadn't had any communication with those outside of their group, other than the odd breeze apparently the air from a distance. They seemed all right, but they weren't a

Legend was interested in getting too friendly with, not given their current situation. Not that he was the overly friendly type anyway.

ruption, He'd always been more of a loner, but then, when you had a father bent on taking over the world, regardless of the governments in

urveyed tended to put a damper on relationships in Legend's life. Not that he'd
whole lot to do with his father either. That was the other part.

system, There wasn't anything to legally compel him to look after his brother,
ordered Legend couldn't *not* do it. He was close to his brother, and this could
er this one chance to actually connect and continue to build their relationship
t for all hopefully give Larry a chance for a much better life than Legend had

didn't seem that Legend was destined to have a family himself, so
easily informing a little family with Larry would be a good thing for both of them.
n some Frowning at the wayward thoughts rambling through his head, Legend
r a job one more step forward, right when a branch crackled off to the side. He
thout and waited, letting his gaze shift in the darkness. His senses were wide
aw fully yet he couldn't see anything, and that was bothersome. Either somebody
ey may using a methodology to hide their own tracks, in which case Legend
s coup. bigger problems than trying to find a place where his brother could
his own senses were being dulled by something. Also not something
, where wanted to consider. His mind raced, searching for any clue.

But to Just as he was about to relax and put it down to wildlife or
different Nature, he heard another crackle, this time a very defined footfall. He
attered his vision through the darkness to his right, where the sound had come
e, but it then barely made out a shadow moving toward the cabin. He sent out a
Legend hoping that somebody would be there to receive it. Otherwise he would
ame. his phone. But, with so many people out here talking energy,
hat had somebody would be aware. It was too early for Brody to come in for
a hand change, though that was actually a good thing because he needed a
nothing sleep as he could get too.

, he put When a voice slammed into his brain, he shuddered in place,
osition, giving away his position with the movement. It was Terkel.

I've alerted Brody, Terk stated, his tone calm.

oliday or Instinctively Legend slammed back with *Turn down the volume.*

had any With almost a note of laughter, Terk replied, *That's controlled
hand inside,* and with that, he disappeared.

nybody Swearing under his breath, Legend quickly modulated the volume
current head, wondering at Terkel's ability to just step into somebody's mi
step back out again. They would have a serious talk when this was over
er hell—they would also have some ground rules, if Legend decided to work for
play, it *You're already working for me,* Terkel noted, his tone now much

d had ainside Legend's brain. *You just don't know it yet.*

Have to survive this first, he snapped.

her, but *One or two?*

l be his *I only see one, but that means nothing.*

o and to *No, it sure doesn't. You know that your brother will be one hell of a*

l had. It *If he lives that long.*

maybe *I hear you there,* Terk agreed in a contemplative mood. *I don't*
em. *you know it, but Clary brought up bringing you guys here earlier today*

he took *I'm sure that went over well.*

le froze *Nobody wants to see a child hurt, but we can't be an orphanage ei*

e open, *Considering Legend was busy following the predator in front of l*
dy was added, *Can we talk about his later? I'm on the move to the cabin.*

nd had *Got it,* Terk replied. *As I mentioned, I already told Brody, so the*
stay, *or welcome wagon waiting for your intruder.*

ing he *Yeah, well, he's got at least one gun, if not a second, and he's car*
knife in his boot pocket, Legend pointed out. *I can just see the metal l*

Motherit's sitting at the top.

shifted *I'll pass that on, but you can talk to Brody this way too,* and, wi
e from, Terkel was gone.

an alert, *The thought of telepathically talking to Brody wasn't exactly at the*
ld grab Legend's list, but, if it would keep him and Larry alive right now,

surely was game. Besides, it was a hell of a hidden weapon if they could ma
his shiftwork. He sent out an alert to Brody and gave him the details on the we

s much *Brody's voice came back calm and quiet. Got it.*

And, with that, Legend had to be satisfied. He was putting an awfu
nearly trust in these people and their skills, but then they were putting a lot
in him too. Basically that's what teamwork was, It had been hard t
away from his former team, friends he knew and trusted, but harder
trust on a completely new level with people he didn't know, yet w
on your abilities that were shocking. If they could do even half of what
suspected, he'd be a fool to not take Terkel up on his offer.

e in his *Damn right,* Terkel agreed. *Keep that in mind. Clary's on watch no*

ind and *Legend wasn't even sure what that meant, but, as he stepped*
er, and toward the cabin, he saw the predator coming around to the side d
r him. *handgun out, shifting so he could look in the window. The window its*
n softer open, which Legend didn't remember from earlier, but, with the hea

day, it made sense that somebody had opened it. As the guy peered the corner, a fist caught him hard in the face, before Brody stepped out the door to tackle him. Legend was on him within seconds. As they picked up the guy and carted him into the cabin, Legend quickly pocketed the guy's handgun while Brody took care of the handgun.

Legend looked at the guy, shook his head, and said, "I don't even know if who you are."

"You weren't supposed to find out either," he muttered. "Now I'm in deep shit."

"Yeah, well, anybody who comes to try and attack us won't get far," Legend stated, his voice hard. "What the hell is going on?"

He shrugged. "Let's just say that everybody knows the kid's father is dead, and now people want a piece of the pie."

"What's that got to do with the kid? He doesn't have any ability to care of that," Legend asked in bewilderment. "Why would anybody attack the kid?"

"Because he is set to inherit a fortune, and whoever controls the fortune controls the fortune."

Well hell. Legend hadn't looked at it from that point of view.

At that, Brody swore, then he looked over at Legend. "We need that paperwork taken care of."

Legend nodded, his face grim. "Yeah, let me make some phone calls. I'll get it started."

And, with that, he stepped outside, contacted both the lawyer and the house manager, plus made calls to the contact people at several banks. Legend hadn't expected to do this so quickly, but Legend was the guardian, and it meant it came down to him. The problem was, if something happened to Legend, who could step in and take over again? They'd have to set up a system to keep Larry safe, which had suddenly started to look like a full-time job—and a hell of a job at that.

Now too.

Get closer

to the door, his

hand was

at the

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CHAPTER 9

HEARING THE COMMOTION, Blair woke up, then snuck out to the living room to see a stranger collapsed on the floor, with both Brody and Legend standing over him, glaring. “Another attacker?” she murmured, as she joined them. Legend nodded. “Yes, found him outside.”

“So you did stay on watch, didn’t you?”

“Of course.” He shrugged. “Instincts.”

“Yeah, your instincts are pretty good,” she confirmed. “I was just so tired I needed to sleep.”

“Which is why we’re taking shifts.”

She looked down at her cell phone and shuddered at the time. She resolutely headed for the teakettle.

“You might as well just go back to bed,” Brody suggested.

She shook her head and sighed. “I’m awake now. Besides, something is going on here. I don’t know how much of all this you guys have figured out, but I can’t say I’m terribly impressed.”

“What do you mean?” Brody asked, looking confused.

“There’s a reason why they’re coming after Larry, which I get. My dad was involved,” she said, with a wave of her hand. “But he’s still a child, and it’s easy to assume that controlling the child means controlling the parents, but that’s not even true. Plus, how did they find us quickly? They’ve tracked us after us since before we really even left the mansion. This doesn’t seem like random opportunists to me. Surely someone is behind it.”

At that, Brody looked at her with respect. “Yeah, I don’t disagree with you on that. Do you have any idea who?” he asked. “After all, you’re the one who was living there.”

She winced. “Not a reminder I particularly care to have brought up,” she muttered. “But, yes, I did live there, and definitely people were around. I guess the person to talk to would be the manager. He’s ... I mean, I

him the manager, but he was kind of what they called the man of
because he handled everything.”

At that, Brody looked at her, with a suddenly sharp gaze. “What
man is he?”

She stared back at him, surprised. “I would have said fine, but I
really have any dealings with him. I got my paycheck on time, and
g room needed anything for Larry’s care, like clothing or things for school,
tanding him for the money to get it.”

em. “Would he just hand it over or what?”

“Yes,” she stated, with a nod. “Cash, usually, or we had a credit c
could use. The limit was kept fairly low, and, if we needed to go abo
then I just had to ask.”

so tired. “Were you ever turned down?”

“No, never. The kid could pretty well have or do whatever he want

“What did Larry like to spend money on?” Legend asked fr
me but doorway.

She turned to face him. “Honestly, schoolbooks.”

Legend smiled. “He really does like his studies, doesn’t he?”

ing else “He loves them. He loves school. That would be the one thing I esp
figured worry about. If anybody took that away from him, I could see him
crumbling. Anything else, he’s pretty resilient. He would cheerfully ne
dressed or shower on a day-to-day basis, yet, if he had his way, he
oney is always be at school. And I don’t know if you know this, but he’s intel
nd sure she added as an afterthought, “as in seriously intelligent. Geniu
money, perhaps.”

ve been “Clary mentioned he has a special energy, and you reckon he’s
em like fide genius.” Brody nodded. “Great, so what are we looking at here
comes up with a future cure for cancer or some such thing?”

ee with She smiled. “I wouldn’t laugh about it because it’s quite possible.”

the one He sighed. “Yeah, but only if we can keep him alive. It’s a little
convince people of something like that.”

ip,” she “There’s no need to convince anybody,” she declared. “Guys li
ound. I they only want money.” She nodded to the prisoner, who was staring
I called both with interest. “The thing is, how does he expect to get cash from
unless somebody out there is offering money for the kid.” She lo
Brody, with a raised eyebrow. He just shrugged and didn’t say anythi

affairs looked back at Legend. “You don’t have much in the way of scruple you want to beat him up for me?”

kind of Legend stared at her, with a tilt of his head. “I don’t?” he asked in a tone.

I didn’t She shrugged. “I suspect, when push comes to shove, you would be happy enough to see this guy in another dimension.”

I’d ask “Well, I don’t know about *another dimension*,” he clarified, his eyes shooting up, “particularly if I’m using it to come back, but sure I could have some fun making him talk. Still, I can’t say I like your way of putting a card through,” he muttered, as he walked forward.

ve that, At that, the newest gunman shifted uneasily in his chair.

She looked down at him. “And you know about all this gangster stuff, don’t you?” she asked the gunman. “It’s the stuff you always did in the past.” Kartal, right? I mean, you’re probably just one of the many henchmen from the neighborhood who took care of a certain corner of his life and always expected to get paid for it.”

“I did,” he replied, “until he lost this war.”

“Did you really think he would win this one?”

pecially He shrugged, then nodded. “Hell yeah.”

slowly “Interesting,” she murmured. She looked over at the others. “Even if it seems to have been so steady in his corner. Yet I wonder if it was just a matter of belief or if Mr. Kartal really had that kind of ability, and something went wrong.”

s level “He was betrayed,” the prisoner stated. “One of his own people, but I don’t know who.”

a bona “That really sucks,” she noted quietly, “at least for him.”

? Larry “And also for you,” he declared, looking up at her. “You’re the one who was disposable, just like us.”

She winced at that. “*Thanks*, that’s always nice to know.”

hard to He shrugged. “That’s just the world that we live in.”

ke this, Larry, teaching him.”

at them “Right, but you were supposed to be a nanny, not a tutor.”

the kid, “I was both,” she corrected him absentmindedly, “but that’s neither here nor there.”

ng. She At that, Legend walked forward and asked, “Who hired you?”

les. Do “Nobody,” he replied, “but there’s ...” He hesitated and then shrugged.
“What?”

n a dry “Well, if I won’t get it, somebody else sure as hell will.”
“Get what?”

ould be “The bounty. On the kid. Bring him back alive for \$250,000.”

At that, Blair winced. “Well, at least now we know what he’s worth.

yebrow “Oh, he’s worth a lot more than that to the right person,” the prisoner
ld have declared, with a shrug. “I won’t get a chance at that kind of money,
itting although I came close.” He glared at Legend. “How the hell did you even
I was out there?”

“It’s what we do,” he said, with a hard smile. “How many people
r stuff, about this bounty?”

for Mr. At that, he laughed. “Everybody within the group.”

en who “How many?”

aid for “Probably twenty, although I understand you’ve taken out a couple

At that, Legend swore, and Brody even stared at him. “Are we serious
thinking we’ll have to deal with something like seventeen more people
assassins?”

“I want to know who is behind it,” Blair stated. “That seems to be
rybody bigger issue here. If we can get him to pull the bounty, we can get
a code this.”

ing just “You’d like to think so, wouldn’t you?” The gunman snorted.

“Who posted it?” Brody asked, glaring at the prisoner.

but we He hesitated, then grunted. “We’re not exactly sure. It was
anonymously but within the ranks. We have a group of twenty of
we’ve all been working there for quite a while. We didn’t think anyone
nanny, it, until this announcement came out. Not knowing who put it out, we
didn’t know how many people we would be racing against for the prize.
most of us came looking for it.”

“Of course you did. That’s a fair chunk of money, isn’t it?”

ing with “Yeah, you’re not kidding. For those of us who are looking to get
away right now, it’s escape money, with a chance to relocate somewhere
else.”

ier here “If you’ve been associated with Mr. Kartal all this time,” Blair
“obviously you have some decent money of your own set aside. The
be.”

ged. “Well, some people moved their money ahead of time just in case others didn’t, and assets of those known accomplices have been Unfortunately I’m one of those.”

“So,” Blair added, “the government knows about you, and, the maybe they’ll pay us to get you back.”

h.” The gunman stiffened at that and glared at her.

prisoner She shrugged. “I mean, the kid’s got to have his future paid for, even while all you guys are busy trying to kidnap him, who the hell is helping him knowout?”

“He’s got lots of money.”

e know “Not necessarily,” Brody pointed out. “It depends on who’ll be owning some of that property. If it was gained by stolen funds, you know the kid won’t have a whole lot left in the end.”

At that, the prisoner nodded. “That’s quite possible. If the government ever figures it all out and gets a hold of what he took from everybody, they’ll seriously see that a lot of those funds belong to the people.”

potential “Great,” Blair muttered. “It won’t be fun telling him that.” When she looked at her with a cocked eyebrow, she explained, “He’ll want to get the money back to the people.”

out of Brody chuckled, shaking his head. “I’m liking this kid more and more already.”

“He’s a good kid, and he’ll certainly need enough to get through life. I think he won’t want to keep anything that could have come through his father’s ill-gotten gains, particularly if the people were hurt by it.”

us, and At that, the prisoner looked at her in surprise and then smirked. “Nothing of really think any of his stuff came through hard work? He got it all through blackmail, through murder, through jobs of the worst kind,” she said with a shrug, but shared. “He’s been so successful up until now, and not one of us has anything of it. We all headed down this pathway, knowing that he would be the next president.”

the hell “Until somebody turned you in.”

ewhere “Well, until somebody turned *him* in,” the gunman clarified. “Still, I’m myself wanting to find that bastard and take him out myself.”

noted, “For yourself or out of loyalty to your leader?” she asked curiously

re must He shrugged. “Both. It could have been a good gig for me too.”

She couldn’t even imagine what life would be like if these guys had

ase, but over the country. “Well, the bottom line right now,” she said, looking frozen. Brody, “is that we need to find out who posted the bounty. We need that revoked, and the kid needs to be stashed somewhere safe, until before, enough to make decisions on his own—if he even gets an option to decision.”

“That’s the problem,” Legend noted. “Right now we’re doing paper, and, He can make a decision after the fact, once he’s had a chance to get everything. It’s not all stolen money. Some of it came from Larry’s

Unfortunately I suspect that he married her just to get her money, and I’ve always wondered if he didn’t have something to do with her end up because, aside from the money, she was nothing but a pain in the ass to know the “That’s exactly how it happened,” the prisoner confirmed, with a

“He had no time for women, unless they had a purpose.”
“He didn’t have the time for *anybody*, unless they had a purpose,” they’ll corrected.

At that, their captive looked at him closely. “You’re Legend, aren’t you? Brody’s son, his disappointing son.”

“Yeah, disappointing because I wouldn’t stand by his side while he tried to steal the country from the people.”

The gunman shrugged. “There have been coups since time began, I’ve muttered, “so I don’t know why you have to be so fussy about it right now. I’ve lived a life, but “I’m not,” he countered, with half a smile. “I just don’t believe in your father’s ill-games based on power and greed, especially when it involves other people’s lives.”

The prisoner laughed. “I could tell you who I think the traitor is, but I don’t know what you want something for it.”

“Yeah, what do you want?” Blair asked, looking over at him.

He shrugged. “I need to get out of here for one, freedom for another, and money to survive of course.”

She nodded absentmindedly. “Of course that’s *all* you want”—she gave a fake laugh—“as if we have nothing better to do.”

“You’ve got the kid’s fortune to control,” he noted. “That’s his money, not yours.”

“Is it though?” she asked, looking over at Legend. “Seems like a lot of people want to control it—and him.” Legend just nodded. Blair looked at the prisoner but went silent.

over at “Better decide fast. Not much time to think about it,” the prisoner v
l to getHe opened his mouth and started to laugh. “Besides ...”
ie’s old *Splat.*
make a



erwork.

go over
mother.
frankly
r death
o him.”
t laugh.
Legend
perimeter.

LEGEND RACED OUT of the house, disappearing into the shadows. He
instinctively that Brody would go out the other direction, leaving t
women with the body of their prisoner, who no doubt was dead. Whoe
fired the shot had blown off half his head. At the same time, if h
somehow still alive, not much of anything could be done for him
would have to hold down the fort inside, while Legend and Brody wor

Legend
it’s you?
he tried
an,” he

What Legend wanted was the damn shooter. If there were some
more people still out here, it would be a nightmare that would have
because half of those could go undercover for a time—years even—
into the shadows, only to pop up at any point in the future, when they
the circumstances were better. Legend was not prepared to live with th
it was definitely something his younger brother should not have to tole

now.”
playing
people’s
but I’ll

Moving as silently as possible, while still at full speed, Legend r
the road on the other side, where the cabin property stopped. There h
to a halt and tuned up his hearing. He heard a vehicle revving up e
slightly, as if somebody was impatiently waiting for someone to
Noting that, Legend quickly turned in that direction and snuck aroun
he came up behind the vehicle itself. Without any warning, he reached
driver’s door, opened it, and dragged the driver out onto the ground.

ier, and
didn’t do anything,” he shrieked.

The guy cried out and curled up into a ball, his hands over his h

gave a
uge in

“Really?” Legend asked, his voice lethal. “I don’t think I believe y
“I didn’t. I didn’t. I was just supposed to wait for a guy to return.
wanted a lift back into town.”

n awful
ir faced

“When was this?”
“Not very long ago, maybe half an hour?”
At that, Legend swore, realizing that this guy had been left as a
“Would you recognize him? Did he leave you anything to identify him

warned. “No, nothing. He had a hat on, and his collar was pulled up, as if really cold. He kept saying he’d be back in a few minutes, to just stand and wait. Then I heard a gunshot, and I didn’t know what to do.”

“Well, I’ll tell you what you’ll do. You’ll shut down this vehicle, you’ll come in and talk to the rest of us because he shot a prisoner we had in our custody.”

At that, the driver looked up at him, quivering. “A prisoner?”

Legend realized just how that sounded. “Yeah, a prisoner. As a asshole shooter and his victim were both trying to attack a young boy in the cabin.”

“What?” the driver asked in astonishment.

“First off, I want an ID on this guy.”

“I don’t have anything, nothing at all.” At that, he started to cry. “God, am I in trouble for this?”

“I guess it depends on what you’re doing here,” Legend noted, stepping back and realizing that the guy really was just a decoy, and the shooter was probably long gone. As Legend heard something and thought around, Brody slid out of the shadows. Legend called him over and explained what happened.

Brody looked at the driver in disgust. “What did he pay you?”

“One hundred bucks,” he replied. “I’m trying to save money to go to college, so a hundred bucks is a lot.”

“Yeah, I understand,” Brody replied, “but now that hundred bucks is going to let a killer go free.”

“But I didn’t know,” he cried out.

“Yeah, yeah,” Brody said. He turned and looked around in the shadows.

“I don’t feel like he’s here.”

“No, but, if he isn’t here, where the hell is he?” Legend asked. The driver

looked over at the driver. “Is there any other way to get in or out of here?”

He nodded. “I mean, once you get to the highway, another one in there it pretty quickly. He could easily have flagged down a ride, saying it was broken down or something,” the driver muttered. “Honestly he asked me to stay though, so why would he do that?”

“Because it distracted us,” Brody stated in disgust, “and we took the decoy. Damn it.”

Legend, just as grim, nodded. “Yeah, I hear you, and I agree. I do

he was like this guy's still around." He looked back at the driver. "But you say here going anywhere until we get a description."

"Six feet tall," he babbled. "Had a black jacket on, with the collar up, and up, and he was younger maybe ..." Then he hesitated. "Well, I mean already older than me, so like you guys' age."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

"He told me that he was checking to see if his girlfriend was meeting in the lover here, and he just wanted to make sure. Honestly, when I heard the gunshot, I was afraid that he'd killed her."

"Well, he shot somebody. That's for sure. Did you see a weapon on him?"

The driver shook his head. "No, I wouldn't have picked him up. Oh my had one in plain sight. I don't need that kind of headache."

"You don't need any of this," Legend declared, "but this is what happens when somebody wants to pay you one hundred bucks for a ride."

asshole "Yeah, but it's not even that much by the time I pay for the gas."

turned "Where did you pick him up?"

plained "I was just coming out of classes. The college is about what? Many miles from here? He approached me and said that he needed a lift and was pretty upset."

to go to "Did he look upset?"

The driver stopped and pondered that. "No, not really, he looked nervous."

just let "Right, so chances are he was coming here, prepared for trouble," replied.

"He brought a weapon," Legend noted, "and the only people doing shadows are the ones who are planning on trouble."

Then he because we need this to end."

re?" "Yeah, I hear you," Legend agreed, "but, in the meantime, we intersect find out who the hell's behind all this shit."

he was "He did talk on the phone," the college guy offered suddenly.

l me to At that, both men zeroed in on him. "What did he say?"

"He talked about a kid and how it better be for real. Otherwise someone would pay."

"Did he give you a name?"

n't feel "He did, yeah. Hang on. Let me think." He considered it for a minute.

I'm not think it was Richard."

Brody frowned. "Richard who? Did he give a last name or anything?"
The driver shook his head. "No, it was all about the kid."

"Right, well," Legend added, "I need to know everything you remember that he said. For that matter, we might as well take him back to the cabin to let the women talk to him."

Brody frowned, then nodded slowly. "I guess if anybody can get the information, it's them." He looked down at the driver and said, "Get on the passenger side." Brody quickly hopped into the driver's seat, with Legend taking the back seat, so he could keep an eye on the college guy, and drove him to the cabin.

As soon as they got there, Clary stepped outside, her lips trembling. Brody immediately wrapped her up in his arms. "I'm so sorry, sweetie."
She nodded, her gaze latching on to the newcomer. "Who's he?"
"He is the one who delivered our shooter," Brody replied. "He was paid a hundred bucks to bring him in."

Her shoulders sagged. "So, we're no closer, right?"
"No, we're no closer, but I wondered if you could get any more information from him."

She looked up at him, then back at the young guy, shrugging. "No guarantees though." She smiled at him and said, "Come on inside." As the guy went to walk in, she stopped him, looked over at Brody, and Brody reminded him, "The body's still in there."

"We'll leave it there because the cops are on the way. We can't bring that in."

She nodded.
"We'll sit out here then," the driver called out nervously, avoiding looking into the window. "I don't want to see it at all. I swear, I just need to ask me to bring him here, and I needed the money for school."

At that, she nodded. "I get it. When you were talking to him, remember any facial features, any scarring, tattoos, anything like that?"

"No. I mean, I was coming out of class, trying to get to my vehicle home. I was tired, worn out, and this guy ... I didn't even want to be involved, but he sounded sincere. He seemed to think that his girlfriend was sleeping around, and he wasn't so much upset as he seemed angry."

"Right, and you said he talked on the phone once, and that was it?"

The driver nodded. “When he left, he looked back at me and told n
g?” very quiet. I’m not sure what he thought I would do that was noisy. A
to do was sit there and wait for him.”

member “No, but you might have put on the music or something”—she fro
bin andhim—“and that might have disturbed him.”

“Right, well, I didn’t do anything, so I’m really hoping I’m
et moretrouble,” he muttered. “I really didn’t intend for anything to happen, a
into thereally sorry if somebody died.”

Legend “Well, somebody did die, and that’s just where we’re at right now.
as theylooked back at the others and shrugged. “I don’t really think he
anything more.”

“He did mention the name Richard,” Legend noted, “from a phone
etie.” “That’s right,” the driver said eagerly. “The guy said something

Richard would pay, if this wasn’t for real.”

s paid a “I wonder whether the shooter was here to collect the kid or to ma
that somebody else did the job, then disappeared when he realiz
attacker had been caught. Either way, it’s not great,” Clary shared.

y more



Maybe.

e.” Just
ly, and
LEGEND HEARD A noise, and just then Blair stepped outside. Legend loo
over, while her gaze immediately went to him.

Seeing that he was okay, her shoulders relaxed.

t move
He sighed because he felt the same damn way. It was confusi
frustrating, given the circumstances, but he walked over, put an arm
her, and asked, “Are you okay?”

ig even
t ... He
said. “I sure wish this was over though.” She turned and looked

do you
,” she got the message. “Right, so this guy gave the shooter a ride here, v

le to go
to get
nd was
he was attempting to take Larry himself or was planning on shoot
prisoner anyway. But, if he was planning on taking Larry, no way he
have gone back to this guy with the child in tow. So, how the hell
planning on getting out of here?”

,
At that, Legend eyed her. “That’s a good point.”

re to be “Unless”—she winced, looking at the driver—“unless the
ll I had planned on shooting the driver, then taking his vehicle.”

wned at “That would make the most sense,” Brody confirmed, with a nod.
“What?” As if he had just caught up, the college guy paled, h
widening in shock.

not in “Seems to me you’ve actually had a quick escape with your life
and I’m noted, her voice quiet. “These guys will kill you. They seem nothing
fully committed, all business and serious.”

” Clary “What’s even going on here?” the college guy asked.

knows She smiled. “We have a young boy I’ve been looking after for
few years. His father’s gotten into a hell of a lot of trouble, pissed off
call.” people, and now they’re all expecting to grab the kid and use h
g about leverage to get money.”

“Yeah, the guy mentioned leverage. Something about everybody
ke sure him for leverage. That’s what the plan was for the child. Is that yo
zed the too?” Then he glared at her suspiciously. “That’s not cool if you are.”

She smiled. “You’re right. It’s not cool, and it’s not what we were
We’re protecting him. I’ve been looking after him for quite a few year
and I sure as hell won’t let some gunman come in here and take him b
he wants money.” She looked at him and asked, “Did he actually pay y

ked her He nodded and pulled out a wad of bills.

“I suppose he had gloves on,” Clary chipped in.

“Yeah, he did.” Then he stopped and gasped. “I didn’t even notice
should have noticed, shouldn’t I?”

ng and around “Well, it wouldn’t have changed anything if you had,” Blair rep
mean, think about it. If you’d noticed and made too much out of it, yo
have got yourself shot earlier.”

th,” she He winced at that. “*Great*, so being thick-headed and stupid a
at the saved my life.”

ted, but “In this case it probably did,” she agreed, with a nod. She looked u
whether others. “Now what?”

ing our “We have cops coming for the body and now to collect this guy,”
: would murmured, “and we’ll have to move again.”

was he Blair pondered that and offered, “Or we just set up this place as a t

At that, Legend looked at her curiously. “I kind of like that idea, b
be putting other people in danger.”

shooter She thought about that. "We can always talk to whoever else might be in the surrounding cabins here to see if they all want to disappear for a few days."

is gaze "And what is there to prevent this from being more than a few days?" She wondered about that. "That's true. In that case, we need to go," Blair turned to the hopeless driver, who even now shifted uneasily, from one side of the boat to the other. "So, this Richard? Did he sound like he was a friend or ..."

He nodded. "At least like they knew each other pretty well. I think something about Richard would pay if something didn't happen."

the last "Right."

a lot of "Who is Richard?" Legend asked Blair in a low voice.

aim for "I'm wondering if we don't have the property manager taking care of everything," she murmured. "If you think about it, he's the one who would be left to handle things, and, if he's put out a bounty on the kid, it's because you guys got plans too."

"Yet you were laid off."

is doing. "I was, but how much of that came from your father?" she asked, looking up at him curiously.

because "As to that, I have no idea, but you weren't terribly surprised."

you?" "No, your father has always treated people like that. We're just normal people to do a job, and, when the job is done, get out of his life because he doesn't have time for you," she explained cheerfully.

. God, I Legend shook his head. "What an ass."

"Yeah, but not any longer."

lied. "I "No, not any longer," he muttered. "Still, it doesn't feel right unless this Richard guy is behind it all."

actually it too." "Well, that would make sense, but then several other people must be involved."

He turned to her and asked, "Like who?"

p at the "Well, think about it. Your father had a lot of business associates, including a lawyer and an accountant. I mean, honestly those two could very easily be the ones with the power over all this. They're the ones who can move things quickly, legally, and lock it up," she pointed out. "If one of them is a questionable character, you can bet that they'll forget Larry and be in a hurry to get out of their own position."

Legend swore at that.

ght still Blair continued. "Forget about that lawyer of his. I think he already had one or a few records, at least I heard him whispering about he already had one against him, and a second wouldn't go down so well."

s?" "No, it wouldn't. Why is it we always want the lawyer to be the one?" Sheone?"

ne foot She burst out laughing at that. "Maybe, but what about the account?"

"They could also be in cahoots," Brody suggested. "All kinds of opportunities exist here for people to get rich very quickly on money not their own."

"Really?" The college student looked from one to the other. "How is it that anybody can get rich on something like that?" he asked nervously. "I really don't want to hear what you guys are talking about."

ould be "Oh, that's a good thing," Blair noted, as she stepped forward and touched his arm. "We're just trying to keep a young boy alive."

"But are you?" he muttered. "Because, you know, the way you're talking ..."

looking "His father tried to overthrow the government, and he failed. He got killed, and now everybody's trying to take over the boy's family money. They're trying to do it by capturing him."

umbers, "Of course they are." The college student stared at her in shock. "What kind of world do you people live in?"

"Not that kind," she stated. "Honestly, we're just trying to keep the boy alive."

He settled back somewhat and asked, "Do I really have to talk to the police?"

"I'm not sure there's any other choice," Blair replied. "If you think you're in on it, you're the only one who saw the shooter."

He winced at that.

"Do you think any of the campus cameras would have picked him up?" Clary asked her husband.

asily be "Tell me what college, and where you were exactly," Brody said. "We'll check it out."

It was a And, with that, they quickly got the information from him, and they focused headed inside with Clary. Legend and Blair stayed outside, waiting for the cops to arrive.

"The local cops will be kind of pissed at us, won't they?" she muttered.

ly has a Legend nodded. “Probably, but Terk already let them know wh
e strikegoing on, so the more we clear up for them, the less they have to do
don’t want to deal with any of it, since it ties into the bigger investiga
e guiltythe coup. Not their jurisdiction, not their war.”

“Maybe, but—”

ant?” “You don’t want to set a precedent with something like this,”
nds ofmuttered.

y that’s “Hey, I don’t want any of it,” she whispered, standing close to his
just wish this was well and truly over with.”

ow is it “It will be, and soon, but we’ll have to track down this Richa
usly. “Iconfirm that whatever has been put up as a bounty is removed, or th
even say it’s been claimed. Something that will send the mercenarie
l gentlywhere they came from.”

“My passenger mentioned something like that too,” the college
you’re stated. “Something about mercenaries, but I didn’t remember that u
said the word just now.”

’s been “What did he say?”

ey, and The college guy pondered it for a long moment, then shrugged. “H
I don’t really remember, but it was something about every damn me
“Whatin the world being after the kid.”

“True enough, our shooter was probably pissed off that he wasn’t
his sonprivate job or an option to do it exclusively,” Blair suggested.

At that, Legend nodded. “That’s a good guess. The original post
to thenot have known who to call, so he just put it out among the team, ins
doing it privately, which would have been much more subtle.”

k about “Guaranteeing we’re in a lot more danger.”

“Yes,” Legend agreed. Just then, they heard the sound of a
approaching, Blair stepped back into the shadows. The college s
m up?”seeing her reaction, tried to join her, but Legend grabbed him. “We
ensure that it’s who we’re expecting and not your guy coming back ag
to him. “Jesus, if he is, I sure don’t want to see him,” the guy wailed.

“It won’t matter if you want to or not. I hate to say it, but, if he
Brodyou’re here, you’ll be dead yourself.”

for the At that, the college student froze, then tried to hide behind I
Luckily the police showed up, not the shooter.

ered. When Blair stepped back out, Legend looked over at her questio

at wasand she nodded. “I only get straight honesty here, so that’s a good cc
o. Theythe coroner coming separately behind him.”

ition on “Terkel’s team,” Legend muttered. “They seem to have this we
personnel, with contacts around the world.”

“Not sure it’s so much *his* team as a collection of teams tha
Legendtogether,” she muttered. “Still a good call for us.”

By the time the explanations were done—with the college guy pu
side. “Icruiser, and the dead body removed—the early morning dawn was b
through.

ard and “So much for grabbing some shut-eye,” Legend muttered.

ey can “Your turn,” Blair said. “I’m quite happy to stay up and keep watch

es back He shook his head. “Yeah, that’s not happening,” he murmured
need sleep too, and, besides, what will you do if something does happ
studentasked in a scoffing tone.

ntil you She gave him a flat stare. “Nobody will hurt Larry while I’m aroun
vowed.

onestly
rcenary

given a

er may
stead of

vehicle
student,
e’ll just
ain.”

e thinks

Legend.

ningly,

and she nodded. “I only get straight honesty here, so that’s a good cop, with the coroner coming separately behind him.”

“Terkel’s team,” Legend muttered. “They seem to have this wealth of personnel, with contacts around the world.”

“Not sure it’s so much *his* team as a collection of teams that work together,” she muttered. “Still a good call for us.”

By the time the explanations were done—with the college guy put in the cruiser, and the dead body removed—the early morning dawn was breaking through.

“So much for grabbing some shut-eye,” Legend muttered.

“Your turn,” Blair said. “I’m quite happy to stay up and keep watch.”

He shook his head. “Yeah, that’s not happening,” he murmured. “You need sleep too, and, besides, what will you do if something does happen?” he asked in a scoffing tone.

She gave him a flat stare. “Nobody will hurt Larry while I’m around,” she vowed.

CHAPTER 10

BLAIR WAS COMPLETELY sincere, but she could see from the look on Larry's face that he hadn't a clue how she meant it. "Look. Clary and I are busy and we'll put on some coffee. For us. Not you. You need to go to sleep. At least grab yourself a couple hours."

He hesitated, feeling torn, but when she smacked him across the face, it gave his head a shake and asked, "What the hell? Did you do that?"

She nodded. "I sure did, and I'll do it again too," she muttered. "Your reflexes have gone to shit, so how are you going to protect Larry? Get some rest while you can."

He glared at her. "How did you do that?"

"The same way you're out there cloaking things," she muttered. "I think you're the only one with abilities around here?"

He let out his breath slowly. "Seriously, you too?"

She nodded. "Yeah, me too, but then you knew that."

"No, but I'd wondered about it," he corrected. "Yet *knowing*, particularly on that level, is something very different."

She shrugged. "It's one of the reasons I work with Larry," she said. "Clary started it because of all the healing, which left Larry very tired after energy work, so it's part of what we do."

"So he's already learned a lot of this stuff?" Legend asked with astonishment.

"He hasn't had a choice. People are using him as a pawn, and, in the eyes of adults, nobody's giving a crap about the child involved."

He winced at that. "I know. Did my father know?"

"No. If he had, he would have exploited the poor kid all the more," she shared succinctly.

"I hate to say it, but you're right."

"I don't know what Larry's potential is, but he's an energy worker for sure. He cares more about healing people, probably because of

happened to him, but he's also manifested a lot of cloaking, and enormous energy. It's as he's trying out his use of energy as to what he can do, but what he sees around him."

"I can see that, and you're right. We definitely need more healers in the world, and he will be amazing at anything he chooses to do. Keeping safe won't be easy."

Legend's "No, we'll have to go back to whoever this Richard is and see what he's capable of." Brody said.

"I've got news on that," Brody announced, from behind them. She turned to see him standing there, with his hands on his hips, looking at the back of their heads.

"I thought you would have crashed by now," Blair said.

"Your "Nah. Are you guys okay?"

Go get "Sure," she replied, "as much as anybody caught up in this mess is anyway."

"Good point," he muttered. "Come on in. We've got to talk." With a nod, Blair stepped inside, happy to find that Clary had put on coffee. "I suggest that Legend go get some sleep, but he's resisting."

"Of course he is," Clary said, with a shrug. "Yet hopefully he knows what he needs."

Legend said, "He can go get a break after we discuss this update," Brody stated a few hours in last night, and Legend hasn't had a break yet."

Legend started to protest, but, when everybody shot him a quelling look, he conceded. "Fine, what did you find?" he muttered to Brody.

"This Richard appears to be part of your father's management team, not the one any of you have been dealing with all this time, but the one involved in Kartal's more underhanded dealings. He's also a lawyer, but not the one we were thinking of. He's been part of your father's team for over a decade, working in the shadows and keeping his dealings all the more mysterious. I think Kartal calls him Rip, doesn't he?"

At that, Blair nodded. "Now I know who you're talking about. He's somebody who doesn't like to be seen. He would come in and leave at night, but I've seen him a couple times. He came up to take a look at Legend when he was first recovering, wondering how and why he had survived. I think he was fishing for information, particularly about Legend's role in all this, but I just told him that God worked in mysterious ways."

otional didn't seem to like that answer much and disappeared soon afterward. I was not happy at all. I do remember that."

"That sounds like him. Maybe he was looking for somebody to manipulate."

ng him "I'm not sure we did that good of a job of keeping a low profile."

Larry survived," Clary added. "We were so damn happy that he was still alive that he's sus, and so we assumed that everyone would be equally happy."

"Oh, I'm sure for the most part they were," Blair pointed out, "but we don't know that everybody had Larry's well-being at heart."

two of "No, of course not, and now it'll be even harder."

At that, Brody continued. "Terkel is searching for any information we can find on this guy. We have multiple addresses that he owns but, so far, we don't know where he resides at."

is okay, "He was slimy," Blair stated. "He really kept to the shadows and didn't trust anybody."

ith that, "Well, that sounds very much like what we've got here now. We need to suggest figure out whether he'll lay off or continue to hunt for Larry. Still, it will take the accountant and the lawyers to actually transfer most of the assets to us anyway."

At that, Legend's phone rang. He got up and stepped away to answer it. "I got Blair watched as he talked back and forth on the call. When he returned, minutes later, he filled them in. "Documents are coming my way. I'm going to look into transferring the properties out of Larry's name—or at least to add Richard as a guardian to them. So, once that is done, anybody trying to kill Larry won't be able to tamper with them. I am, not wouldn't get their hands on the assets, so hopefully that will help."

involved "Now all we need to do after that," Blair noted, looking at him, "is to make sure the world knows somehow. And you'll have to set up another beneficiary designation in your will, in case of your death, so that it's one more step away from Larry."

rious. I "Right." Legend nodded. "In that case I should set up a charitable trust for something, so, no matter how many people they kill, the assets are still there. He's reach."

late at "Good point," Brody agreed. "You get that started, which will give Larry another degree of separation from anybody who's after Larry, and then we can actually need to send a message to this Richard, though I'm not sure how to do that. Clary's number."

ays. He They pondered the problem. "There should be some information about Richard somewhere."

, but hehouse. At least within the known associates, somebody should know reach Rip, especially if Mr. Kartal is unavailable.” Blair frowned. The easy topointed to the area where the dead guy had been. “Did you guys see prisoner we had here?”

he when “We did,” Legend said, “which reminds me.” Hopping up, he pulled his phone from his pocket. “I took pictures of the guy’s Contacts, and enough, there’s one called Bull’s-Eye.”

I don’t “Yeah, I take that as a good guess for our go-to guy,” Brody replied. Legend looked around at everybody. “We’re in agreement to all then?” All nodded. “So, we set up this additional paperwork, transfer the canssets, then we let Rip know there is no hope of him getting at the moment any “But that’ll still take a couple days,” Brody noted. “Until the paperwork is done, we need to keep an extra eye out, until this is really something I didn’tcan put out there.”

Blair interrupted, “I don’t want to put a damper on what is a good need tobut we also have to ensure he won’t just kill Larry for the fun of it but wouldhe’s pissed off.” At that, everybody turned to look at her. She shrugged. “I don’t think Rip’s a very good loser.”

“Great,” Legend muttered, glancing at Brody. “So we go on the off to answer it.and hunt him down?”

d a few Brody nodded.

way for “Yes,” Blair agreed, her voice serious. “That would be best. It’s the nine asideal answer, no matter which way we look at it. I’m coming with you. Worry stillthough.”

Legend shook his head. “No, you’re not.”

is let the “Yes, I am, and don’t go telling me what I can and cannot do. If you can’t, in thecan you even identify Rip? Well, ... can you?” she asked curiously.

Legend glared at her, and Brody laughed. “She’s got a point.”

priority or “What will we do with Larry in the meantime?” Clary asked.

I out of “We have Brody and Clary stay here with him, with extra protection.” Legend muttered.

give us “Or we can take Larry back with us to headquarters,” Clary suggested cheerfully. “I think he’ll fit right in.”

get that “What’s that about?” Legend asked. “More pressure for me to join the team that my kid brother can stay?”

1 at the “Larry might get a spot even without you,” Clary teased, serious.

how to cheeky grin in his direction.

then she Legend groaned. "Look. First off, we have paperwork to deal with. Then we have to send the message. After that, we'll decide about where we should be, based on what kind of response we get from Rip."

lled his "Sounds good," Brody said.

id, sure With a sigh, Legend stretched, then headed for the bedroom.

"Have a good sleep," Blair called out.

d. "Yeah, right," he muttered, then slammed the door shut, ... a bit more than necessary.

all the Blair chuckled. "He doesn't take suggestions well, does he?"

ey." "None of us do," Brody admitted, "particularly when it comes to the paperwork of stuff."

ing we "Yeah, well, it's not just you anymore," Blair muttered, as she said to him. "Some of us can do things too."

rd plan, At that, he stiffened, then turned and looked at her. "Are you an employee because you work?" he demanded.

ged. "I Blair looked over at Clary.

Clary shrugged, then added, "I haven't said anything."

defensive "Yeah," Blair declared, looking at Brody defiantly. "Why?"

"I just want to know what I'm dealing with," he said, "because you're poking a tiger when you talk to Legend like that, and it can go wrong sometimes."

ith you "Sometimes it can go wrong, but sometimes it can also go right. It depends on which way he's leaning at any given time. I'd say that, right now, it's probably good to poke him."

Besides, "What is it you're trying to do when you poke at him?" Brody asked.

"Wake him up a bit and make him see me." She shrugged. "I've seen him go off and on for years, but he never looks at me."

At that, Brody studied her, and he started to smile. "So, I was right about your reaction," he exclaimed, then turned to his wife.

Clary smiled at him. "They still have quite a long way to go, dear." Brody suggested "Maybe, but I was right."

"If it's important to you to be right," Clary noted, with that serene expression on her face, "then fine." He glared at her, and she chuckled.

"Glad to see that you guys sorted it out," Blair muttered, looking at them curiously. "It must be a challenge with the energy work."

“You would think it would be a challenge,” Clary shared, “but serious, and should make things easier. While it wasn’t easy to begin with, once Larry there, it got better immediately.”

Then suddenly a weird hum filled the air, and Blair turned back to two of them looking at each other. “You can talk that way too, can’t she asked, clearly fascinated.

“Yes, so can Terkel,” Brody said, with a wry look. “So, be warned: harder when you least expect it, you’ll have Terk and anyone else on the top of your head too.”

At that, Blair stared at him. “That’s something I’ve never had experience with.”

“None of us had because the bottom line is that Terkel is sort of special all on his own,” Brody admitted. “We have yet to see anyone can equal him.”

“It’s not about equaling him,” Blair clarified. “It’s about finding the way to complement each other.”

Brody chuckled. “Yeah, you’ll fit right in,” he said, yet with a head shake. “I don’t know if the rest of the place is ready for it though.” Brody looked back at Clary.

“Probably not,” Clary agreed quietly, “but it is one of the things I wanted to do.”

“You’ve lost me,” Blair said, looking back at her. “What do you mean?”

“We were looking for more team members, which is why we’re trying to convince Legend to join us,” she explained. “There’s always a need for more men.”

“Yeah, I can see that,” Blair muttered, “but he’s difficult, and you know that already.”

“We have more than a few difficult people in our group,” Brody said with a laugh. “Plus there’s Riff, another potential team member, who comes in and out of our world, not necessarily on our time frame.”

“Not sure any of them would come in on your time frame,” Clary admitted, with a smile. “Sounds to me as if they’re all just as stubborn and cantankerous as you are.”

He stared at her in shock and asked, “How do you know I’m any of those things?” he protested.

ously it She shrugged. "You're male, and this is the kind of work you do. we gotit goes along as a package deal." She looked over at Clary. "Am I what?"

see the "Oh, you're right," she stated, chuckling at the look on Brody's t you?" "But, as I said, we've come a long way together."

"I'm glad for you," Blair replied sincerely.

ed. Just Clary nodded. "I don't think there's anything better than realizing team inhave a second half of yourself who's equally adept at energy. That's important when it's the same work you do."

erience "There's more than a few of us out there," Blair muttered, glaring door where Legend had disappeared.

nothing "You'll get there," Clary added. "Just give it time."

dy who She looked over at her, smiled a sad smile, and shared, "Well, he in and around in the background for years now and has never shown he bestinterest. ... So, as far as I'm concerned, he's had all the time he'll get either a sledgehammer over the head or a whack."

dshake. At that, Brody grinned broadly. "Given that it's Legend, I would lookedsledgehammer would be more like it."

that we



es that LEGEND HAD SLEPT long and hard. One of his abilities was to re-lying to relatively quickly, though he didn't even really know what other abil-or good had because he'd never been in a position of having to identify them who did that? Did you sit down and say, *Go invisible. Check.* No. u know went through life one day at a time, dealing with all these corrupt nation people, working for a couple of good bosses and a couple who were good.

r noted, Terkel would be a good boss. Legend was just undecided about it kind of of his energy thing. It was very invasive, and the one thing Legend o" Blair was his privacy. But, as he stumbled out of the bedroom to join the everybody sat around their laptops, sipping coffee.

and as Blair gave him a glare.

of those He glared right back. "I slept."

"You were only down for an hour."

I think “But, for me, that’s as good as four.”
right or She faced him, assessed something about him, and then nodded. “
still coffee.”
’s face. “Glad to hear that. Otherwise I would put on fresh. Did you guys c
any decision?” he asked, pouring a cup of coffee and now coming
them.
ng you “All kinds of decisions,” Brody declared, with a level of cheerfulness
so verymade Legend suspicious. “Not sure any of them involved your coop
though.”
g at the “Well, all of them will involve your cooperation to put them into
Blair clarified, with a cheeky grin, “but we won’t discuss them with yo
He frowned at her and at Brody, then turned to Clary. “Clary, you
’s beenmake any sense of this?”
wn any She chuckled. “It’s all good.”
get. It’s Just then from behind Legend, Larry came out of his bedroom, i
his eyes.
say the Blair got up and walked over to him. “Hey, sleepyhead. How a
doing?”
He looked up at her, blinking. “I’m hungry.”
“Yeah, that’s about normal,” she muttered. “What will you have?”
“Food, lots of it.”
“Yeah, but your version of food and *lots* may not be the same as
she noted, “so can you be a little more specific?”
“I would like three scrambled eggs, bacon, ham, and toast, I guess.
“Well, you can have the scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast, but w
have any ham.”
He stopped, as if suddenly realizing where he was. “Oh, right.” T
turned, caught sight of his brother, and grinned. “Hey, you’re still he
said enthusiastically.
“Yeah, I’m still here. Did you expect me to run and hide or someth
“No, not run and hide, but you generally don’t stick around very lo
A note of ... not quite sadness but something in Larry’s tone
Legend realize that maybe his little brother had missed him mo
Legend had realized. “Sorry, big guy. Sometimes life gets a little crazy
“Yeah, it sure does.” Larry nodded. “Do we have any updates?”
“Lots,” Blair replied, “and you slept through all the action.”

“Yeah, there was definitely an odd feeling to the room,” he noted. There’s shiver. “Maybe that’s why I’m extra hungry.”

“Do shivers make your appetite build?” Legend asked curiously. Clary looked over at him, then turned to Clary.

toward She nodded and said, “It’s fine to tell him.”

“Is it though?”

ess that “Yes,” she declared, with a clarity that seemed to reassure him.

eration Larry turned to Legend. “So, whenever there’s bad energy around here, it goes through a lot of my own energy. I just don’t know why yet.”

o play,” Legend studied him carefully and suggested, “Maybe you’re looking for the enemy. Maybe you’re trying to protect the place, without even telling me about it. You care so much that you’re stretching yourself, and it’s leaking through your energy faster.”

Larry considered him and his words, then said, “It could be either of those, but I fall asleep every time I’m trying to sort it out. Clary and I keep telling me to ease up on it, and I will figure it out, but it’s really hard to do are you still.”

At that, Blair headed into the kitchen to make breakfast.

“It’s probably a part of your age as much as anything,” Legend suggested.

Larry shot him a disgusted look. “Yeah, I’ve heard that a few times. They seem to think it’s got something to do with hormones.”

mine,” Such disgust filled Larry’s tone that Legend burst out laughing. “I’m sorry about that, bud, but it’s all part and parcel of growing up.”

” “Well, it sucks,” Larry stated. “I personally think we should get rid of it, but we don’t when and how we want to, without any of that nonsense part of it.”

“Well, if that works out for you, let me know because, so far, I can’t remember when he I’ve seen it happen too many times.”

ere,” he “Yeah, it won’t happen,” Larry muttered, as he walked over and patted himself down on a chair next to his brother, “but, in the meantime, anything that’s coming my way.”

ng.” “Well, that’ll be nice for a change,” Blair noted from the table. “I made a note.” “Usually you’re on the picky side.”

re than “Too hungry to be picky now,” he mumbled. Then he yawned and looked around, bleary-eyed. “Why am I still tired?”

Clary smiled. “Hey, sometimes you just need some recharging time.”

“*Maybe.*” Then Larry looked at her suspiciously. “Did you knock

, with a again?”

“Nope, I sure didn’t,” she replied. “Do you want me to?”

Larry Such an overstated mock threat filled her voice that he looked at
giggled. “You know that is actually pretty cool that you can do that.”

“Yeah, it is pretty cool.” Then in a mock whisper, she added, ‘
helps keep Brody in line.”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Brody protested. Then, hopping to his feet, he
, I burn into the kitchen, sniffing around. “Are you making enough for every
just for the hungry kid? I could use some breakfast too.”

And, with that, a raucous breakfast began.
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“Nope, I sure didn’t,” she replied. “Do you want me to?”

Such an overstated mock threat filled her voice that he looked at her and giggled. “You know that is actually pretty cool that you can do that.”

“Yeah, it is pretty cool.” Then in a mock whisper, she added, “It also helps keep Brody in line.”

“Hey, hey, hey,” Brody protested. Then, hopping to his feet, he barged into the kitchen, sniffing around. “Are you making enough for everyone or just for the hungry kid? I could use some breakfast too.”

And, with that, a raucous breakfast began.

CHAPTER 11

SEVERAL HOURS LATER, after everybody had eaten, after the kitchen had cleaned up, they were mostly packed. “I still don’t know what the p Larry said almost petulantly, speaking from the kitchen counter, whe parked his butt. “Why can’t we just stay here until it’s all settled?”

“Well, so far, four armed people have found us, plus the clueless so that’s hardly a good solution, and we can’t afford to have this Rich come back with somebody else.”

“But he will,” Larry stated, “as long as he thinks there’s money in :

“Which is why I’ll go off and pay him a visit,” Legend shared.

“Yeah, you and what army?” Larry muttered. “You know Dad’ whole army, right?”

“Yeah, I do know that,” Legend confirmed. “He wanted me to jo one time.”

“But you didn’t want to?” Larry asked, cautiously looking at hi brother.

“No, I sure didn’t. That’s not my style.”

Larry studied his face. Then came a weird buzz of energy, as if l searching to see if his brother was lying. Then he relaxed. “Well good.” Larry looked over at Clary. “I don’t think I should go back place. That’ll just bring trouble your way.”

“Yeah, it might,” she admitted, “but I’ve talked to the others, and totally okay with it.”

“Are they really okay with it, or are they just hoping it will fo brother into working for you?” Larry asked, with an adult percepti made Blair stop and look at him closely.

“Even if they are,” Clary explained, “your brother is perfectly cap telling them *Thanks, but no thanks* and taking you off to another place.

“Why should I have to go with him anyway?” Larry question belligerence mounting.

“Because your father appointed Legend as your guardian,” Blair knowing that she had just dropped a bomb.

Larry stared at her in horror, then turned to look at Legend, who on the other side of the room, listening but staying out of the conversation as much as he could. At that, Larry lowered his voice to a hushed whisper. “Why would he do that?”

“I believe your dad did it because he knew that Legend would keep you safe,” Blair replied, her voice just as inflexible as Legend’s had been earlier. Larry stared at her, and then his shoulders slumped, but he nodded. “That much is true.”

“I’m glad you accept that much,” Legend stated, walking over. “I didn’t have much warning about this either, so I can’t say I have any advice for you, but together we’ll limp along and get through it somehow.”

“Somehow is right,” Larry muttered. “Because look at you now. You’re about to take off, so where does that leave me?”

“It leaves you with me,” Blair declared. “The same as it always has. At that, he looked at her hopefully. “You didn’t get fired?”

“Well, let’s just say that, for the moment, I’m still on the job,” Blair replied.

Larry shook his head. “You can’t work for nothing,” he muttered. “The world doesn’t work that way. You taught me that.”

“I’m not working for nothing,” she stated. “I’m getting paid. The question is of how and what isn’t really a discussion you need to be a part of.”

He glared at her. “Oh, we’re back to that ‘need to know’ crap, huh?”

“Ignoring the cussing issue, here’s my reply. No, not at all, I don’t consider my finances personal and private.”

At that, Larry looked ashamed. “If there’s one thing my father taught me, it was never to talk about money, so I’m sorry. I guess that was crossing the line.”

She laughed. “You didn’t cross the line because I didn’t let you. I pointed out. “Remember? We all have boundaries, and my money is my own income, and all the rest of that personal stuff of mine, is not for discussion.”

Larry nodded. “I guess I can understand that. I wish I knew if I had any money,” he muttered.

“Well, you will have,” Legend replied, “but that’s part of what I stand

added, to get sorted out.”

“You mean money from Dad?” Larry asked.

was off “Partly. You also had money from your mother.”

ation as He frowned at that and then nodded. “I remember something about
hisper, but Dad told me not to worry about it.”

“Of course he did.”

ep you “There’s a good chance he may have spent it,” Larry noted, look
arlier. the window.

led too. “Listen,” Legend began. “I’m hoping there’s money, but, if there
we’ll figure it out. Regardless we’ll get you a great education, and you
listen. I from there.”

answers There was a palpable easing of the tension in the room as Larry at
Legend’s words at face value. Blair was amused and yet relieved to see
ow. ...word from Legend could actually calm down his brother to this extent.

As he walked past her, dropping his bag of tools and whatnot at the
s.” door, she told him in a low voice, “You could turn out to be quite useful.”

He snorted. “Nice try. I’ve got to tell you that babysitting has never
b,” shemy thing.”

“Maybe not,” she said cheerfully. “However, from now on, it has
d. “The become your thing.”

And just enough of a note of a warning filled her tone to make her
details and look at her. “So you’re not up for the job full-time?”

“Babysitting? No, not full-time. We’ll talk about it later—once
?” this nightmare over with,” she murmured. “I have a life too, you know
since I least I should have.”

He pondered that for a moment and then acquiesced. “Fine, we
ght me, about it afterward.”

sing the “As for now, of course, I’m coming with you.” He froze, then turned
glared at her. She shrugged. “We’re back to the same problem again
u,” she don’t know what Rip looks like. I do. I also know several of the other
ey, my involved in his shadier side of the business.”

up for At that, Larry turned to him eagerly. “I could come. I know all the
too.”

had any She smiled. “Well, that would kind of defeat the purpose. We don’t
to actually deliver you back there, do we?”

ill have His face fell. “I don’t want you to go,” he wailed.

“I know that,” she noted, “but I also want you to be safe, not just moment but for the rest of your life.” She got up, walked over to Lar asked him, “Have I ever let you down?”

ut that, He shook his head. “No.”

“Have I ever lied to you?”

He shook his head again.

ing out “So, believe me when I tell you that I will come back, and, when we’ll get busy and carry on with the physics.”

re isn’t, His face lit up, as if she had offered him a major Christmas gift. “I can go You wouldn’t lie to me, right?”

“No, I wouldn’t lie to you. Physics it is, but we’ll go solve this s accepted first. Then we’ll come back, figure out where we’ll be next and get e that and then we’ll resume the schooling. In the meantime, you still finished the other homework I left you.” She added just a note of severe fronther tone to get him to realize that she meant it.

ul.” He groaned. “Well, if I would stop getting moved around, I could a er been have a chance to open my books and to get something accomplished glared at her.

d better She smiled. “Very true, so this is your chance. We won’t be going long, and, by the time we come back, we’ll have some solutions.”

im stop He looked at her and then walked up, opened his arms, and gave hug. Not for the first time did she realize this ten-year-old was growing we get an almost alarming rate. Hugging him close, she whispered, “We’ll be ow? A promise.”

He nodded. “You know what will happen if you’re not.” There s’ll talk mock threat in his voice but also a solid note of steel ran through it.

“I do, indeed,” she confirmed. “You listen to Clary and Brody. I ned and hear me?”

n. You He looked over at Clary and smiled. “Yeah. Well, if I don’t li people Clary, she’ll knock me into tomorrow, and, if I’m not good, she won me back, so no problem there.”

players At that, Brody burst out laughing. “Wow, she’s already got you w around her little finger, doesn’t she?”

it want “She didn’t need to,” Larry disagreed. “One doesn’t wrap angels their fingers. One complies with their every wish.” He walked over ar Clary a big hug. “Thank you so much for doing all you can to keep m

for theyet again. I promise that, when I'm old enough and get a chance, I
ry, and something to give back to this world in some way, to make up for all t
and effort you've put into me."

"Sweetie, listen to me," Clary replied, tapping his nose gently, h
around his shoulders. "You are and always will be special, and what I
time and effort, I've done it out of love, so don't feel like you owe any
n I do, Larry gave her a misty smile.

Blair had tears starting to tickle down the back of her thro
Really?swallowed and turned to face Legend. "We've got two days. They
here after we go, just long enough to get picked up by someone T
ituationsending over, although I don't really understand who he's sending."
settled, "I'm pretty sure we have somebody not very far away," Brody n
haven'the dropped his bag at the front door too. "And not a minute too so
erity tosaid, looking over at Clary. "You ready to go?"

She nodded. "There's still one cup of coffee left. I'll drink that.
actuallywatched as she got up, poured it, and then sat back down again.

ed." He "We have that kind of time?" Brody asked her hesitantly.

"No, not at all, but I want the coffee."

ne very He winced at that. "Okay then."

"Hey, Riff," Clary called out, and a startled noise came on the oth
e her aof the front door.

ig up at "God damn it, how do you always know? Damn it."

e fine. I "Well, if you didn't make quite so much noise, it would be
harder."

! was a He snorted at that. "Like hell. I was super quiet."

"Doesn't matter," Clary noted. "You make the air move."

Do you At that, the newcomer stepped through the door into the living ro
glared at her.

isten to She just smiled at him benevolently. "So, you guys get everything
't bringup, while I finish this coffee. Then we can go."

Riff frowned at her. "And you're sitting *and* drinking coffee while
rappedall the work, *huh?*" His tone confirmed he expected exactly that.

"Well, when you can tell when the air moves, you can be the last
aroundget loaded up. Right now, I'll have my coffee."

id gave Such an inflexible note filled her tone that Riff looked over at Bro
e alive,raised an eyebrow.

will do Brody shook his head. “Yeah, let her have the coffee if she wa
he time Then he turned, looked at Blair, and asked, “Are you sure about this?”

“You know I have to,” she stated. “Even if all I do is confirm the c
er armis Rip, that’s important, and, if it’s somebody else, we need to know w
do, that player is too. I’m still the best chance we’ve got to ID these shadow
/body.” Besides, it’s not far away. Two days is our limit.”

“Two days is *your* limit,” Legend clarified, turning to look at her.
at. She “I mean, until the job is done.”

’ll stay
erkel is



oted, as LEGEND LED THE way on foot through the bush, until they hit the mai
on,” he Blair didn’t say anything but followed along at his side. He didn’t l
” They she would read his mind—which was a very disconcerting thought,
reminder to keep his thoughts turned down to himself.

As they hit the main road, she still didn’t say anything, just sho
her pack and kept on going beside him.

“You really care about my brother, don’t you?”
er side “I’ve looked after him for a long time,” she stated quietly, “so, yes.
He just nodded.

“When the time is right, I’ll leave him without any problem,
a little worry,” she stated, with a wry tone. “But you don’t look after sor
who’s been close to death like Larry has been and not become emo
attached.”

“No, I guess not. I can’t even imagine what it would have bee
om and watching him fight for his life like he did.”

“Exactly,” she stated.

When a vehicle pulled up beside them, Riff got out. He never said
loaded just turned and walked toward the cabin. She looked over at Legend.
he ever talk?”

“Not often, not to me at least. He talked to Clary though, and th
e we do only time I’ve ever witnessed him speaking.”

one to Blair just nodded. At that she heard a second vehicle appro
dy and another AGV she presumed, and turned to see Brody and his team lea
that one. “Interesting way you guys operate.”

nts to.” “Hey, I’m not even sure how this works, and Riff is fairly new team too, as I understand.”

one guy “Still not exactly a die-hard fan apparently,” she murmured. “Or h/who that some sort of agenda of his own.”

players. “Everybody does. Everybody went into this line of business for a r he shared, “and generally we don’t like people getting in our way.” W he shot her a look, as if hoping she’d heard the rebuke for herself.

She just gave him a sunny smile and continued looking ahead.

“You never let things get to you, do you?” Legend muttered.

“If you’re expecting me to back off because you’re unhappy, too bad.”

n road. He groaned. “I can’t keep you safe while I find out what I need know if out.”

plus a “If that were the truth, you would have fought harder to discour from tagging along,” she argued, “and you didn’t, so I took that as a ye

uldered He stopped as they got into the vehicle and looked at her. “Serious

“Sure, if you actually cared and really said something about it, it have made a difference in the way you replied,” she stated, “but it didn

,” “So, you also knew I could cut down some of the travel tir eliminate the time guarding you.”

not to “Look. Let’s just get this job done, and then we can get back nobody Cambridge,” she said, with an odd tone of voice.

tionally He pulled out onto the road. “What about Cambridge?”

“I just never really thought that’s where I’d end up.”

en like, He looked at her and frowned.

She sighed. “That’s where Terkel’s headquarters is.”

a word, thoughts in a turmoil over her words. “Why do you think you’ll there?”

Does She shrugged. “Pretty sure I can probably get a job with Terk this.”

at’s the “You won’t leave my brother, will you?” he asked, glancing at her

aching, “I said I wouldn’t, but, at the moment, I’m not sure what that like,” she admitted, “and I really want to learn more about this energ; ving in, if I can learn more.”

He nodded. “You already have a lot of skills. I’m sure they co

to their whatever you can do.”

“I don’t really even know what I can do,” she admitted bluntly. “How often’s it go how many times do you actually get a chance to turn around and say, *can do this!*”

“Reason,” He burst out laughing, and she looked at him in surprise. He noticed that, was just thinking that myself, you know? Then I imagine Terkel stepping out and saying, *Nice to know you want to join our team, but what can you do?* Yet I don’t have any answers for them. It’s not as if I have any formal training and a certification from Psychics R Us or something. Oh damn. She giggled at that. “Right? We’re oddities in this world, and knowing about Terk’s place, where acceptance for this aspect of our world can be found, is a beautiful thought. I really want to be part of it.”

“In other words, you don’t want to stick around and look after my ass for too long.”

“No, I’m not saying that, but I do want to know more about what Terkel’s team can do and what else I can learn to do. If I’ve learned anything from this, it’s that, although I have some skills, I don’t have nearly enough of them.” “I don’t think anybody has enough,” Legend replied, his tone harsh, but he did his best to modulate it down. “Particularly while we’re here to protect somebody under attack. Whoever these assholes are, and wherever they’re up to, the last thing we want is to have them succeed because we weren’t good enough.”

“I’m glad you agree,” she replied quietly, as she looked over at him while you’re gone doing whatever other missions you’re planning on. I’m hoping to at least stay in touch with Terkel’s team and see if I can do anything to help. And, if that has to be on a volunteer basis until I’m able to help, his enough to have something to offer, so be it.”

He looked at her, startled. “You seriously don’t think you have something to offer?”

“I don’t know,” she muttered. “Terkel, ... what I have heard about you sounds intimidating.”

“I don’t know about that,” Legend disagreed. “I’ve heard that he’ll look but he doesn’t necessarily suffer fools easily.”

She burst out laughing at that. “I’m not sure anybody on Terkel’s team does,” she noted. “Based on what I have heard and seen of Brody and his use

seems a whole legion of men like you guys live and breathe,” she
I mean, “and I would kind of like to meet them.”

, *Hey, I* Legend felt a flash of anger that was almost jealousy slide through
and he shot her a hard look. “Why?” he snapped. “You think your a
lded. “I will grow by sleeping with them?”

’s team She stared at him, but her voice was calmer than it should have
what is considering his rude remark. “No, I hadn’t really considered that, but
’ve had that you’ve brought it up, maybe I should give it a go.” He continued
ig.” at her, and she laughed. “One of these days you’ll admit what’s between
nd just “There’s nothing between us,” he stated immediately.

r world “Yeah, only because you keep the walls up,” she pointed out. “
years ago, when I first met you, but you, on the other hand, are just
brother stubborn.”

He snorted. “There’s also such a thing as a time and a place, and I
erkel’s gotten to either. It also doesn’t mean that, when I get to that time and
rom all you’re it.”

h.” “Ouch.” She winced. “Good to know that you can snap and play hard
h, even like you do.”

e trying “Why?” he asked worriedly.

hatever “Because now I’ll feel completely comfortable snapping right back
use we muttered and turned to the window. “Now drive, so we can get back
and shut up for the rest of the trip. After all, if I sleep with any men
m. “So, know you can have nothing to say about it.”

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nd you,

seems a whole legion of men like you guys live and breathe,” she shared, “and I would kind of like to meet them.”

Legend felt a flash of anger that was almost jealousy slide through him, and he shot her a hard look. “Why?” he snapped. “You think your abilities will grow by sleeping with them?”

She stared at him, but her voice was calmer than it should have been, considering his rude remark. “No, I hadn’t really considered that, but, now that you’ve brought it up, maybe I should give it a go.” He continued to glare at her, and she laughed. “One of these days you’ll admit what’s between us.”

“There’s nothing between us,” he stated immediately.

“Yeah, only because you keep the walls up,” she pointed out. “I knew years ago, when I first met you, but you, on the other hand, are just plain stubborn.”

He snorted. “There’s also such a thing as a time and a place, and I haven’t gotten to either. It also doesn’t mean that, when I get to that time and place, you’re it.”

“Ouch.” She winced. “Good to know that you can snap and play hardball like you do.”

“Why?” he asked worriedly.

“Because now I’ll feel completely comfortable snapping right back,” she muttered and turned to the window. “Now drive, so we can get back faster, and shut up for the rest of the trip. After all, if I sleep with any men, I now know you can have nothing to say about it.”

CHAPTER 12

SEVERAL HOURS LATER Blair clued into where they were going. She looked over at him. “Are we going back to the mansion?” she asked in disbelief. Legend gave a clipped nod. “But why?”

“Because paperwork and laptops and things are there that we need for Larry’s future,” Legend replied.

“The paperwork should all be online, and his manager should have at least the estate lawyer and the accountants will.”

“Yeah, and what they’ll provide versus what actually is there is probably a whole different story.”

“Two sets of books? Of course.” She sank back into the front seat and pondered that. “The mansion is likely to be overrun at this point.”

“There is a chance of that, but I’m also hoping and half expecting it not to be overrun or to maybe find a theft in progress, by whoever set this up. I don’t know if any lootable valuables are in that house.”

“Yes, but the house itself is what’s truly valuable.”

He nodded again. “I agree, but, if we’re trying to find out who’s behind this, that’s the best place to start. There has to be a clue.”

“It’s also suicide,” she noted.

He glanced at her, flashed a grin, and asked, “Still want to come with me? I’ll drop you off, and you can go back to the cabin at any time.”

She jutted her chin out at him and glared.

He shrugged. “Just an idea.”

“Yeah, well, it’s not a good idea,” she snapped. “If you’re determined to do this, then so am I.”

“Yeah, and what is your reasoning behind that?” he asked curiously. “I’m trying to make sure we don’t have any more attacks, and, for that, I need to get as much information from his mansion as I can. If I can snag laptops and other things, I will.”

“I want Larry to be safe, so that is my reason. So don’t you think I should have searched the mansion for that stuff in the first place then?”

He shrugged. “Yeah, that would have been nice, but I don’t recall any extra time when we took off out of there before we heard gunshot.

I don’t know if anybody has even made a move on the place, though I certainly would have. Plus, if I hadn’t had so many people to look after, I probably would have looked first escaping the mansion, I would have been back there in a heartbeat. He explained.

“It’s not as if we’re that far away.”

“No, but we’re just far enough away that we aren’t around the corner for

“I saw that, and I’ll put it down to the fact that I was sleeping and not having noticed earlier.”

“Well, if you’d asked me ahead of time, I could have told you where we probably were headed, but you didn’t. You were too hell-bent on coming with me

“Sure, and maybe if I had understood why we were coming, I probably wouldn’t have been so shocked.”

He shrugged. “Sorry, not used to explaining myself.”

“Well, you might want to consider getting into the habit of snapping. A lot of people do it now.”

“Exactly,” he said cheerfully, “and you need to stay close. I’m not sure what we’ll find, if anything, but I need to snag as much as I can.”

“What about the vehicle?”

“We’ll park in the back acreage, then go in cross-country.”

“Are you really expecting anybody to be there?”

“I had Terkel scout it out, and people have been back and forth. He probably won’t say anything about permanent lodgers or at least nothing that looks like anybody was staying to that extent.”

“Interesting,” she murmured. “But then, it’s not really the place that Kartal stayed at all the time, is it?”

“No, but it is one of his favorite homes, and he did a lot of work there.”

She pondered that. “He has a safe in his home office too.” He surprised. She shrugged and added, “Hey, everybody ignores the hired help.”

He laughed. “That’s the last thing you were.”

“To your father, I was,” she stated. “He never saw me, never understood anything about me, and never cared to.”

think we
' anybody, including his own kids."

having
s. Now, As long as I kept Larry occupied and his schooling going forward
ough I doing my job, and Mr. Kartal didn't care to know about anything else."

er when
eat," he "Did you ever go to him with problems?"

eat," he "God no," she replied. "He didn't want to know about anything li
Problems meant we weren't all doing our jobs."

er." He laughed at that. "Yeah, if only life were that simple."
"Well, for him, it apparently was."

for not "Well, it's definitely not that simple now."

"Do we really think he's dead?" When he frowned at her, she sh
ere we "I don't know why it's bugging me. It's just ... you know? For all we
ie." that was just a media story. I feel like he's gone, but we haven't had
here, I confirmation."

"That's a good point too," Legend agreed. "I did consider it, but, u
actually get confirmation, what is it you want me to say?"

it," she "I guess you don't know either," she said. "I keep expecting tha
're here have answers, but you won't have any more than I do. I just thoug
would have doubts."

not sure "Hopefully we'll know more soon. I can get a few more answers
but we'll still have to wait for some final confirmation, since we
actually see his body ourselves."

"Which we didn't, but it would make sense that Mr. Kartal would
to do something like that, faking his death, in order to get out of the
e didn't he is in."

ed as if "I wouldn't be at all surprised," Legend agreed, with a nod. "That
make me feel any better though."

hat Mr. At that, she nodded. "He always was kind of slippery." Legend dic
anything to that, and when they pulled into the shrubs at the back
ere." property, she hopped out, looked around, and asked, "Is this really adj:
seemed the mansion?"

help." "It is, but it's another mile cross-country."

"Well, if we have an awful lot to carry back, that won't be very
erstood do," she noted, contemplating the distance.

"Carry what you can. I'll take the rest," he replied.

g about She looked over at him, registering the breadth of his shoulders and the power of his arms. “Yeah, you might as well just carry all of it for the time,” he muttered, “compared to what I’ll carry.”

, I was He just nodded, as if fully accepting that was the way it was.

” She sighed. “I’m not that weak, you know?”

“Hey, I didn’t say a word,” he pointed out cheerfully, “but you don’t like that.” She glared at him. His lips twitched, and he picked up the things she now realized were several empty backpacks from the rear seat of the vehicle.

“Presumably to make life easy?”

He nodded. “Yeah, if we have a lot to carry, I need to carry it.”

rugged. She noted he was bringing ropes with him too. “Well, give me some to know, to take.”

a solid He pointed out two ropes in the back.

She quickly slung one over her shoulder and grabbed another one from the back. Then seeing zap straps, she looked at him, shrugged, and grabbed them too. “Interesting choice.”

t you’ll “Hey, I like them.”

ght you “Why? Because they are hard to get out of?”

“I figured they might come in handy. And actually, they can be used to get out of, but only if you know how, and so very often nobody knows how to get out of them.”

“Well then, you can show me how later,” she stated. “Right now it’s more important that we use them on people who potentially might not be able to get out of them.”

trouble “Yeah, but anybody in this field will get out of them pretty fast,” she added.

doesn’t “Well, we have rope too.”

“Agreed.” With that, he moved some brush around to camouflage the vehicle ever-so-slightly.

of the “Does anybody even come back here? It looks like a completely dead-end road.”

“Which just means that, given the circumstances, there’ll be quite a bit of traffic.”

easy to Not a whole lot she could say to that, so she stepped behind him and he raced through the trees. Now that they were actually here, he was apparently in some sort of a rush. He’d driven hard and fast, but she had settled in.

and the speed soon enough and had forgotten he was going as quickly as I
it,” she Now that they were outside, running, it was a whole different story.

He glanced back at her. “If you can’t keep up, go back to the c
snapped.

“I’m keeping up,” she replied, keeping her tone and her breathing e
sure do just wasn’t expecting an all-out run.”

up what “Well, that’s what it’ll be until we can get the hell out of here,” he
of the “If you can’t do it, you know what the answer is.”

“*Get lost*,” she said, without rancor. “I’ll keep up. Don’t you worry
it.” She felt his gaze assessing her intently, then he turned that lase
back to their surroundings, as he maintained the same punishing pa
nethingshe meant it that she would keep up, and, if they could find anything
help Larry and could put a stop to this nightmare, she was all for
would play her part; she just hadn’t anticipated having to do it at fift
e in heran hour. An exaggeration, but damn.

ed them It didn’t take long for her muscles to start screaming, but she kr
minute she wavered and let him know, he’d put a stop to her even
anything to do with him and this or any other missions, and that w
work out so well for her. When he suddenly reached out a hand, a
easy toslammed into it, she stopped and tried to get her breath back.

how.” “Somebody’s up ahead,” he whispered, as he peered through the bu
ow, it’s She tried to peer through the bushes too but couldn’t see anything
it knowhad to trust that he knew what he was talking about. “Friend or foe?”

“At this point they’re all foes,” he muttered. “Treat everyone
Legendenemy.”

She winced at that. “Unless I know them.”

“Chances are, if you know them, they know you, and they’ll know
age the supposed to be with you,” he pointed out, “so don’t expect that to get
of trouble.”

leserted “Right,” she muttered.

When he gave the word, he said, “Now be quiet. We’ll go in thro
a bit ofback door of the loading area.”

She nodded, and, by the time they were inside the mansion, her
n as he was back to normal, and she watched through a window at a guy, tall
oarentlythe phone at the far side of the property. “Do you think he saw us?”

into the “No, he sure didn’t, but he is talking to somebody, and I wish I kn

ne was.it was.”

“He’s pretty relaxed though, isn’t he?” she muttered, staring at his car,” he “Yeah, for the moment. Come on. We’ve got to go.” And, with that, he followed him through the industrial kitchens to the main floor, where he stopped even. “I stopped again and assessed the sounds.

She couldn’t hear anything, and apparently he was of the same caliber as he noted.as he quickly led her upstairs toward the office. As they got close, he stopped, listened, and shrugged. “Still sounds empty.”

He nodded. “That’s a good thing.” In the office, he quickly went to his desk. It was locked, but it popped open in seconds, and he started looking through the paperwork, looking for anything. She opened up a drawer on the far side and pulled out a laptop. He glanced at it and nodded. “We’re good. She that with us.”

She nodded too. “It would help to have his log-ins.”

“Not a problem really,” he replied. “They’ll have no problem getting them back at Terkel’s place.”

She didn’t say anything, wondering at a team who could get into a system so easily, then realized that most people probably weren’t aware that the system breakers took lessons and, in a few hours, could get into almost anything.

Hell, she wasn’t even sure how she knew that, but it was something she’d learned with questions Larry had asked her once. So she’d gone down the rabbit hole of research to find out. That was life with Larry, who was nothing if not inquisitive.

He had an inquiring mind, and she’d done her best to answer as many of his questions as she could. She knew her time for teaching him anything she didn’t already know was potentially running out, but that wasn’t the point of who’s hand. As she put the laptop inside the backpack, she found another folder with some paperwork, and a stack of what looked like credit cards and bank statements. She held them up.

Legend looked at them briefly, then nodded. “Take them too.”

She went through and grabbed anything that looked financial or business related. By the time Legend was done with his part of the desk, her backpack was full too. She asked, “How come Mr. Kartal has so much stuff here?”

“Because he was involved in a lot,” Legend muttered. “Yet the amount of cash, and that surprises me.”

“No, it’s in that safe,” she said, pointing to the wall. At his frown, she shrugged. “I told you. Nobody ever thinks about the help.”

“You’ve actually been in here when it was open?”

“Yes, and he didn’t even bother shutting it. Again I was nobody to

He nodded, then quickly looked back at her.

She added, “Behind the painting.”

He lifted the painting off the wall, and there was a wall safe. “suppose you know the code, do you?”

“No, and that would help, wouldn’t it? Hang on a minute.” She went over to the desk and lifted the large desk pad. Underneath was a screen filled with numbers. “I remember he had a habit of slipping things under things sometimes too.” She studied the notes for a moment, then read the numbers to him.

Legend smiled. “Yeah, that would make sense. It’s Larry’s birthday.” “Interesting,” she muttered. “He must have been planning on changing again.”

“He changed it constantly, but it was variations of the same number,” Legend replied. Sure enough, the safe opened on his third attempt. Inside was paperwork, a lot of cash, and several weapons.

She stared at that and winced. “Do you think it’s safe to take it all?”

“Yeah, better than letting the bad guys keep all this,” Legend stated. He quickly unloaded the safe into his other backpack. Snatching

weapons, he checked to see if they were already loaded, then slipped many of them onto the back of his belt. With the safe emptied and now locked again, he hung the picture back in place, did another quick circle around the office, and stopped at the desk again. He ran his hands over a couple spots around the tablet, back, pressing at certain points.

“Did he have secret drawers?” she asked, her voice an excited whisper. He nodded. “I know of at least two.”

It took him ten minutes. She was constantly staring at the doorway behind her bottom lip, until a drawer popped out. He smiled. It was full of gold bars, shimmering in the dim light. “Now that is gold.” He nodded and put everything into a smaller cloth bag, then put that bag into his jacket and zipped up the pocket. Then he went to the next secret drawer and quickly opened it. She wasn’t even sure what was in there, but he stared at it,

ven, she then snatched it up and quickly put it into his last backpack. “Now getting the hell out of here.”

“Then what?”

him.” “Don’t worry about it,” he said. “First we get out of here and get safe and away from these morons.”

“What about the guy who put out the contract?”

‘I don’t “We’ll be on that next, so let’s go.” And, with that, he quickly through the hallway, back down the way they came. As she went around the backcorner behind him, she heard a shout, and Legend swore. “Sorry,” she touched padguess I was just a little too slow taking that last corner.”

ler here “No, I was expecting somebody,” he noted.

if some With that, racing footsteps could be heard behind them and someone yelling, “Stop or I’ll shoot.”

y.” She bent down low, expecting to feel a bullet any second, but Legend quickly pulled her around the next corner and waited. They were just from being outside. Escape was tantalizing and close.

bers, I Then he whispered, “Don’t even think about it.”

attempt. She glared at him, but he just smiled as the person chasing them around the corner, hell-bent at a horrifying speed. Legend stuck out his foot tripping him up. He went flying, the gun slipping from his hand and skidding. Then across the floor. Just like that, Legend was on him. After two hard blows to the jaw, he was out cold.

one into Blair frowned, went over, and took a look. “It’s one of the security guards,” she said in surprise.

and then Legend quickly pulled out the guy’s ID, looked it over, then took the photos of it and him, sending them off to somebody, presumably

“Come on. Let’s go.” Legend took his IDs but left the man on the ground to wake up at his leisure, assuming that he’d somehow been attacked and plain tripped. Once outside, unwilling to give her any relief, he kept pushing her, biting her to move faster and faster. At this point, she was flat-out running, kicking and goldenthey were up against any number of other security guards on the place quickly if it wasn’t the security guards, it could be any number of other armed men. By the time he got her to the vehicle, she could hardly breathe.

quickly got He pulled away the brush, opened up the car, urgently motioned for her to get in.

She looked over at him and asked, “You think he wasn’t alone?”

“I know he wasn’t alone,” he stated, as he quickly got into the vehicle and started it up. Pulling out at top speed, he was soon out of the shrubbery and onto the road, headed back the way they came. Almost instantly she saw headlights all fired in their direction. She shrieked and crouched down low.

“Stay down,” he snapped. “I don’t know how quickly they’ll come for us, but you can bet they’re on their way.”

“Why?” she asked, then realized what a stupid question it was. Legend glanced at her once, and she nodded. “You’re right, stupid question.”

He laughed, his tone bright and cheerful, as if it were an everyday occurrence. “I said. “I She stared at him. “Have you lost your mind?”

“Nah.”

“You really love this kind of stuff, don’t you?”

“Not necessarily, but there’s a certain adrenaline rush that comes with it. Legend succeeding.”

“Do you think we succeeded?” she asked drily.

“Well, we’ve taken quite a haul out of there, so, if my father is alive, he’ll be pissed and looking for all that shit back. If he’s not alive, it’s damn good that something I don’t want other people to get their hands on.”

“Good point,” she agreed, “but we’re still not any closer to finding out who put out the contract, and, if it was Richard, we need to contact him and figure out how to stop this.”

“Yeah, but hopefully now we’ll have a hell of a lot more information to work with,” Legend pointed out. When they quickly hit more traffic, they slowed down to just barely above the speed limit.

“The last thing we want is to get pulled over,” she cautioned Legend, watching the speedometer at a crazy pace.

“Yeah, I know, but I’m pretty-damn sure we’ll have somebody coming for us or just behind us pretty soon.”

And, with that, he quickly made several changes in direction and was now zig-zagging from corner to corner, block to block, until she was almost dizzy. “Even “Aren’t we out of danger yet?” she asked, when he finally straightened his course and coasted forward.

“I think so, but we need to change vehicles fast.”

He pulled into a parking lot and drove around to the back. He found a hatchback there, kind of beat-up and older, probably belonging to one of the

icle and employees. He got out, quickly hot-wired it, then moved her and the
ery and over. Moments later, he shot out of the parking lot.

ts were “Damn, I feel bad about the person we just took this from.”

“Well, it’s insured, and he’ll probably get far more money out of th
ne after what this thing is worth. This is on its last legs.”

“Won’t they wonder why anybody would steal it?” she muttered.

He just “Yeah, and that is also why they won’t be looking for us in a c
this.”

thing. She pondered that strange logic, as he drove in a direction she
really expected. “Where are we now?” she asked in exasperation.

“No clue,” Legend admitted, “but, as long as we keep going awa
where we need to be, we’re better off.”

es from “And, of course, we don’t want to be anywhere close to where
expecting us to be.”

“That’s true enough.”

re, he’ll “What we should be doing is heading back to England, but w
:finitely because we haven’t found anything,” she muttered.

“Well, we found a bit of stuff, but now we need to grab a motel ro
ing out for a couple hours to look at it better. I want to go over this informat
im and see if we can get an idea of what’s really going on. We have a good ic

let’s get down to the bottom of it for sure.” Just then his phone ra
ation topulled it from his pocket and barked into the phone. “Yeah, what’s up?

ffic, he At first came silence on the other end. “Was that you?” asked a n
tone hard.

ed him, Legend stared at the phone. “Was that me where?”

“At the house.”

ning up “Who is this?” he asked.

“Somebody who wants that money bad.”

zipped “What money?”

with it. “The money from the safe you just wiped out.”

ned his “Oh, that’s interesting,” Legend replied. “Now that you men
anything at the house would belong to Larry.”

“He doesn’t need anything,” the man on the other end st
found a exasperation. “He’s just a kid.”

e of the “He’s a kid, but he also needs to grow up and to get an educatio
now, depending on what becomes of the estate of his father, that’ll b

air gearharder for him to do.”

“His dad is dead,” the man stated with harsh clarity. “*Your* dad. . . think I don’t know who you are? I caught sight of you racing through that thantrees with some chick. What kind of an idiot have you turned out to you actually take a woman on a trip like this?”

“When the woman is just too ornery to stay behind,” he replied, car likehalf laugh. “I don’t know who the hell this is, so you need to talk to me not introduce yourself?”

hadn’t “You need to talk to me because I know exactly where that kid brought yours is, and I’ll take him out if you don’t bring me back the contents by fromsafe.”

“That’s interesting because the contents of that safe weren’t enough to rewrite home about. Just enough to give the kid an education and some sense a normal life.”

“So *you* say,” he snapped, and his tone turned ugly. “Your father can’tbehind a hell of a lot of stuff worth stealing.”

“Well, we’ll see about that,” Legend replied. “I don’t even know what’s left behind, but what I do know is that the government will likely confiscate most of it.”

lea, but “Yeah, but I’m not into lifting the family silver. I want an awful lot of blackmail material and some really good leverage on people. You give me that, and I’ll leave your brother alone.”

ian, his “If I don’t?”

“Your brother is marked,” he declared.

“Seems he already is. Are you the one who put out the contract already?” Legend asked, his voice calm, as he searched the area around. Up ahead was a motel. He quickly pulled into the parking lot, shut the engine, and said, “We need to meet.”

“Yeah, we sure do. You give me what I want, and I’ll give you what you want.”

tion it, “Yeah? And how will you pull that contract if you’re not the one who actually posted it?”

ated in He hesitated and then added, “Richard posted it. I can get him to post it.” “Sure, you say that, but Richard must have a reason for it.”

1. Right “Yeah, because everything goes to your brother, so whoever controls the money.”

“That’s nice, but that also means that I have to die first.”

Do you At that came an ugly laugh on the other end. “I wondered if y
ugh the figured that out. You’ve been kind of slow up until now.”

be that “Oh, I’m not slow at all,” Legend declared. “I’m the guardian
intend to stay that way. Should anything happen to me, the money i
with ainto a very well-run charity fund.”

e. Why “Charity,” he repeated, aghast.

“Charity. So, if anybody takes me out, it won’t make a damn
other of difference. So, spread the word. There’s no money for anyone. If
of that Larry’s, then it goes to charity. Every bit.”

“God damn it. No way you’ve had a chance to work any of that yet
ough to “Yeah, I sure have. I’m just waiting for the final paperwork now
sense of have to lay low until it’s signed, and, if you take me out after that, i
make a damn bit of difference.”

her left “Yeah, but all the assets have to get moved first. There’s pap
involved, and it takes time.”

what he “Yeah, well, we heard about my father’s death yesterday, so belie
nfiscate That paperwork is well and truly taken care of.”

At that, the other man swore. “I still want the contents of that ba
l lot of you ran out of here with.”

e me all “You can’t have the backpack,” Legend stated. “Besides, you told
you wanted the contents of the safe.”

At that, the other guy asked, “What else did you get?”

“None of your business. It’s all for my brother.” It was obvious
on him guy didn’t believe him. “You tell Richard that I want to meet with h
d them. that I want to put an end to this.”

off the “Well, he’ll want money for that, and big money, because your br
worth big money.”

hat you “No, he isn’t. That’s been taken off the table, and tell him I’m
table as well. He won’t get any money out of it.”

ne who “He’ll put you back on the table just for fun,” he said, with a laugh
know that.”

ull it.” “Yeah, I do know that. He also knows that I play hardball. Tell
call me. I’ll be looking forward to it.” With that, Legend ended the call

ols him



ou had

, and I LEGEND PAID FOR a room with cash under an alias. Then returned to
s going opened the car door, and said, "Come on. We're going upstairs." He
grabbed the bags and nudged Blair ahead of him into the second-floor

As soon as the door was closed, she turned and asked him, "Now v
l bit of He walked to the nearest bed and dropped the bags there. "We need
it's not through as much of this information as we can to figure out what w
against, and then I need to set up a meeting with Richard." When s
t." nodded, he looked over at her with a frown. "Are you okay?" he ask
7. I just just nodded again, and he glared at her. "Hey, I didn't want you to
t won't Remember?"

"I'm stubborn. Remember?"
erwork Just something about her poked at his sense of humor, and he la
"Isn't that the truth," he muttered. "It could be the end of you one day.

ve me. "It just might be," she agreed cheerfully. "It really brings home the
that your dad played and how dangerous they were."

ckpack "They were always dangerous. It was always a game to him,
didn't give a damn who got hurt in the process."

me that "You must have really hated him."
He stopped to consider that, then faced her. "You know that *hate* is
word when it comes to family," he began, looking away from her now
that the just a hard word but it's even difficult to justify that kind of emotio
im and man like my father, who was essentially devoid of emotions, at le
healthy kinds. He was a user. He didn't love my mother, and he didn't
other is Larry's mother. It was all about what they could do for him. In my m
case, it was five minutes of pleasure and then he was done, and he
off the with a lifetime of child-rearing and never looked back."

"Wow, that doesn't sound great."

1. "You "No, it sure wasn't. Larry's mother was no different, except my
decided that having a wealthy, well-connected wife would do more
him to career than somebody *cheap and easy, like my mother*. His words, not
Blair winced.

l. "No, I don't give a damn about my father's words, and any insults
my mother have absolutely no bearing on my reality, not back then .

now. She's been dead and gone a long time, and her life was absolute because of him, but I'm not getting into that with him or with anybody loved her dearly, but I didn't have a whole lot to do with her either. Blair chose drugs after him, and it was a downward slide from there. I quickly telling you all this for sympathy. I just want you to know that all that room. stuff really doesn't have anything to do with me."

"What?" "I think it does," she disagreed, "but you just don't want to admit it did to get He rolled his eyes at that. "Whatever." He quickly unpacked the e're up they had taken from his father's office and the safe.

she just "That's a lot of money," she stated, realizing it for the first time.

ed. She "It is, but I don't know that it's nearly enough for these guys to come back off and to get out of our lives."

"Will you try to buy them off?"

"No, because, if they think we have this much, they'll assume we laughed. access to a lot more." He sat on the bed, gripping his head in his hands. " second. He looked exhausted. "The minute you start paying for sor like this, all hell breaks loose, and they keep coming back."

and he She looked at the money and nodded. "I think we should pack all so it's ready to go in a heartbeat."

"Absolutely. Can you do that? I need to get the laptops out and sorting through what's in these computer files." With that, he opened a hard laptop and started popping in the USB keys, also taken from the safe. n. "Not packed up the money and the jewels that were in the safe.

in for a She hadn't even realized he had grabbed any, but he'd just cleaned out, not caring what was there. There were also some papers. She r't love through the small stack and found Larry's birth certificate, as well mother's marriage certificate. It was a business arrangement. She winced as she left her the terms and agreement. Larry's mother was supposed to get five dollars after the birth of her son, as long as she stayed long enough Kartal to get elected. Instead he'd obviously killed her or she passed a her own, when Larry was just a couple of years old.

7 father Blair took several photos of everything she'd found, put the papers for his back together, and finished loading up the bag, putting it behind the door mine." was ready to go. Then she moved over next to Legend, where he was against at the computer. "Well?"

and not "Blackmail," he said, his voice thick with anger. "Blackmail ph

ute shitother politicians, families, anything he could use to force people to c
y else. He wanted them to do. Take bribes, send legislation through. It's all he
er. She muttered. "I've only been through three keys so far. Damn him anyway
I'm not "This isn't really anything new for you though, is it?"

family "No, I already knew he was a bastard," Legend stated, standing
glaring at her. "But it's one thing to know, and it's another thing to s
t." black and white like this."

ie stuff She nodded. "Are you making copies of everything?"

He hesitated and then nodded. "I am. I just don't know why."

"Well, at least if we lose everything in the bags, we'll have digital
actually of the documents, of the data on the USBs, in case we need it agai
murmured. "We don't really know how bad this can get."

With a nod, he quickly went through the rest of the keys. As she
ve have watched him go through a couple of them, she realized she really didn
ds for ato know anymore because these were people's secrets, sordid detai
nething affairs, some thefts, and definitely some crooked deals.

By the time he was done, and everything had been copied over, he
this up, down at the USB keys and declared, "These are definitely bargaini
material."

rd start "It is, but what about all these people?"

l up his "I think they've probably already been set up as much as they can
fe. She muttered, "but I could be wrong."

"Do they ever get to have peace and quiet after this? This
ed it all something they're tormented by forever."

ie went "Good point," he replied, looking over at her, half smiling. "A
as the want me to destroy it all."

he read "I don't know what I want to do right now," she admitted. "As mu
million do want to think that this won't be an issue, I also want to ensure we
for Mr. way to get Larry a safe life again."

way on He nodded, and started going through some other files found on th
laptop. "I've copied over as much of this as I can." Then he put al
erwork USB keys into a pile on the bed. "There's still way more stuff to go t
or so it on this laptop too." He looked over at her. "What did you find in the sa
staring

She quickly gave him a rundown and added, "I took photos of th
even the birth certificate and the marriage contract for Larry's sake."

otos on "Right, just what he really needs to know, isn't it?"

lo what She nodded. "Maybe later, when he's an adult, it will be some-
ere," heshould be aware of. I don't know, but, if we lose it, then there's no re
y." it."

"Right," Legend agreed. "I'll go through some of these, and then v
up and food and a bit of rest. Thereafter, hopefully we're getting on the road a
see it in "Where are we going then?"

"You'll stay here, and I'll go meet Richard."

"Do you really think it'll be that easy?"

"No, I don't think it'll be easy at all," he muttered. "He'll set me
l copiestry to take me down, and, beyond that, I have no idea."

n," she "Do you think he has any plans to let you go free?"

He looked over at her with a wry smile. "Would you?"

sat and "Yes, actually I would." She gave a half laugh. "That doesn't m
i't wantwill."

ls, love



looked

ng chip

LEGEND LOOKED OVER at Blair, as they ate several granola bars, which
the food they had. The motel had a coffee vending machine, which
both delicately tasted and then immediately dumped.

be," he She asked, "I guess there's no hope of getting some real food, is th

will be "Not right now," he said, just as his phone rang. He looked dow
then frowned. "Hey, Terkel." He put it on Speaker, and Terk's voic
the room.

nd you "It's a trap, you know."

ich as I "Well, I haven't gotten any communication yet to say whether it
have a on or not," he replied in a mild tone. "We can definitely expect it to be
but I still feel as if I need to meet him."

e office "Meet him or take him out?" Terkel's voice was calm, as if interes
not bothered either way. But surely he heard the audible gasp from Bla

l of the Legend shook his head. "Whichever way this guy wants it to play c
through declared, his voice hard. "We both know this has to stop one way or ar
ife?"

em all, "Absolutely," Terkel agreed, "but you haven't actually spoken
Richard yet, have you?"

hing he “No, just the one guy who wanted his stuff back. I told you ab
cord of conversation.”

“Yes, you did. Oh, by the way, Brody and Clary arrived. Larry
ve needsafe and sound.”

gain.” “Oh, thank God for that,” Blair said, racing closer to the phone. “
he holding up?”

“He’s actually in very good spirits. He’s pretty overwhelmed w
about the castle.”

up and “Castle?”

First came silence, then Terkel laughed. “Yes, our place here is ac
castle.”

“Oh, wow,” Blair exclaimed, “like that alone won’t make eve
ean become running.”

“Well, it’s not intended for *everybody* to come running,” he replie
a note of humor, “but it does seem to bring out the interest factor.”

“Yeah, you’re not kidding,” she muttered. “Well, as long as he
there safe.” Then she looked over at Legend. “Legend is pretty determ
go on this adventure alone.”

was all “Of course he is, and that’s another reason I’m calling.”

they’d “Okay,” Legend replied. “What’s up?”

ere?” “Riff is still over there, so he’s coming as backup.”

m at it, “Oh.” Legend had an odd note in his tone. “I guess that’s probably
e filled idea.”

“What?” she cried out. “It’s a good idea for Riff to come, but no

He shot her a look. “So what if he knows what he’s doing,” she mutte

’s even still doesn’t change the fact that you won’t know who you’re dealing v

e a trap, “But we’re not certain that you know this guy either,” Legend
out.

ted, but She nodded, then shrugged. “I do seem to be in the way more th
helpful.”

ir. “That’s not true.” He turned his attention back to Terk on the ph
out,” he emailed a lot of stuff to you, copies of materials that we found
iother.” mansion.”

to this “I went through some of it,” Terkel noted, his voice deepening. “
nastiness on that.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure my father was using it to get what he wa

out that have a lot of documents I still haven't seen, plus a lot of information on cards, bank accounts, statements, and that kind of thing. I've taken is here, and I'll send them to you tonight," he added. "Maybe we can track the bank accounts for Larry's sake. Also, quite a bit of cash is here."

How is "If you need to use the cash to buy Larry's freedom ..." Blair began. "Think that through," Terkel said. "As soon as they know there is with joy kind of cash, they'll want more."

"That's what I told her," Legend stated.

"Is everybody so greedy?" she asked bitterly.

ually a Legend grabbed her hand and squeezed it gently. "Most of the time are, and, in this mess, these guys are scared. Their leader's down. The everybody went awry, and now they're all trying to scramble for survival. There anybody cares about right now, and, if we understand that and realized, with guys are dangerous because they're cornered and can't even get out of hopefully it will keep us all alive."

made it "Not really," she argued, the stress and worry clearly taking a toll. "I think you've got the money, then what's to stop him from just shooting dead on sight?"

He winced. "I was kind of hoping they wouldn't do that," he quietly laughed in his voice.

She glared at him. "It's hardly a laughing matter."

a good "I told you to stay with Larry and the others."

"Yeah. Well, I didn't," she muttered. "Believe me. You're beginning to make me wish I had."

red. "It He groaned. "I don't think Terk needs to listen to us squabbling."

with." "No, but it's more interesting than anything I had going on here pointed added, with a note of humor. "You guys do need to get your relationships between yourselves settled. It'll make it a lot easier if you do it before I'm here and find yourselves doing it in front of everybody."

At that, she stopped, stared, and asked, "Meaning?"

one. "I "You know perfectly well what I mean," he said in a gentler tone. "The one thing to have a family dispute on your own," Terk added, "but in like this? Everybody'll know, and more than that, they'll know with Lots of details are too. We do our best to keep to ourselves, but it isn't something happens easily."

anted. I She winced, as she looked over at Legend. "Well, thanks ..."

n creditwarning,” she muttered.

photos, “You know perfectly well what it’s like when you’re around some of psychics. When you were with Clary or close to Clary, your own a increased, did they not?”

n. “Yes, but I wasn’t sure whether it was because of her or not.”

is that “Yeah, and Brody, plus Legend, have their own skills of course that I’m still hoping Legend will put to use here with our team.”

“I don’t know that he’s all that cooperative,” she shared. “He difficult.”

ne they At that, Legend sighed. “Hey, I’m still here. Terk, we’ll talk ir plans Moments later, his phone rang again. He quickly answered with a bar at’s all tone.

re these “You want to meet. I want to meet,” a stranger said on the phon f town, half an hour away. Leave the lady behind.”

.. “She doesn’t want to be left behind,” Blair stated in a snappy voic .. “If he wants Larry safe.”

ing you At that, the stranger laughed. “Larry has definitely earned himself saviors,” he noted, “which I find very interesting. Now why would a pped, a give a damn, I wonder.”

“No need to overwork your brain,” she declared, her voice darken would be enough to know that we care about people.”

“Caring about people will get you killed, so, if you haven’t learn ing to by now, come at your own peril. You damn-well better bring all that c preferably any other paperwork you stole from the house. There’s m be had by all, but I am determined to get my share. I’ve put a lot of ye ,” Terk this cause, his cause, and I’m not walking away with nothing.” An ionship that, he seemingly disconnected.

you get “But wait, where are we meeting?” she asked the void.

The stranger laughed. “Legend knows.”

After that came only silence.

ie. “It’s a place hat the ing that

for the

warning,” she muttered.

“You know perfectly well what it’s like when you’re around other psychics. When you were with Clary or close to Clary, your own abilities increased, did they not?”

“Yes, but I wasn’t sure whether it was because of her or not.”

“Yeah, and Brody, plus Legend, have their own skills of course. Skills that I’m still hoping Legend will put to use here with our team.”

“I don’t know that he’s all that cooperative,” she shared. “He can be difficult.”

At that, Legend sighed. “Hey, I’m still here. Terk, we’ll talk later.” Moments later, his phone rang again. He quickly answered with a bark to his tone.

“You want to meet. I want to meet,” a stranger said on the phone. “I’m half an hour away. Leave the lady behind.”

“She doesn’t want to be left behind,” Blair stated in a snappy voice. “She wants Larry safe.”

At that, the stranger laughed. “Larry has definitely earned himself some saviors,” he noted, “which I find very interesting. Now why would anybody give a damn, I wonder.”

“No need to overwork your brain,” she declared, her voice darkening. “It would be enough to know that we care about people.”

“Caring about people will get you killed, so, if you haven’t learned that by now, come at your own peril. You damn-well better bring all that cash and preferably any other paperwork you stole from the house. There’s money to be had by all, but I am determined to get my share. I’ve put a lot of years into this cause, his cause, and I’m not walking away with nothing.” And, with that, he seemingly disconnected.

“But wait, where are we meeting?” she asked the void.

The stranger laughed. “Legend knows.”

After that came only silence.

CHAPTER 13

“**W**HERE?” BLAIR DEMANDED.

Legend sighed. “Back at the mansion.”

“Oh, no, that’s not a good idea. It’s really hard to get out of that place.”

“We’ve managed to do it twice now,” he reminded her.

“I know, but still, who says there will be a third successful escape? I hated the idea, and she was having absolutely no luck in changing his mind.”

“I think you should stay here.”

“Only to spend the rest of my life waiting for you to return,” he muttered. “Hell no.”

“At least that way, if I don’t come back, you’ll know perfectly well where you can go. Head over to Terk’s and look after Larry, and use all the money we got to try and get him to adulthood, so he can have a decent life,” Legend told her, his voice rough. “I’m leaving you the cash and everything we have.”

She glared at him.

“Look. I’m not taking you. It’s too dangerous. I’ll have Riff as my backup and that’s as good as it’ll get.”

She stared at him, feeling the same anger but more than that now. Legend washed all over her.

He frowned at her. “You really don’t think I’ll come back, do you?”

She swallowed hard. “I’m afraid you won’t come back,” she clarified. “There’s a difference.”

“That’s true, but it’s not one I’m prepared to argue over.”

She groaned. “He’s not planning on letting you free.”

“Maybe not, but I’m not planning on letting him live either,” he replied.

She shook her head, glaring at him. “He’ll already be in position when you get there. He’ll have who-knows-how-many traps set up. If you even try to go in the same way you know you’ll be taken immediately.”

“Hopefully Riff has some ideas about that or will already be in position to help himself.” At that, he tilted his head to the side.

She frowned. "What's that?" she asked.

"Terk is talking to me."

Her gaze widened. "The fact that he can even do that is amazing."

"He can do a lot more, but it's much easier if he has the ability to do it on just me and not you."

She glared at him. "Oh, so now you're telling me that I'm in the way?"

"Of course you're in the way, and, worse than that, you'll be in the way of my leverage, and that's the last thing I want. They are threatening Larry but if they got ahold of you ..." His words trailed off, turning rough. "I don't want to see you hurt, and I certainly don't want to be in a position where I'm giving up secrets or my brother in exchange for you," he admitted, still glaring at her.

She could see the emotions in his gaze.

"You need to stay here," he repeated. "You need to stay out of trouble."

She studied him for a moment, unsure how to break through his resistance, until she realized there really wasn't any way to get through. He was adamant. "Fine," she muttered. "In that case, I might as well pack my head over to Terkel's then."

"Well, you don't have to be quite so fatalistic," Legend replied, with a note of humor. "A little more faith would help."

"Would it though?" she asked, turning to look at him. "It seems more like a fantasy."

"Sometimes we need that too." He ran his hand through his hair and slowly turned and took stock of things here. "What I really need is to know that I don't have to worry about you, so I can focus on what I need to do at the mansion," he shared. "And remember. *This* is the work I do."

She nodded, but her throat was tight. "I hear you. I still think it's a fantasy though."

He smiled. "Lots of things in life suck."

"Yeah, but you don't have to give your life for them."

He stiffened, then turned and glared at her. "I'm coming back the way I came, snapped. "Do you want to stop putting that thought out there?"

She raised both hands, then walked over to the other bed and threw herself down on top of the covers. "Fine," she muttered, "if you say so." She stared up at the ceiling, knowing she wasn't acting very well, but the fear was choking her deep inside, and there wasn't anything she could think of to do.

make it any better. "You need to look at this from a rational point of view, though," she added, "since he is out there to try and kill you."

"Yes, I know that," he stated, with exaggerated patience. "We've already focused on what he'll try to do to take me down."

"Yeah, we did. But what will you do to ensure that doesn't happen again?" he asked, turning to look at her.

He stopped and stared. "Well, Riff will be a big help, and, with your life, I can maybe use Terkel or some of these hidden weapons that they all have. Look, I have," he muttered.

"And if that doesn't work?"

"Well, I have the same old set of skills I've always had, my own skills that have served me pretty well over the years," he muttered. "And a little faith on your part would help."

"I know that you'll do the best you can," she conceded, "but though that won't give a shit. Plus, if you don't go with a backpack, making it look like you have a lot, you know that somebody will be backtracking you."

"Good point," he muttered. "We need to change your room number so nobody can find you." With that, he got up and walked out of the room.

She got to her feet. That's not what she had expected out of him. It didn't make sense because, if anybody was keeping an eye on him, his room or had some way to track the energy, then she wouldn't be safe here.

Honestly the thought of being left here alone without him to protect her also made her feel that she was one step away from death herself. It wouldn't be a nice death. She winced at all these errant thoughts, and when he finally returned, she glared at him. "And?"

"I think a better place for you is about two doors down," he whispered, turning to look back outside. "It's empty, and I've just picked the lock so you can get in. If you stay inside, nobody will know you are there, so you'll be safe until I get back."

She nodded. "You do know that I'll track you."

He stopped, turned, and then frowned at her. "What?"

Such a low and deadly tone filled his voice that she stared at him. "Track you," she repeated defiantly.

"As in ... how?"

"Ah." She shrugged. "The same way I track Larry, whenever he gets

of view and does his disappearing act.”

“He does a disappearing act?”

already “Well, he did, until he realized it didn’t work. I learned it while he
ill. It was something that Clary taught me to do, way back when.”

n?” she “You track him?”

“I track him on the ethers. Whenever he got to the point of havin
y luck, relapses, I would connect with Clary and, with her help, we would bri
seem to back again. I don’t know how to explain it better than that. I’ve never
do it with anybody else, but I’ll do it with you.”

“What do you think that will do?” he asked her curiously. “I mea
, which if you could track me, what difference does it make?”

e bit of She pondered that, shrugged, and admitted, “I don’t know, but I
feels like the one thing I can do, ... so I’ll do it for me.”

his guy “That’s fine. I don’t have a problem with you tracking me, as long
ok like have no way to interfere when things are happening. You don’t, do you

“I don’t think so,” she replied, “but I wish I did.”

ere, so He smiled at that. “We’ll have to talk about tracking afterward.”

e motel She shrugged. “Well, it’s not as if you talk about any of your abilit
“Who says I even have any?”

i, but it “Why would Terkel want you if you didn’t have any?”

vehicle, Legend burst out laughing at that. “Good point. Let’s grab the ba
get you situated.”

tect her They quickly grabbed everything they needed, and he moved he
, and it other room. “Now stay inside, no matter what,” he ordered, as he l
l, when whistle and looked out the window.

“Is somebody here?”

spered, “Yeah, somebody’s here all right,” he replied, with a smile. “Riff
so you with that, he walked over to her, took her into his arms, and held her c
shoulda moment. “Remember. Positive thinking. I’ll be back.”

“Positive thinking,” she muttered. She smacked him on the back. “

At that, he grinned, grabbed her chin, and gave her a hard kiss.

“Now for that, I might hold a positive thought for you.”

m. “I’ll He smirked, then winked. “When we get back, sweetheart.”

“Ha, ha, ha, maybe not. I could be too pissed at you by then.”

“That’s all right. I’ve got your number now.” And, with that, he
goes off out the door. She watched from behind the curtain, as he got into a

vehicle, and it took off. She wished she had some way of knowing where they were heading into, but what she did know was that it was bound to be there for some time. And, with that, she sat down on the bed to wait.



ing these

ing him, “How’d she take it?” Riff asked Legend.

tried to “Not easily, but I don’t know what she expected.”

n, even “Like most women, she probably expected it would go her way,” stated, with a laugh.

guess it Legend shook his head. “The last thing I need right now is to worry about her too.”

as you “Do you think she’s stashed safely enough here?”

“I hope so,” Legend said. “I can’t put a cloak or a guard around me to keep my energy steady for what’s coming.”

Riff considered that and then nodded slowly.

ies.” Legend shook his head. “Regardless it’s good to know where they must be drawn,” he noted, feeling unsettled.

Riff nodded. “Hopefully she’ll be safe enough there.”

ags and “Are you working for Terkel now?” Legend asked Riff.

r to the “I’m still on the fence about it because I’m trying to solve the problem. He’s agreed to give me a hand when things ease up, but I just know that I have enough to go on to not be wasting their time yet.”

heard a Legend stared at him, but Riff just shrugged.

“You could explain a little more,” Legend suggested.

.” And, “I could,” Riff agreed, “and, yeah, it would pass away the drive to lose for it won’t help us get this asshole. So maybe I’ll fill you in later,” he m

“If you stick around with Terkel anyway.”

Sure.” “They do seem to have their shit together.”

“Yeah, I’ve just never seen anybody have it together quite like this. Most of the time we’re all complete mavericks, but somehow we managed to get this group corralled into some sort of formal organization with a cohesive team. I don’t get it.”

headed strange At that, Legend laughed. “I know, and you’re right. We almost never see people like us on teams, but somehow it seems to work with them.”

at they be badmanage it.”

“I don’t know whether it’s a case of good training or the fact that came out of government service. I just don’t know.”

They pondered that as they drove back toward the mansion.

“I took a look at the blueprint,” Riff said.

“Okay, good. I suspect all the normal routes will be completely l off.”

,” Riff “I would guess that they’ll appear to be completely loose and al until we get inside. Then they’ll be blocked off,” he corrected.

y about “Good point,” Legend agreed.

“And you’ve taken two different routes out of that place, right asked.

her and “Yes, we’ve gone through the loading zone, and the first time w down through the basement.”

ie lines “Right,” he muttered. “So next, I would suggest we try to find an e or exit to the place that they don’t know about.”

another “Well, if they’ve spent any amount of time there, they’ll know ab obvious ones,” Legend noted. “Though there is one that my brother : me. Down in the basement, there is access to the cold rooms, and t rooms have outdoor access, but they’re a ways from the house.”

st don’t “I like it,” Riff said, “as long as they haven’t got it blocked.”

“We’ll find that out once we get there.” Once again, they parked trees, but this time in a completely different location. As they stop stared, Legend sent out a query on his senses, but he found nothing an nothing. He shrugged. “I’m not getting anything, are you?”

me, but uttered. “No, I’m not,” Riff replied, “but I suspect it’ll be a case of eve waiting for us to show up, ready to pounce.”

“Yep,” he muttered. “Let’s get this show on the road then.”

hey do. “Sure, why keep them waiting, right?”

Terk’s, rization And, with that, they quickly raced through the trees, heading tow back of the house. When they got within about one hundred yards fr main house, Legend pointed out an old mound off to the side with a p

door. “That goes into the root cellar and what used to be the old cold he muttered. “From there, it has kind of a tiled accessway into the m. of the house.”

seems to They snuck up to it, with no sign of anybody around or even being
see them. Then they slipped into the old entrance, closing the door
they all them. They moved through the tunnel until they reached the house.
they got up to the kitchen, they froze, listening, but there was nothing.

 Riff looked over at him with an eyebrow raised, and Legend
shrugged, and they kept on going.

clocked As Legend and Riff headed upstairs, Legend heard voices, pe
coming from the office. That only made sense, as that was where Legend
ll open, taken everything from. He shouldered the pack that he had, leaving the
in the outer pocket, though he'd stripped them clean. He'd removed the
of the money but left a little bit, in case they were willing to grab the
?" Riff run, but he didn't expect that to happen. All the rest of the informati
been left at the motel with Blair.

re went As soon as they hit the main hall, Riff melted into the shadow
Legend strolled confidently forward to the office. When he stepped
entrance two men looked at him expectantly. He studied them both and nod
guess that's to be expected."

out the "What's that?" the first one asked, as he pulled the cigar from his
showed "You didn't really expect your daddy to be here, did you?"

he cold "No, not anymore. At least if the news outlets are worth listening to

 "Well, the news reports are generally wrong, but, in this
unfortunately, they were correct. Your father was shot, right in the back

l in the Legend nodded. "Just the way he liked to do it."

ed and "That's what I heard too, but you never know. He could have been
d heard his death."

 "Honestly," the other man added, in a quiet tone, "we waited for the
rybody reason, but I did see him, and he's truly gone."

 "It wasn't unexpected," Legend replied, refusing to show any emotion
because these guys were looking for that. "Now, what kind of deal are
looking to make? This property belonged to Larry's mother, so it should
ard the his with no question."

rom the "It's also possible the government will seize it."

lywood "That's true, but it's equally possible that won't happen. It'll take
vents," time to sort through this mess."

ain part "Right," said the man with the cigar, "but you know what I want."

 "What's that?"

able to "I want what you took from the safe."
behind "What would that be?" Legend asked, staring at him. The second man remained silent. Legend had no idea who the second man was, but the first one was the property manager or the business manager who his father had just employed for years. "Which one of you is Richard?"

At that, both men laughed.

probably "It's a name we both use, and it really just means *boss* for us."
and had "Of course," Legend replied, nodding. "So, what'll it take to have the USB guys pull the contract on my brother?"

he bulk At that, an eyebrow went up on the smoker's face. "You heard about that and did you?"

ion had "Because your guys failed," Legend stated bluntly, "but I'm not interested in keeping Larry safe for the next ten years, while he grows up, and be an adult."

inside, "Ten years is a long time. I mean, if he even got a couple more years, it'd be a huge surprise. He's what, five?"

"No."

mouth. "What nine, ten?"

"He's ten," Legend murmured.

o." "But that could be all for him," the smoker stated, letting Legend's case contemplate that for a moment or two. "Well, we told you what we want." "Which is the contents of the safe?"

At that, Legend nodded. "So you want the money, not the USB keys, right?" "Faking that, the men eyed each other and then back at him.

"What keys?"

ie same "You know what keys."

"I'll take the keys," the second man stated. "Make them my payment."

omotion "What? So you can turn around and blackmail the same people?"

are you He shrugged. "Doesn't matter if I do or not. Those people made a decision when they got themselves into all that trouble in the first place," he stated, with a half laugh.

"What about the contract on my brother?"

a bit of "I can pull that," the first man replied, "as long as I get my money."

"What makes you think there was any substantial sum in that safe?"

"Well, there was."

"Sure there *was*, before he put his plans into place."

At that, the smoker frowned.

Somebody stepped up behind Legend, and he stiffened but didn't. The bag was pulled roughly from his shoulder and tossed toward the other men.

They immediately grabbed it, finding both the cash and the keys. The cash made them frown. "There should have been at least ten times as much."

"There was nothing even close to that." Legend laughed. "You probably know better than I do that my father always traveled with a lot of cash."

"Yeah, he did, didn't he?" He swore as he looked at the money. "That won't even get us out of the country."

"You don't need his money to get out of the country. Come on. You've been taking good care of yourselves all these years. You're just looking for a final payout."

At that, the other man looked at the smoker and laughed. "Jesus, almost like he knows you."

"What do you know?" the smoker asked, his voice turning silky.

"Not much. As you know perfectly well, my father didn't talk to me because he considered me useless to him."

"It's not that you were useless. He just didn't understand why you were so righteous," he spat, with a disgusted sound. "But when it comes to your brother, you're not quite so righteous, are you? You'll do all kinds of things to keep him alive. See? That's our best bargaining chip."

"Maybe, and that's *if* you actually have a bargaining chip," he mused. "which you don't."

"Wow, what makes you think that your brother is safe?"

"I wouldn't be here if he wasn't in a safe place. He is essentially safe. Knox, and you won't touch him there, but I don't want to sit there and watch him in a place like that until he's an adult. In addition, I'm his guardian, so his paperwork has already been taken care of to ensure that, if he dies, it comes to me, and, if I die, it all goes to charity."

The other guy stared at Legend in shock. "Jesus, he told me that you figured you were bluffing,"

"Not bluffing."

"Jesus, why charity?"

"To get you guys off our back," Legend stated, "and any charity is..."

me, which is another aspect of me that my father hated.”

to move. The other man nodded. “Yeah, I can see why. Talk about a waste of the two.” He glared at him and asked, “So what the hell are you even here for?”

“I want the contract rescinded on my brother,” Legend repeated.

“You don’t have much in the way of bargaining chips.” The other man pointed at the little bit of stuff on the desk.

“That’s not true. You’ve got the bargaining chips right there.”

“But we have them. Remember that part. We actually have them in our hands, so you don’t. Therefore, if you don’t have anything else to offer, you really don’t give a shit. So I can pop you right now, and your little empire will have nobody.”

“He’s got a team of people who will look after him,” Legend continued. “His life is fine, but we don’t want to sit here and deal with you guys constantly.”

“You’ve already taken out several of my men.”

“No, not your men, my father’s men. Men willing to turn for a few bucks.”

“They didn’t turn at all,” the one man stated angrily. “However, we were looking for something to call their own, when their wages were no longer getting paid.”

“They’ve been well paid for a long time, just as you guys have,” Legend declared. “I know my father would have taken you out if he thought you were stealing from him, but I’m pretty sure guys like you steal anyway.” The one guy laughed. “No, that’s true, and we got a lot of work needed over the years. I could probably live just fine, but you know?”

“I see all this sitting around here, and it’s such a big parcel of money that I can’t help but want to get your hands on it.”

“But you can’t now.” Legend smiled. “As I said, unless the government decides to seize it, even this house has been signed and sealed. So, it all becomes of it will all be up to Larry and what he wants to do with it.”

“Larry?” he repeated. “God, that kid is even worse than you are. I don’t know, but I have any idea how much your father hated the fact that his kids were squeaky-clean type? He hated the fact that you were *special*, as he called it. He had no idea what the fuck that specialty is. You look pretty ordinary.”

As far as he was concerned, power was something that needed to be used. “Fine by me.” “And that’s what got him shot in the back,” Legend noted, with a

“So, it’s not as if it did him any good to have that attitude either. I fucking understood my father just fine, but that didn’t mean I liked his politics for?” I’m here for is to discuss the contract you put out on a little kid.”

“You can buy it out,” the smoker offered, “just one-quarter of a smokerdollars for Larry.”

“That’s nice,” Legend replied. “Do you think I have that kind of money?”

“You do because you look after the kid now,” he stated, with a flourish here in “So, the answer to that question is obviously yes. You pay that, I offer, I cancel the hit.”

Legend eyed him for a long moment, knowing that, even if he did there would never be an end to this. He rubbed the back of his neck directed. immediately guns appeared in both men’s hands. “Wow, look at you guys much trust.”

“No honor among thieves,” the two men said at once.

“We’ve been working with your father for decades to overthrow a few government and to take care of business,” the smoker began. “Absolutely nothing you can say or do will change how we feel about this. You work, they control a ton of money, and we need a ton of money to reestablish ourselves no again.” They looked at each other, smirks on their faces.

“Is that what you’ll do, just set up a whole new war? Another couple of Legendsoldiers to come back after the same government?”

“Well, if not this one, another one. It’s amazing how many people pay to have you kick down their government and to put a better one in its place.” He shrugged. “It’s just what we do.”

“Just not well. I mean, you lost this one, so what makes you think anybody’ll pay you to win the next one?”

“Because they won’t know the difference, because, just like your government we can feed them lies.”

“So did he actually do this out of political beliefs or because he was paid?”

“He did it because he believed in it. As for me, I did it because I was being paid.” The smoker gave Legend another half smile. “So you should lead it. I don’t have the political aspirations that your father did. We were just hired to me for the ride because it’s fun.”

And that, of course, made them the worst kind of mercenaries because the only language they actually understood was money. “So, power and

Look. I that's it, *huh*? And the ability to kill is what? A nice added bonus?"

ics. All "It took a while to get to that point, but you're right. It is kind of a bonus when you can take out your opponents without any qualms," the smoker acknowledged. "I mean, the world would be a lot easier to live in if people were honest about the shit they did and if they knew they would get shot for lying, cheating, and stealing. So what the hell? You wouldn't smile, but the fact of the matter is, everybody does it, yet nobody has to pay for it and we're not including you guys?"

He shrugged. "Yeah, including us, but we don't count because we don't have the power behind these wars."

ck, and "Interesting," Legend muttered. "So, what do you want to do about that situation?"

"Well, you'll arrange for our money. We'll give you a couple days in a nice influx of cash. I think one-quarter of a million should do for you. You can pull back the contract, and then we'll talk about what else we might need. Absolutely noted, with a flat smile.

will now "Meaning that you have no intention of ever stopping to extort yourselves from me."

"Why would we? You have a massive fortune at your fingertips, and we have a fortune that we feel fully justified in having a part of because we're getting it."

ple will "So you say, but this house in particular belonged to Larry's mother. It's in the family's ancestral home."

"Yeah, and Larry might very well want it, considering that we don't think Larry's mother because your dad was getting a little too fed up with her. She became a problem, so to speak, so we had to take her out. We cleaned up her father's messes for him." The smoker shrugged. "As I mentioned before, killing becomes easier and easier all the time."

is being Legend stiffened at that. "I'll be sure to tell him," he replied, almost in a murderous tone. "At some point in time, he'll need to know the reason I was his father's actions in that regard."

ee? We "Of course," the smoker agreed, "and then there's you. If you don't do it along with us, we have leverage to make sure you behave too, you've got a rude awakening in store."

use the At that, he asked, "What kind of leverage would that be?"

money, "Well, we have a team already at the motel, picking up your girl."

he shared, with a laugh. “So, don’t think that you’ll be getting off so
f a nice either. We’ll hang on to her, until we get that first one-quarter milli
is,” the we’ll talk after that.”

Such a slimy smile had been added to his tone that Legend kn
ould get would have to end tonight, one way or another, and he knew exactly
’t do it, way he would vote. It may not make him any better than his father,
or it.” least, Legend was doing it to save a life.

At the look on Legend’s face, the others laughed. “We thought you
e’re the feel that way,” the smoker stated. “But you know? You just won’t ha
hope of getting to her in time,” he added, with the most sinister smile
in this had ever seen. “Even if you manage to find a way to kill us, saving
won’t happen because, ... well, the team was already dispatched
to pull phone call earlier. I’m just waiting for them to call and to tell me that
or us taken care of.” He looked down at the phone, then back at Lege
ed,” he smiled. “So, what’ll it be?” he asked. “Keep her alive or not? Becau
know, I’ll give them one order when they phone me, and it’ll be on yo
money either way.”

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friend,”

he shared, with a laugh. “So, don’t think that you’ll be getting off scot-free either. We’ll hang on to her, until we get that first one-quarter million, and we’ll talk after that.”

Such a slimy smile had been added to his tone that Legend knew this would have to end tonight, one way or another, and he knew exactly which way he would vote. It may not make him any better than his father, but, at least, Legend was doing it to save a life.

At the look on Legend’s face, the others laughed. “We thought you would feel that way,” the smoker stated. “But you know? You just won’t have any hope of getting to her in time,” he added, with the most sinister smile Legend had ever seen. “Even if you manage to find a way to kill us, saving her still won’t happen because, ... well, the team was already dispatched with a phone call earlier. I’m just waiting for them to call and to tell me that it’s all taken care of.” He looked down at the phone, then back at Legend and smiled. “So, what’ll it be?” he asked. “Keep her alive or not? Because, you know, I’ll give them one order when they phone me, and it’ll be on your head either way.”

CHAPTER 14

BLAIR PACED THE motel room, not even sure what she was supposed to do but the longer Legend and Riff were gone, the more agitated she got. Immediately, when the guys had pulled out of the motel's parking lot, a sense of wrongness filled her, the sense of something going horribly wrong. The beat-up getaway vehicle Legend and she had arrived here in was still in the keys in her pocket.

A part of her yelled that she needed to jump into that sucker and go.

Finally, with her instincts still screaming at her, she grabbed all that she could, and it took her two trips to load the vehicle. By the time she came back for one last look around the motel room, she heard voices from outside, and she heard the phrase *catch that bitch*. Immediately she slipped out the window on the far side and went down the fire escape. She raced around to the front and drove off, careful to drive at a slow and steady pace, not wanting anybody to take an interest in her.

As soon as she was out of the parking lot, she gunned it—as much as she could in this old heap—heading back toward the ancestral home. There was absolutely no reason for her to go there, except for the fact that trouble was there. But that also meant that trouble was there as well. Suddenly she wondered what she was doing. What the hell was she doing driving toward trouble, when she should be driving away from it?

At that thought, Terkel's voice slammed into her head. *Exactly, you need to come here.*

"I can't. They're in trouble." When Terk hesitated, she glommed on to that. "You know it. You know they're in trouble."

I do know they're in trouble, but having you there won't make it any easier for them.

"Maybe not easier but surely I can do something."

I've got a large team of militia on the way but not for a little bit yet.

“So then what? We need somebody to create a distraction?” she curiously.

Something like that, but I've already got Riff on it. If you get into t chances are you'll just get hurt.

“Says you,” she muttered.

He laughed. *Says me, and, honest to God, why is it that, ever sir l to do, gone private, I have more people wanting to argue with me instead Almost doing what I ask?*

a sense “Because we’re not used to being part of a team like this, where supposed to follow orders when they’re wrong.”

ig. The outside, *Are my orders wrong?* he asked.

), she knew. “Yes, at this point in time they are.” She didn’t know how she kn she knew. “Get that team there as fast as you can.” And, with that, she he bags him out of her head.

me she It didn’t take anywhere near as long as she thought it would to g coming to the mansion, and, knowing that boldness was about the only opt ely she had, she pulled right up to the front door, got out, and slammed the c e, then hard, yet hid the bags underneath one of the other vehicles, then stroc l steady the front door. She opened the door and called out, “Well, I’m here.”

First came silence and then a scurry of activity, as everybody race 1 as she front hallway.

et there She walked inside, took one look at Legend, then smiled. “The Legend are,” she said, and, walking over, she reached up and kissed him hard nly she was stiff, and anger radiated from him. She patted him gently.

toward Then she turned, faced the other two men, and greeted them. “/ here we go, Richard and Garry,” she noted, with a nod. “The two m ou need father trusted the most.”

At that, the pair looked at her, not at all sure just what the heck wa d on to on.

She nodded. “Yeah, you sent some of your friends to the motel : it any she began. “I decided I didn’t want to talk with them. If you want to me, then you talk to me personally,” she declared, glaring at the me only thing you guys understand is power and money.”

of time Legend jerked at that, almost as if it were a phrase he knew we turned, looked up at him, then smiled and asked, “Hey, are you okay?”

“I’m fine. You sure don’t follow orders, do you?”

She shrugged. “No, not really, not when everything is screaming and getting the hell out.” He nodded at that, then turned and looked at the other men. “So, now that you don’t have her as a hostage, new deal,” Legend said. “You guys rescind the order on Larry’s life, and I won’t kill you who stand.” At that, they looked at the guns in their hands and then at him. “I’ve any weapons. He stood there, his hands on his hips, completely nonchalant as if he didn’t care.”

“You don’t even have a weapon,” Richard, the cigar smoker, pointed out. She frowned at that because he did have two weapons; they’d taken them out of the safe, but she didn’t mention that. “He doesn’t need a weapon,” she stated. “He was just worried earlier about whether I’d been taken or not.” The guys looked at each other, then back at her. “You guys don’t expect normal.”

“No, we sure don’t,” she agreed cheerfully. “Now, the question is, do you do your thirty-five years in prison cheerfully, or would you rather take a bullet?” She had said it so abruptly that they looked at her and blinked. “What are you talking about?” Richard cried out.

“It’s like this. We won’t tolerate that contract on Larry,” she stated. “If you don’t pull it, we’ll just take you down. Afterward we’ll put out a bulletin, saying that you’ve been captured by the military and that you’re talking, revealing your known associates in exchange for a lighter sentence.” At that, Garry blew up furiously. “You know what would happen, but then, don’t you?”

“Yep, I sure do,” Blair confirmed. “Do you think I give a shit?” Silence settled over the room. At that, Richard pointed the gun at her. “We were doing just fine before you came along.”

“That’s why you killed Larry’s mother too, wasn’t it? It’s not that Kartal wanted her dead, but *you* wanted her dead because she was working to get him to be a better person and to let go of all this. You did it, her interference, so you’re the one who shot her. You probably made Kartal think that it was his idea, but it was you all along.”

Richard stared at her, ... fury making his face work. “How the hell do you know that?” he roared.

“It’s easy,” she declared, “and I know all kinds of other shit too. I know that you have no plans of sharing your largesse with your partner. You’re planning on knocking off Garry before this day is done.”

Richard stared at her in shock, while Garry glared at Richard. “Garry asked his partner.

Knowing she had them on their heels, distracted, even divided, you continued. “After all, your men are being hunted now. It was only a matter of time before you would have to whittle down the numbers, and this is a good way to do it. Plus you don’t even need the money from Larry because you’ve been ripping off his father for decades. All a part of the game, right? It was okay with it to a degree, as long as you kept it to a reasonable amount. But, after you killed Larry’s mother, things didn’t go quite so easily for you, and Mr. Kartal was getting a little more worried. He even set up a private little revenge, just in case.”

“What’s that?” Richard asked nervously.

She smiled. “I guess you’ll have to wait and see.”

He stared at her uneasily and then looked at the exit.

“Yeah,” Blair taunted, “you should be looking for the damn exit.”

Without warning, he raised his gun and fired a bullet at her.

Only she was no longer there; she stood in front of Legend, just off to the side. “Yeah, that worked out well, didn’t it?” she asked in a news-mocking tone.

He glared at her. “What the hell,” he cried out. He fired again and again, but, each time, he missed. He stared down at the gun, then at Legend, who just stood there, his hands on his hips. His voice was clearly in shock, Richard asked, “What are you people?”

She smiled. “We’re *special*,” she replied in a mocking tone, a word she had used to describe Larry. “You just have no idea how *very special* we are.” She walked up to Richard but looked over at his partner. “What Mr. ready to die tonight?” she asked in a conversational voice. “Honesty was the plan.”

Garry shook his head. “No, hell no, I want out of here. In fact, I’m prepared to leave right now and never come back.”

“Good choice,” she confirmed. “Go out the front door, don’t stop, go straight down the driveway, and don’t take a vehicle with you.”

With that, he booked it for the front door and never slowed down.

She sent Terkel a message about his flight path. Then she turned to Richard. “Put out the call to rescind the order,” she ordered.

He shook his head. “You can’t make me, even if I don’t know w

What?”hell you did to his gun.”

“Well, if it’s the one left in the safe, that’s easy. We fixed it before
ed, shehere earlier.” She looked over at Legend and smiled. “You think I did
atter of you do that, *huh?*”

is was a Legend sighed. “You could let a man have his moment, you know?
because She laughed. “Not Richard, he doesn’t get any more moments. If
and heelse he should go down for the murder of Larry’s mother. However,
mount.of the matter is, nobody will even want a trial. They would rather put
etweenin his head and help him disappear, along with the rest of this insur
his ownnightmare,” she shared, with great delight.

“Well, you won’t be the one to do it,” Richard stated, his face twist
don’t even need a gun to take you guys down.” As he spoke, he pulled
from a sheath in his boot.

She looked at him and shrugged. “That might cause some dama
between the two of us, I think we can do a whole lot more.”

All of a sudden came sounds of vehicles coming up the driveway
slightlyRichard twisted suddenly, she nodded. “Yep, that is the sound
ed in a window of opportunity ... closing.”

He turned to look at her, scowling.

d again “That’s the military here to pick you up,” she stated, with a smile.
over ata wire is about to go out, letting everybody know that you’re talking n
hisper,the military and helping them out for a lighter sentence. You won’t g
and we’ll be certain to help out all we can to ensure you go away for
ord thattime. That’s under the unlikely scenario that you live to go to priso
cial webecause somebody will cheerfully put a knife in your back between n
ere youwhat, Sunday, you think?” She faced Legend for a moment, then look
ly, thatat Richard. “Do you think you’ll live that long?”

Since Sunday was a couple days away, she didn’t think Richard
ct, I’m even make it that far.

“No, I don’t think he’s got a snowball’s chance of making it to Sa
p, headlet alone Sunday,” Legend shared, his arms coming around her she
pulling her back against him, his fingers squeezing her gently.

“No, I don’t think so either,” she agreed.

med to Just then the doors opened, and teams of military raced in. She
out Richard. “He’s the one you want, gentlemen. He’s the one beh
/hat theinsurrection, the coup, and he has murdered various people all along t

We can hand over plenty of very interesting paperwork and USBs to help we left nail him for it.”

“What paperwork?” Richard asked, turning to look at her.

“Well, one of the things we found in the safe was an insurance policy” Larry’s father had written against you. It’s a list of all the people that nothing took out, some of it for him, but it doesn’t really matter who it was for the fact it was you who pulled the trigger,” she explained. Then she pulled a bulletproof USB key that hadn’t gone into the bag and handed it to the correction commander, who was staring at her. “You’ll find the names and dates here,” she said.

He took it and smiled, then turned and looked at Richard. “Sorry about the knife you and I need to have a talk.”

“If you want to talk to him, you better do it fast, before his cronies get out. Don’t forget to make sure everybody knows he’s singing like a bird.”

“Absolutely, and that should keep as much of this revolution down as possible. When can?” Then he ordered Richard to be taken outside.

At that, the commander turned and looked at her. “I have never seen you somewhere before, haven’t I?”

She nodded. “You have, indeed, but it’s been a few years.”

“Now, He pondered that as he headed toward the front door. Then he turned to her and said, “It was about a little boy who was deathly ill, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, it was.”

He nodded. “As I recall, you and somebody else did an awful lot of work to keep him alive.”

“Keeping him alive has always been our priority, and that’s why he’s still here today,” she explained. “He’s just a little boy.”

He nodded. “Just make sure he doesn’t turn out like his father.”

“Not an issue,” she declared. “That’s the last thing he would ever be.”

At that, the commander raised a hand. “Good. Make sure of it.” Arriving Saturday, that, he was gone.

Blair turned and there was Riff, standing in the shadows. “You look like you’re bored,” she noted.

He shrugged. “It took a fair bit to actually direct them right here. I pointed out the fact that I had to keep your energy up the whole time to avoid those line bullets.”

elp you “Thank you for that,” she said, with a big grin. “You really consider working with Terkel’s team full-time.”

“Why, so I can deal with more crazies like you?”

policy “Absolutely,” she agreed, with a broad smile. “You do know some hat you doctor is hassling Terk too, right? About you?”

r, since He stared at her, then groaned. “Of course she is.”

out the “You *will* find the answers regarding your fiancée’s murder, but military need to walk away from it at some point.”

s are all “*When* I get answers?” he asked, his gaze flying to her. “What even know about it?”

ids like “I don’t know a whole lot,” she admitted, “but I do know that the answer, and it’s fairly close, and an awful lot of people want you to find you can get back to the land of the living.”

rd.” He nodded slowly, his gaze penetrating her. “Anybody in particula

n as we “Perhaps,” she said, with a smile, as he stared off in the distance know perfectly well that’s where you belong, and it’s only guilt et you sending you in this other direction.” He stiffened, then glared at h shrugged. “Yeah, I do know I have a habit of speaking when peopl want me to. Don’t worry,” she added, with a wave of her hand.

red and “Will everybody at Terkel’s place be like you?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been there yet,” she said, “but I’m hoping so.” There was an almost wistful tone to her voice. “It feels li to keep been alone for a very long time.”

At that, Legend pulled her back until she leaned against his che y we’re course this big galoot behind me,” she muttered, “is not so differer you. He’s had his own demons to deal with, so he’s ignored me too.”

At that, Riff laughed. “Well, I sure as hell hope you start tormenti e.” and leave me the hell alone,” he noted in disgust.

id, with “I plan to, but you can bet that friend of yours, the doctor, is call loud and clear for help,” Blair told him, “and when she starts sending almost—”

“She’s a megaphone, I know,” Riff replied, with a pained expre,” he “but I can’t get her to stop.”

ention “That’s because you’re not listening. Stopping is one thing. Liste e damn another.”

He snorted. “I’ll see you guys back in Cambridge.” And, with t

should have disappeared into the shadows.

She turned, twisting into Legend's arms.

female



you do LEGEND LOOKED DOWN at her and shook his head. "What the hell are you doing here?"

do you She laughed. "I fully intended to follow your instructions, holy God." Then she explained what happened.

re is an He nodded. "Well, I can't really fault that because, when your instructor says you need to make a move, you need to make a move." He pulled her into his arms and just held her close. "Now what?"

r?" "Now, I suggest we grab some real food, some shut-eye, and head back to Cambridge. I'm looking forward to seeing Larry again."

er. "You Legend chuckled. "Yeah, that's a good point, and we at least need to let them know we're okay."

er. She "No, we don't," she said. "Terkel knows, and he'll pass on the message." Legend sighed. "It'll be very strange to get used to this many people knowing about everything we do."

kind of "It will. But it'll also be strange to know that you actually have someone who cares whether you come home or not. But you can handle it. Like I've said, faith."

st. "Of He looked down at her, his grin wry as he asked, "There's really nothing for me, is there?"

it from "Not one hope in hell," she said, smiling sweetly.

ing him He sighed. "What if I don't want it?"

She stopped, looked up at him. "Do you *not* want it?"

ing out Just enough challenge filled her tone that he tapped her nose. "Of course I want it. I just never believed I could have it."

signals "But that's the thing," she murmured, "because you can. You really can." "Promise?"

ression, "Absolutely, and, if we weren't here, I would prove it to you."

ning is "Oh, so you'll prove it to me, will you?" he challenged her, his eyes sparkling with interest.

that, he "We could go to my old bedroom here and make a moment of it now."

“God no, anyplace but here.”

“Good point,” she agreed, “so back to the motel it is, but this time picking up food on the way.”

“I presume you’re hungry,” he said, with a sigh.

“I think I’m always hungry, but particularly when I’m burning energy.”

As they walked back outside, toward the vehicle, he turned to her. “You even you really have something to do with those bullets?”

“Yeah, I sure did,” she admitted. “I can shift air. I just can’t stop from firing.”

“So, you were taking a chance,” he noted, stopping and looking back. “Those bullets still could have hit you.”

“Sure, but they could also have hit you, and I wouldn’t let that happen.”

He gave a shout of laughter, wrapped an arm around her, and said, “I would say, *Let’s go home*, but I’m not sure where home is. So, grab the keys and go back to the motel. Tomorrow is a whole new day.”

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CHAPTER 15

FOR ALL THE effort of getting into the motel, by the time Blair and tumbled into their motel room, laughing and giggling like kids, with a takeout in their arms, the only thought Blair had in her mind was Legend.

He wrapped his arms around her and whispered against her ear, first or ...?”

She chuckled, already lifting his T-shirt to slide her hands under, feeling the smooth expanse of his bare chest. “You can eat,” she murmured. “I’ll feast on something else.”

He burst out laughing and quickly shucked his clothes, only stopping when she placed her hands on his boxers and slowly lowered them. He sucked in his breath, as her hands found him. He whispered, “wearing way too many clothes.”

“Not for long,” she replied quietly, as she slowly slipped his boxers the way down to his ankles, helping him to step out of them, where he feasted on the proud manhood in front of her. She quickly slid her hands to the back of his thighs and around the inside, stroking and soothing muscles, while watching his erection twitch with each inhaled breath got closer and closer to the area he really wanted her to touch.

Slowly she slid her hand over the top of his firm erection, grasping gently in one hand, sliding her hand down and back up, as her other kept exploring. He stood, his stance wide apart, breathing heavily.

“Good Christ, at this rate, it’ll be over before it’s begun.”

She gave him a cheeky look. “Then we’ll just have to do it again. You’re a teacher, you know, and practice is part of an everyday schedule.”

His eyes opened wide, and he looked at her for a moment blankly, but he started to chuckle and, within seconds, had her picked up and tossed through the air, where he tossed her onto the bed. “Yeah, I’m all

lessons you think you want to teach me, and believe me, I'll be attentive pupil," he replied, as he came down on top of her.

"In that case, you really need to start with some basics. You have your clothes on, and I've got way too many, so this just won't work." He wrinkled his eyebrows, and, with an example of his deftness, she was suddenly stripped down to the buff. She shrieked with laughter. "Oh my, apparently lessons will be required after all."

"Just the ones that are fun," he noted, as he lowered his head and draped his heavily muscled body atop her frame, giving her every chance to pull back, but she wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer. "Food."

"I waited a long time for you to finally make your way back home underneath," she murmured.

He nuzzled her nose gently and nodded. "I was always home, but I couldn't quite get my mind wrapped around how it was supposed to work."

"That's because you let that magnificent brain of yours interfere, but there are times when you're just supposed to let things happen."

He smiled, gently kissed her once and then twice, before she protested. "Now let's do it properly," she ordered.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, and, with a twinkle in his eyes, he lowered his head and kissed her deeply, their tongues warring in remembrance of times gone by.

She sighed against his lips and whispered, "Much better." She wrapped her legs around his hips, pulling him even closer. "I didn't think we would ever get here," she whispered.

"Well, we are now, so we can forget about all that time in between." She nodded and held him tight, then slowly slid her hands down his buttocks and dug in her nails. He yelped gently, and she laughed. "Thank you, in case you think you would spend all of our time here socializing." "I am a simple man," he murmured.

"Never with you," he noted. "As I recall, you are all about getting to the point."

"Oh, I like to take my time too," she added, "but not after it's taken this long to get back here again."

"Oh, I can agree with that," he replied, his voice thickening with passion. He used his knees to spread her thighs wide and settled between them.

a very However, instead of entering her, as she thought he would, he dropped his head and took his time, as he made a pathway down her breasts, first one and then the other, before slowly slipping down farther and farther.

Suddenly He spent several moments at the smooth muscles along her abdomen, then at her hips, her belly, his fingers going all the way down to her thighs and under her feet. She gasped and giggled, as he slid up the inside of her legs. He smiled, but, just as she relaxed, he dropped his mouth against her neck, between her lips and gently suckled. She shuddered, coming apart in his arms, an orgasm striking her so fast and hard that she wasn't even ready for it.

When it came again and then again, she was a bundle of jelly, quivering in his arms, before he finally made his way up and positioned himself at the entrance to her. He looked down at her. "Remember."

I just As he slowly slid deep inside, she still quivered around him, but she managed to lift her thighs, wrapped them tightly around him, hook her legs behind his hips, and whispered, "Maybe not. I think you'll have a better time than that."

And, with that, he gave a shout of laughter and drove all the way down.

After that first plunge, he was a piston, driving out of control, for his need had quickly overtaken him.

She seemed just along for the ride, which was totally fine with her because she was still shuddering from the aftermath of everything that had already happened. And just as he deposited his seed deep within her, his orgasm left her quivering and mindless, as he slowly collapsed beside her.

She whispered, when she finally could, "I don't remember any of that."

"I don't either," he said, holding her close. "I suggest we try it again."

"Later," she whispered, "at least two minutes later."

His warm breath stroked along her neck as he held her close, the tight grip of his lips making her smile as he whispered, "That's fine. We do have a little time after all."

"I'm glad to hear that," she whispered. "It seems like we waited a long time for this."

"Maybe," he muttered. "I was just stubborn, thinking that I didn't want to interfere in Larry's world. I couldn't do that to him, and, if you and I had a relationship that didn't work out? Well, ... it would affect him and me in a good way. So I walked away and ignored you."

slowly “I get that too, although picking a fight whenever you were around to hermy way of dealing with that stony wall of silence,” she noted. “Her and Larry will always be there with us, not between us, and that’s the important thing to remember.”

then and He smiled and leaned over. “Are you okay to head to Terkel’s place to get confirmation that they have a set of rooms for us?”

er arch. She stopped and looked up at him. “For us?”

plump His lips twitched. “Yeah, apparently for us. They already knew, and this is something we’ll have to get used to. They’re apparently very powerful energy workers.”

livering “Meaning, they’re also psychics too, I presume,” she said hesitantly. f at the He nodded. “Yes, exactly.”

She looked up at him and smiled. “I guess we won’t hide anything from each other either, will we?”

ing her “Well, we might hide each other from each other,” he noted, with a smile. e to do “but definitely not from them.”

“Got it,” she said, and then she smiled. “It’s all good, and, yes, I can’t wait to go home because they have abilities that we can only dream about, and we need to learn.”

“Do we?” he asked, as he gazed down at her. “We would have to live our private life if we didn’t go there.”

hat had “I know, but I think both you and I spent a long time on the outside without having our own family life. So maybe it’s time for us to try being in our own family, where we aren’t always alone.”

hat.” “It could get crowded,” he warned.

in.” “It could, indeed,” she agreed, with a smile. “And a part of me is already looking forward to it, not to mention I think, for Larry, it will be awesome.”

lt of his “No, I totally agree with you there,” Legend said. “For the first time, Larry will have a stable family, maybe way more family than he ever expected.” Legend laughed. “It won’t be the kind of place where he’ll forever isolate himself.”

“No, sure won’t,” she agreed, “but I think it will be good for all of us.” “Well, in that case, we’ll head over there tomorrow.”

I had a She shook her head. “No, how about the day after?” she asked, with a smile. not in her arms around him. “You can tell them that we’ll be busy tomorrow.”

“Busy doing what?” he asked, waggling his eyebrows.

nd was “Exactly,” she murmured. “Anything and everything we want. W
oever,them the day after.” And, with that, she pulled him down agai
importantmurmured, “I promise to keep you busy, and you definitely won’t get l
As he lowered his head, he whispered, “Never with you in my
e? I’vesweetheart, never with you.” And he sealed his words with a kiss.

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“Exactly,” she murmured. “Anything and everything we want. We’ll see them the day after.” And, with that, she pulled him down again, and murmured, “I promise to keep you busy, and you definitely won’t get bored.”

As he lowered his head, he whispered, “Never with you in my arms, sweetheart, never with you.” And he sealed his words with a kiss.

EPILOGUE

AS LEGEND AND Blair drove up to Guardian headquarters, she star gasped. “Oh my God, it really is a castle, isn’t it?”

Legend laughed. “Not only a castle, it’s a massive castle.” He somewhat excited himself. “They’re still trying to work their way through the logistics of updating it.”

She frowned at him and asked, “It does have indoor plumbing right?”

He grinned. “It does, indeed, have indoor plumbing. In fact, I and the bathrooms have been massively updated and a few other things well. ... So, some tolerance and patience will be required, but that works both ways. We’ll need to make a ton of adjustments, and so will they.”

She nodded, as she got out. “It’s so huge.”

“It is, and they own acres and acres here, so lots of ground to explore. You can take Larry out for walks and all kinds of adventures. Legend grabbed his bags, and she grabbed hers, and they started for the front door.

Before they ever had a chance to reach for it, Larry came barreling with all the exuberance a ten-year-old could manage. He threw himself into her arms and then into Legend’s. “There you are,” he screamed.

She laughed, the three of them in a three-way hug, as she kissed Legend on the cheek. “Sounds like you’re having a blast.”

“Oh my gosh, it’s amazing. Can we stay here? Can we stay?”

“Well, I’m not positive about that, but we’ll see.”

He looked up at her beseechingly. “Please, there’s so much I can do. You have no idea.”

“Yeah, that’s just because you know that Clary is here along with Calum.”

“Well, that too,” he agreed, with a big grin. He threw his arms around her neck and hugged her close. “I’m really happy that you guys are together. It’ll be almost like a real family.”

“It is a real family,” she stated. “No matter what it seemed like this is the real deal.”

He looked from one to the other and got choked up. “You promise?”

“I promise,” Legend vowed, wrapping an arm around her shoulder then around Larry’s. “Now, shall we go in and talk to the rest of the team?”

“Yeah, you don’t even know who’s all here,” Larry added, “and you won’t believe all the baby bumps.” He looked at her and asked, “Have you got a baby in there yet?”

She flushed. “No, I hope not,” she replied, embarrassed.

“Well, I wouldn’t give it very long,” Larry declared, “because you’ll have to work if you stay here.”

“Why is that?”

As they walked inside behind him, they saw several of the newcomers coming out of the kitchen with plates of food, only to stop and look at the newcomers. Blair saw the baby bumps, then she looked back at Larry. “What the hell?” she whispered.

“I have no idea,” he muttered. He turned to Terkel, and then to Brody. “Funny how nobody mentioned that aspect,” he said to Brody.

Brody laughed. “Well, we’re trying to work on that aspect,” he said. “so we’ll give you some pointers now that you’re here. However, for a moment, you’re the only couple who isn’t in the family way.” Terkel stopped, chuckled, and asked, “Or are you?”

She glared at him. “I better not be.”

He shrugged. “We all thought we weren’t either, but it’s apparently a hazard of this kind of energy.”

“Okay, that’s definitely a little disconcerting.” Blair walked further and was introduced to the group of people here. Some she knew of and some she didn’t, but the first one to greet her was Clary.

Clary walked over, gave her a gentle hug, and said, “So glad to have you here. Larry has been an absolute treat to have around.”

At that, Blair laughed. “And he tells me there’s so much he can still do that he definitely needs to stay.”

“Well, it’s a good thing you’re staying then, isn’t it?” Clary teased.

Blair smiled. “Well, at least for a while.”

“Nope, no *at least for a while* nonsense,” Terkel replied, as he addressed her with one quick clean look and nodded. “You’ll do just fine.”

before, She stared at him. "And you are?"

He grinned. "Terkel, grand master of this insane household."

"?" She nodded. "Nice to meet you. I'm glad to know that you're a person and not just a voice in my head."

"am?" At that, everybody burst out laughing.

nd you "Yeah," Terk confirmed. "I'm definitely a voice in your head. I am a real person, and we will all, at one time or another, be voices in your head."

Another woman walked up and added, "One of the first things we've discussed with you is how to get some privacy and peace and quiet around this place. Well, meantime, we have an apartment for you."

Terkel, getting to business right away, stated, "We also have another apartment, although this one is a little different."

women "Aren't they all?" somebody quipped. "I'm Gage, by the way," he said at the Legend and Blair. Gage sat down with a cup of coffee and asked Legend. "What's going on?"

"Bullard called. He has a woman who's apparently got some problems with her job stability, and, at the same time, he says that his wife is in trouble."

At that, another woman came up to Terk and wrapped her arms around him, saying, "In that case, you know what to do. We owe him ..."

At the Legend, Terkel nodded. "Yeah, I just have to come up with somebody to tell Bullard." Terk looked around at all the people gathered in the room.

"I'm not doing anything at the moment," said one man, leaning against the wall.

ently a At that, Blair turned and recognized Riff. "You seem to be now here everywhere," she said.

r inside He nodded, giving her a lazy smile. "Yeah, that's me." Riff looked at Terkel. "Bojan is already in Africa."

Terkel's gaze sharpened, and then he almost zoned out, right in front of them. Soon he nodded. "That would work perfectly," he said in a very low whisper.

ill learn "You want to contact Bojan, or will I?" Riff asked.

"It'll have to be me," Terkel said, "but you might want to contact Blair and tell him that I'll be calling."

"You think that'll make a bit of difference? He already knows."

ssessed "Yeah, he knows, but it might be easier if he knows that it's coming from you first."

At that, Riff laughed. "Okay, and what's the time frame on this (Bullard?"

1 actual "Well, how quickly can you get over there?"

"I can be there early in the morning, probably," Riff estimat glanced at Terkel and all the others. "Unless somebody else wants to g

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"Yeah, the psychic who's been warning Terkel," Gage confirmed.

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And, with that, Riff nodded. "I'll go grab my bag."

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“Well, how quickly can you get over there?”

“I can be there early in the morning, probably,” Riff estimated. He glanced at Terkel and all the others. “Unless somebody else wants to go.”

“No, this one’s all about you,” Terk noted.

“It won’t be all about me. It’ll be about Bojan,” Riff stated.

“And Lacy,” Terkel added.

At that, Riff’s gaze narrowed. “Lacy?”

“Yeah, the psychic who’s been warning Terkel,” Gage confirmed.

“The university student in med school in Africa who has been working with Leia,” Terk added.

Riff nodded. “*Lacy and Bojan.*”

“Perfect,” Terkel said. “Tell Bojan I want to talk with him and soon.”

And, with that, Riff nodded. “I’ll go grab my bag.”

This concludes Book 2 of Terk's Guardians: Legend.

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Terk's Guardians: Bojan (Book #3)



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Thank you for reading Legend: Terk's Guardians, Book 2! If you enjoyed the book, please take a moment and leave a short review [here](#).

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Dale Mayer

About the Author

Dale Mayer is a *USA Today* best-selling author, best known for her military romances, her Psychic Visions series, and her Lovely Lethal cozy series. Her contemporary romances are raw and full of passion (Broken But ... Mending, Hathaway House series). Her thrillers keep you guessing (Kate Morgan, By Death series), and her romances comedies will keep you giggling (*It's a Dog's Life*, a stand-alone novel in the Broken Protocols series, starring Charming Marvin, the cat).

Dale honors the stories that come to her—and some of them are the ones that break all the rules and cross multiple genres!

To go with her fiction, she also writes nonfiction in many different genres with books available on résumé writing, companion gardening, and the mortgage system. All her books are available in print and ebook formats.

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LEGEND: TERK'S GUARDIANS, BOOK 2

Beverly Dale Mayer

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