



STEALTH

REESE KNIGHTLEY
OPERATION JUSTICE FORCE BOOK FIVE

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Stealth (Operation Justice Force Book Five)

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Editing provided by Heidi Ryan of Amour the Line Editing

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Interior Design and Formatting provided by

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Pegasus and Phoenix are teams designed to help bring down the scum of the earth when law enforcement's hands are tied.

Please note—There is a large cast of characters in this book.
The Pegasus roster can be located at the back of the book.

[Click here.](#)



PROLOGUE

Dave - Former SecDef

“Solomon?”

A hacking cough came through the line. “Erebus has been compromised.”

“And Phoenix, Pegasus?” Dave snapped up out of his chair and stalked the length of his office with the phone clenched tightly in his hands. He reached the window but didn’t see the Paris skyline beyond his own reflection in the glass.

“Safe as far as I know.” The grimace and pain in Solomon’s voice came through the line loud and clear.

“Who was it?” Dave hissed, pushing down his rising anger.

“Malcolm and Theo. There’s something else. Theo went to Hunter.”

“Handle Malcolm and I’ll handle Theo and Hunter.”

With Hunter involved, there’d be Seven to deal with—not something he was looking forward to. Could things get any worse?

The line went dead and Dave pushed the cell phone into the inside pocket of his suit. Reaching his desk, he lifted the red phone and made the call. The old saying *with power came great responsibility* came to mind as he punched the button.

As the leader of several covert ops teams, he knew it was only a matter of time before one of the units became compromised.

Dave just never dreamed it would be Erebus.

“What’s wrong?”

Dave quickly explained the situation, relaying what Solomon had told him about Malcolm.

“As much as I hate to say this, but with Hunter involved, call Ace and get Pegasus on board. And activate Jaxon from Colorado. He’ll know how to handle Malcolm,” POTUS said.

“Yes, sir.”

“And you might think about bringing in Stone,” the man added.

“Maybe.” Dave clenched his teeth.

“What will you do about Solomon?”

“He’ll be neutralized,” Dave said.

The man grunted and hung up the phone. Striding to his desk, Dave sank down into the black leather chair.

Reaching for his cell phone, he called Logan Cobalt, the head of Cobalt Security.

“Dave?”

“Yeah, listen...is Jaxon available?”

“For you, yes,” Logan said.

“Thanks.”

Logan didn’t ask why and Dave didn’t say anything. What could he have said?

I need him to carry out a hit?

Not likely.



CHAPTER ONE

Seven

The pounding on the door would not fucking quit and the longer it went on, the more pissed off he became.

Why couldn't people just leave him the fuck alone? It wasn't like he was social anyway, so what was with his sudden popularity?

Bang, bang, bang.

“For fuck's sake!” he growled to the empty room and rolled stiffly over in the king-sized bed to flop onto his back. The ceiling fan in his bedroom circled slowly overhead, making shadows as it hit the morning light filtering through his window. Someday, he was going to buy fucking blackout curtains.

His head pounded and he snagged the ibuprofen from the bedside table and tossed three back with a chug of water from the glass he had sitting there. After his capture, his mobility was a bit fucked up at times and he got a headache every once in a while, but overall, he was recovering and that was all that mattered.

It took another moment before he felt able to sit up on the edge of the bed.

A motion at his bedroom door brought his head up and he grimaced.

“Someone's at the door,” Ice said, standing in a pair of boxer briefs, scratching the hair on his bare chest, with his shoulder-

length blond hair loose and a bit wild looking.

“Probably someone selling something,” Seven croaked.

“I don’t think so, they’ve been pounding for a while.”

“And you didn’t look out and see who it was?”

The former Navy Seal shook his head, cracked his neck, and disappeared down the hall.

Seven snorted after the man he’d served with. It had been one of life’s nicer moments to meet Ice again at a party a few years back. They’d quickly reconnected, and it had been easy to stay in touch since they’d discovered they both did mercenary-type work. Now more than ever, Seven needed Ice’s take on his current situation, hence the reason he’d asked Ice to meet up for drinks last night.

“What do you need?” Ice asked, eyeing him over the rim of an IPA.

“I’m starting to suspect that Lisa wasn’t taken and killed by a sex trafficking ring.”

“Okay,” Ice said slowly. “So, back off the sex trafficking and start on sex offenders?”

“Yeah, that’s what I’m doing.”

“Then what’s wrong?” Ice asked.

“I feel like I’m chasing my fucking tail.” Seven grimaced and took a swallow of beer. “I need a private investigator to start looking into people.”

Ice drained the bottle before placing it on the table. “I know of a few.”

“I was hoping you would.”

“I’ll make some calls.”

The bathroom door closed down the hall and Seven flopped back on his bed. He was beginning to think Lisa’s killer was someone she knew. The thought soured his gut and left a bitter taste in—

Bang, bang, bang.

Making a sound through his teeth, Seven rolled to his side and slapped the intercom on the wall near the bed that connected to a speaker on the front porch.

“I’m not buying anything,” he snarled.

“Shane?”

His baby brother’s trembling voice snapped him upright in bed.

“I’m coming.” Seven released the button and launched out of bed. Hopping on one foot and then the other to pull on his jeans, he ignored the stab of pain in his left leg. Snatching his phone off the nightstand, he tucked it into his front pocket before yanking at the zipper on his jeans. Ignoring the ache in his leg, he hurried down the long hallway to the living room. His bare feet sank into the thick cream-colored carpet as he stepped down into the room and skirted the messy bedding hanging half on and half off the couch where Ice had slept.

Reaching the entryway, he flipped the deadbolt and yanked the door open.

His seventeen-year-old brother stood on the front steps. Seven darted a look behind Joshua—for one or both of their deadbeat parents—but the stoop stood empty.

“Where’s Carla?” He closed a gentle hand around his brother’s arm and pulled him out of the cold and into the warm house. Even in Ventura County, California, February was chilly and Joshua was shivering.

Seven pulled him closer and rubbed his bare arms. That was when he really got a look at his brother. Dark hair fell into his scared blue eyes. He only wore a t-shirt, jeans, and...

“Where the hell are your shoes?” Seven frowned at his brother’s bare feet.

Joshua’s teeth chattered and Seven saved further questions. He turned his brother toward the couch and bundled him up in the bedding and blankets.

Crouching in front of Joshua, Seven caught his brother’s hands and rubbed at them, trying to bring warmth into the cold, trembling digits. Fury sent a charge of anger into his chest but he was careful to keep his face and eyes calm.

“Who spent the night?” Joshua pulled the blankets tighter when Seven released his hands.

“Ice.”

“Really?” Joshua looked around before he tucked his head into the blankets and let out a soft sigh.

When his brother’s shivers increased, Seven hurried to the fireplace and lit the wood. The dry kindling quickly caught fire and in a matter of moments, the fire crackled loudly. Stalking to the thermostat on the wall, he cranked it up to eighty just to knock out any lingering chill.

“Got any food?”

“Hang on,” Seven said and left the room. His wide kitchen was a mixture of marble countertops and stainless-steel appliances. Pulling a plate from the cupboard next to the stove, he placed it on the island-type bar before getting out the leftover pizza from the fridge.

Where the hell was Carla? And why had Joshua come clear across the city in bare fucking feet? How did Joshua get here if his mother didn’t bring him?

Most importantly, where the fuck was their good-for-nothing sperm donor? If that son of a bitch was out on a bender, Seven would make sure he regretted it. He’d already threatened to take Joshua from them if they didn’t clean up their act. Seven jammed four pieces of pizza in the microwave and stood staring as the glass dish spun.

He blamed his dad and stepmother for what happened to Lisa. If they had been watching his little sister, or hell, given her the attention she needed, Lisa wouldn’t have been taken.

And murdered.

He fisted the paper towel in his hand and when the microwave beeped, he pulled the plate out and headed back into the living room.

Ice was standing next to the living room window and threw him a quick frowning look when he entered.

Joshua had slipped sideways on the couch, his knees pulled up, and burrowed in Ice’s blankets. The boy’s eyes were closed—

exhaustion etched his young face.

“Joshua.”

“Yeah.” His brother jerked upright with a scared look in his eyes.

“Hey,” Seven soothed; hurrying to the couch, he sat down and brushed the hair from Joshua’s face.

“Who the fuck hit you?” Ice snapped.

Seven swept his eyes over Joshua’s face and that was when he saw the bruise on his brother’s cheekbone. The mark ran upward from his cheek and ended at his temple.

“What happened?”

Joshua pulled away and took the plate. Ignoring them both, his brother snatched up the pizza and wolfed it down like a starved animal.

Ice met his eyes over Joshua’s head. His friend’s nostrils flared and Ice lifted both hands and mimicked squeezing someone’s neck.

Seven agreed, but at the moment, Joshua needed a calming influence and as much as Seven liked Ice, his friend was not the calm sort.

Seven leaned his elbows on his knees and gazed at the thick carpet beneath his bare feet.

“How did you get the bruise?”

Nothing but silence followed his question. Joshua continued to eat with ravenous hunger and Seven had to wonder how long it had been since the boy had last eaten.

The doorbell rang and he squinted at Joshua.

“Did someone follow you here?”

“Um...no.” Joshua frowned, looking scared.

“Just stay here.” Seven stood and strode to the side table near the door and pulled out the Glock he kept stored in the drawer.

Ice stalked to the couch where Joshua sat and plucked a .41 Magnum from between the cushions.

“Really?” Seven hissed at Ice, eyeing the gun.

“What? I didn’t know he was going to show up,” Ice argued under his breath.

Rolling his eyes, Seven checked the clip in his own weapon and tucked it into the back of his jeans before looking through the peephole.

“Shit, stand down,” he muttered.

Ice sank back out of view from the door. “Wait.”

Seven shot Ice a look, but the man disappeared down the hallway.

Seven sighed and yanked open the door. “What do you want?”

“Is that any way to greet a friend?” Link said with a smirk before striding inside like he lived there.

“Please, come in,” Seven said sarcastically and shut the front door.

What the fuck did Pegasus want now?

“What are you doing here?” Seven asked.

“Can’t I stop by and see a friend?” Link asked.

The guy dropped by periodically to check on his recovery progress after being nearly beaten to death. And Seven appreciated it, really, but Link was bordering at the hovering mark.

“I’m fine, before you ask,” Seven said.

Link quirked one eyebrow at him. It was a silent *I don’t believe you* and Seven gnashed his teeth.

“Who are you?” Joshua’s soft words snapped Link’s attention to the couch.

Almost swallowed up by Ice’s blankets, Joshua had been hidden from view.

Link tossed Seven a quick wide-eyed look and then turned to Joshua. Seven watched as Link changed from the hard-as-nails operative to a softer, more approachable guy. It was amazing to see. “I’m Lincoln Beckett, but people just call me Link. And you are?”

Joshua gazed at Link, eyes wide, seeming to have swallowed his tongue.

“This is my little brother, Joshua,” Seven supplied when Joshua seemed to be at a loss for words.

It didn’t last long though.

Joshua shot Seven a look. “Why are all your friends so hot?”

Link barked out with laughter.

“Please, for the love of God, save me,” Seven muttered, pinching the bridge of his nose.

The powers that be must have heard him because his cell phone buzzed in his pocket. He tugged it out and his anger evaporated like a fucking miracle when he read the snarky text.

Hunter: “The Backdoor Bar, 10:00 PM tonight, be there or be a dud.”

His smile grew. Sure, it was later tonight, but he was saved.

“*I’m no dud.*” He fired back the text, tucked his phone away, and turned with a sigh to his overly crowded living room. First, he’d get rid of Link. That was easy enough, and then he’d drive Joshua home and see what the fuck was up with their parents before heading off to hook up with Hunter.

The hallway that Ice had disappeared down stayed empty and Seven suspected that Ice was long gone by now.

No matter, Ice would find him a private investigator and he’d finally get his hands on the man who’d killed Lisa.



CHAPTER TWO

Three days later

Hunter

Fucking hell, there isn't enough room to move.

Sweat glistened on bodies, and the odor that hovered somewhere between BO and cologne was almost overwhelming. Gyrating people bounced to the pounding music thumping overhead and the floor beneath Hunter's feet pulsed with the beat.

He'd lost sight of Theo five minutes ago and fuck if he could find that curly, dark head of hair. Standing on his toes didn't help to locate the slender man and Hunter went back to bobbing his head to the guy dancing in front of him. The man gave him a wide, toothy smile and lifted the bottom of his shirt to wipe the sweat from his face.

Someone bumped into Hunter's back, sending him closer toward his dance partner, when suddenly, he'd had enough. Although it was nice to be out, he'd reached a point where he couldn't take the pounding noise any longer.

Jags Nightclub really wasn't his scene, but one of his friends had asked to meet there. And here, at least, the cold, rainy February night was kept at bay and he didn't need to think so much—besides, it beat sitting home alone.

Hunter regretted staying so long, though, and wished he had suggested the coffee bar down the street. A mocha cappuccino would taste really good about now.

Turning away from his dance partner, he searched for a way off the crowded dance floor. The man closed a hand around his wrist and yanked him around again. Face-to-face, Hunter pulled at the tight grip with a squinting frown.

When a hand came up and gripped the back of Hunter's neck, he didn't jerk away. This was a touch he knew like he knew there would be air when he took his next breath.

Seven.

Seven's other hand came from Hunter's peripheral vision and clenched on the dancer's wrist. Even over the pounding music, Hunter heard the guy cry out. With his wrist now released, Hunter swung around but didn't get a chance to say a word when he was pulled closer and held with only a hand on the back of his neck.

He should have been pissed that Seven had stood him up the other night, but he couldn't bring himself to muster up the anger in the face of the man's presence. Yeah, call him a glutton for punishment.

The dance lights overhead caught in the wet strands of Seven's dark hair and several droplets clung to the man's closely cropped beard and mustache. Hunter fought back the urge to run his fingers through the thick strands and brush them back from Seven's forehead.

He wasn't giving in that easily.

Seven leaned his head forward and Hunter eased closer to rest his own forehead against Seven's. His feet barely moved and Hunter closed his eyes, breathing in the scent that was all Seven.

Like something dangerous and all male. Stealthy as shit because Seven was like that. He'd disappear for days and then suddenly...bam! He'd reappear out of nowhere and they'd be in this same exact spot.

Close.

Closer than he'd ever been with another living soul.

The hard grip on his nape eased and Seven's big palm slid down his back to the top of his ass, and their hips were suddenly grinding to the music. Their hard cocks were perfectly aligned, separated only by jeans.

The hot room disappeared beneath the hungry onslaught and Hunter made a noise before he tucked his face into Seven's neck. He slipped his hands to the man's nape.

The world disappeared as it always did when he and Seven were in each other's vicinity. The universe narrowed to the two of —

"Hunter?" his friend Theodore Kada shouted from behind him.

He yanked his head from Seven's shoulder and turned to his friend.

Theo's cute face was all scrunched up like when he was confused.

"You know him?" Theo pointed to Seven.

"No! I just dance this way with strange men," he shouted back over the music.

"Let's get out of here," Seven growled against his temple, sending a shiver down his spine.

Gripping Theo by the shirt, Hunter pulled him closer.

"Theo, it's too crazy in here. Let's hit the coffee shop down the street," Hunter said loudly next to Theo's ear.

With a quick bobbing nod, Theo smiled and made a beeline for the exit. Hunter went to follow but found his hand caught and held in Seven's grip, and he was suddenly following the man through the crowd of people. Like magic, the sea of people parted, naturally getting out of Seven's way. Not Hunter, though, he gravitated toward Seven. He could find Seven in a crowded room. Not that Seven stood taller than most men; it was the air of mystery and danger that set Seven apart from others.

Maybe it was the color of Seven's eyes. Sure, they were startling, changing colors between a lightish blue or green—like creation hadn't been able to decide.

Hunter couldn't decide either what color they were. But it was more than Seven's eyes that gave him an unparalleled quality.

The man was pure stealth and lethal, the kind of man who would appear in the night and kill you in your sleep and wouldn't miss a beat. Of course, Seven only killed bad guys, but the general population didn't know that.

Danger simmered beneath Seven's surface and it turned Hunter on—he recognized a kindred soul.

Collecting their coats from their table, they spilled out into the dark, damp night. A heavy drizzle covered the streets, making the asphalt shine. He didn't mind the rain, but Theo squeaked and pulled his coat up to cover his head.

Seven prowled through the damp night, casing every inch of their surroundings as they walked toward the twenty-four-hour coffee shop.

Theo bounced on his toes, holding his jacket up. He'd had too much to drink and Hunter had wrapped his hand around his friend's bicep to keep him from careening off the curb and into the street.

Seven walked on his other side and every so often—when he wasn't casing the area—he'd send a scowl at Theo.

“That's Theo and he's harmless,” Hunter whispered to Seven, who gave him an *I don't believe you* look.

“Theo who?”

“Theodore Kada, at your service!” Theo giggled drunkenly, making Hunter laugh when Theo danced ahead of them.

“He really is a good guy. I promise.”

“I'll have to take your word for it,” Seven growled.

Hunter grinned. If Seven only knew who Theo really was. He shook off the thought.

“What are you doing here?” he asked.

Seven gave him a flat stare for about ten seconds and then went back to surveying the area, running his eyes over the cars, other people walking, and even into the windows of closed

storefronts. Always aware, always alert. Almost hyperaware, and it made him frown. Was something going on?

Hunter glanced quickly around and then shot Seven a look. “What’s got you so paranoid?”

Seven didn’t even bother to look at him that time—maybe because they’d reached the coffee shop. Seven yanked open the door and ushered him and Theo inside before snapping the door closed.

The warmth engulfed Hunter and he sighed. While the club had been overheated, the walk through the cold February air had sent a chill down his spine. Cinnamon, spice, and coffee lingered in the air and he glanced at the clock over the counter.

It was just after midnight.

Seven guided him with that controlling hand on his back to a table in the corner. Theo bounced along and snagged the aisle chair. Good thing because Hunter always sat with his back to the wall. After Hunter took a seat, he glanced up to find Seven hovering.

He smiled at the man. “Two mochas.”

Seven frowned and shot a look toward Theo, and Hunter chuckled. “Trust me, he needs the caffeine.” Yeah, his friend was already hyper, and some people might think coffee would only make it worse, but Theo needed to sober up.

Because Hunter had yet to find out why Theo had come from Chicago to California to find him.

Seven headed to the counter without another word.

Theo grabbed at his shirt and yanked Hunter closer.

“Who the hell is the hunk?” Apparently, Theo had sobered up enough to see just how hot Seven was.

Hunter stifled his laughter. “Well... we’re sort of together.”

“Sort of together?” Theo’s eyebrows shot up over his bright blue eyes.

“It’s a long story.”

And it wasn’t technically true. He and Seven weren’t really sort of together. But Hunter figured from the way Seven stalked

him, they might as well be a couple. Typically, they ended up somewhere with a bed...it was rare to have Seven come to coffee like this. The only other time he could remember they'd eaten together had been when Seven had shown up at last year's Halloween party.

Since then, Hunter had only seen Seven for several hookups, but the guy always left quickly afterward. Hunter didn't like the fact that Seven disappeared for days before reappearing like a stealthy ghost. And he didn't like that he was probably being used. Most of the time, he could shake it off. He'd taken a chance sending that text the other day and when Seven responded, Hunter thought he had a date.

He had been so wrong and had spent hours at that fucking bar waiting until Seven had sent him a text at 2 A.M. saying only that he couldn't make it. Hunter grimaced and directed his attention at the large glass windows of the coffee shop; he looked over the darkened streets, wet sidewalks, and closed buildings across the road.

"Tell me," Theo whispered.

"What?" He frowned at Theo.

"About him." Theo jerked his head toward Seven.

"I will, but later." He met his friend's searching gaze before he tossed a glance at the counter.

He found Seven leaning a hip against the counter, arms folded against his muscled chest, those fluctuating colored eyes locked on him. At some point, Seven had finger combed his dark hair back, but one stubborn strand fell forward over the man's forehead. Hunter let his eyes trace the stubble covering Seven's unshaven jaw.

The very corner of Seven's hard mouth tipped up and Hunter's heart jumped in his chest, heat filling his gut.

Was this what love felt like?



CHAPTER THREE

Seven

He stood with his back to the counter, never letting Hunter out of his sight.

Seven had seen the flash of anger directed toward him at the club, but Hunter had quickly hidden it. As much as he wanted to meet Hunter three days ago, it hadn't worked out. After getting Joshua home around ten that night, he'd spent several hours having a talk with their father and Joshua's mother. It hadn't been pretty, but he'd been assured for the hundredth time that they would straighten up.

He wasn't banking on it. They only toed the line because he gave them money every month to keep themselves and Joshua clothed and fed, and utilities paid. When Joshua turned eighteen—they didn't know it—all funds would be ending.

The conversation with his brother outside the home Seven rented for his family brought a knot in his throat.

"Why can't I just stay with you?"

"You can't. Not yet. Once you turn eighteen and I...take care of things, you can come live with me."

Joshua's eyes filled with tears. "You mean catch Lisa's killer."

Seven wasn't able to answer because Carla came and stood in the doorway, so Seven yanked Joshua into a quick, tight hug

and sent his stepmother a stern look before he headed out.

He was in a no-win situation with Joshua, who hadn't yet graduated from high school. He didn't have custody of his brother, and his father had already flat-out refused when Seven said he'd take Joshua off his hands. The calculating look in the man's eyes told the truth.

They were at a stalemate, so Seven had done the only thing he could do—threatened to cut off all money unless they took care of Joshua. Sure, Seven could have sued for custody, but that would mean a long court battle if he went that route. And it didn't make sense to put Joshua through that when he'd be eighteen in nine months.

“That'll be twelve-fifteen,” the barista said, gaining his attention.

He paid for the coffee and lifted the cups before turning toward the table. Meeting unfamiliar people took an astronomical amount of trust, and Seven had none where Hunter's friend was concerned.

Reaching the table, he took the vacant chair. He used to sit with his back to the wall, but not since meeting Hunter. Snagging a chair with his back to the wall was one of Hunter's tells and Seven couldn't wait to find out more. They were like little hints into Hunter's past—a past Seven wasn't privy to. Although, to be fair, he wasn't around all that much so he hung onto what odd habits of Hunter's he could find.

Theo's hands waved about, and his speech was overly loud as he recanted about his dance partners at the club. The man's sway in his chair told its own story. The guy was plastered.

Hunter shot him a look from those bright blue eyes. He'd be goddamned if he'd let anything happen to Hunter. Call him paranoid after his own sister's murder, but Seven wasn't taking any chances. He had to step very carefully, though...he and Hunter weren't together. Seven never was much for relationships past the bedroom. Frankly, he sucked at it.

So, what do you call stalking the guy? Keeping him safe! Mhmm, and that includes fucking him? He scowled at the annoying voice in his head. It was more than fucking—and whatever the hell it was, it kept him coming back for more.

The weird thing was, Seven didn't need to protect Hunter. While the guy came off as happy-go-lucky, Seven saw beneath the surface. Something dark lingered in Hunter's eyes. It spoke of that past that Seven hadn't been able to dig out.

It screamed from the way Hunter cautiously moved like an animal. Not one of the prey kind, but rather the predator. He moved with a hyper awareness, which had caught Seven's attention that very first night in the alley when Pegasus was onto the wrong culprit in a case. It had taken all of his skills to come up on Hunter without the guy knowing he was there and that was only because Hunter had been distracted keeping an eye on his brother. Seven doubted if Parker knew how many times Hunter had saved his ass.

Hunter intrigued him.

Hunter was a mystery. He couldn't put his finger on what Hunter was hiding, but he was damned sure going to find out. Preferably from Hunter himself and not from digging further into the man's hidden life.

That unknown element kept Seven vigilant.

It kept him diligent where Hunter was concerned. That combined with the sexual attraction between them had Seven coming back for more.

Theo loudly sipped his coffee and complained that it was too hot. The guy may have introduced himself on the walk over here, but Seven had already known Theo's name.

It wasn't possible for Hunter to meet someone and Seven not know about it. He shifted in his chair and took a sip of his black coffee. So yeah, when Theodore Kada had called Hunter's phone earlier this evening, Seven's gut had sent up a shit-ton of alerts. Basically, because Hunter didn't get calls outside of his two moms, coworkers, and brother.

There was only one conclusion to come to. Obviously, Kada was from Hunter's past, but who was this guy and who was he to Hunter? Seven didn't trust the guy's sudden appearance, but more than that, he sensed that Kada was hiding something—kind of like Hunter was. And just like with Hunter's past, Seven hadn't been able to find out shit about Kada and that was a red fucking

flag if you asked him. He'd be damned if the guy was going to drag Hunter into whatever the fuck was going on.

He carefully observed the pair and swiveled his own chair a bit. That way, he could fluctuate his attention between the entrance, the hallway in the back, Theo, and Hunter. They were the only three in there, but when the club down the street closed in a few hours, it would be packed. He hoped to be the hell out of there by then and preferably somewhere with a soft bed and Hunter in it.

Cradling his black coffee, his eyes lingered on Hunter. At over six feet, Hunter could look him in the eye with only a slight height difference. The only thing Seven had on the guy was shoulder width. Seven had never been attracted to a man who matched him physically in every way, but with Hunter, it was different. Muscles bunched beneath Hunter's tight shirt. Not only did they match physically, but the danger simmering beneath Hunter's surface called to his own. The man had the blue-eyed, steely look down to a fucking art, and with his unshaven face and thick brown hair, Hunter was in the smoking hot category. His mouth, fucking hell, Hunter's lips alone drew him in like a moth to a flame.

The lips he was focused on started to curve upward. Ah, he'd been caught. He quirked an eyebrow at the amusement in that gleaming blue gaze.

"What brought you out to that particular club tonight?" Hunter said.

Pinned beneath those blue eyes, Seven took another slow sip of coffee. Like hell he'd admit that he'd put a tracker on and tapped Hunter's phone since Halloween and he had known where the guy was twenty-four seven. *And let's not even mention the call he'd recorded from Theo.* Instead of answering Hunter, Seven shrugged—better to say nothing than incriminate himself.

"Yeah, what brought—wait...what's your name?" Theo asked, his sway a bit less pronounced with half the mocha consumed.

"Seven," he bit out, more than annoyed.

"Like the number?" Theo mumbled with a confused look.

Hunter snickered into his coffee and shot him a look that said, *you're on your own*. Seven didn't mind; he lived for Hunter's looks and would take them anyway he could get them. Theo, however, received his flat, bored stare before Seven's gaze was moving again.

"Why Seven?" Theo persisted and when Seven didn't respond, Theo turned on Hunter.

Hunter shrugged and smiled.

Seven liked that about Hunter. He kept information close to his chest. Hunter never gave things away that shouldn't be given, and he never gave anything to someone who wasn't a member of Pegasus—except for him.

Hunter always shared Pegasus stuff with him.

He let one side of his mouth quirk because he knew that would bring back that bright light in Hunter's eyes. He loved it when Hunter smiled.

Pegasus was where Hunter worked. If Seven was being honest, Pegasus—the unit designed to help out when law enforcement's hands were tied—was more like a family to Hunter. They were an elite team of operatives who helped out innocent people by saving the day—like a dream come true.

Only that dream wasn't for Seven.

Last year when Giovanni Rossi, chief of Pegasus, had approached him with a job offer, Seven had turned it down. When the former Secretary of Defense, the man in charge of the unit, had followed up with the same offer a few weeks later, Seven said he'd think about it. But he'd only said he'd think about it because he'd been recovering from injuries of his own.

His wounds hadn't been a big deal, but even now, Seven's left leg ached. It had been his own fault for trusting the wrong people. It was a long story, but it had damaged his faith in people even more than before. Of course, he was grateful to Pegasus. They had rescued him, with Hunter leading the way.

"So, what brings you my way, Theo? What's going on?"

Ah, now we'll get some answers. Seven ran his gaze over the room one more time before bouncing it off of Theo. The man's eyes were wide and settled on Hunter.

“Nothing’s going on, just wanted to see an old friend.” Theo clutched his cup a bit tighter.

The man’s tone was too defensive for Seven’s liking, and he narrowed his gaze. At that moment, Theo glanced at him before hastily lifting his cup to sip. Seven would have stayed with the intimidation stare if Hunter’s touch hadn’t snagged his attention. Electricity zipped up his arm. It was like that when Hunter touched him, and Seven’s cock twitched in his jeans. With that light squeeze, Seven held his words, but sometimes, Hunter was way too fucking trusting—like now—for Seven’s peace of mind.

“What hotel are you at?” Hunter asked Theo.

“I didn’t get one yet.” The man ducked his head.

“I rent a room from some friends, but they do have a spare room, and I’m sure you can crash there tonight.”

Seven’s lids closed to slits, and he clenched his teeth so hard his jaw ached. Hunter’s thumb caressed the skin on his forearm and Hunter sent a one-handed text to his landlords. Seven knew the people Hunter lived with because he’d investigated them after Hunter moved from the place he’d rented with his brother into the home of Olsen, Hobbs, and Alder. Not only were they a throuple, but they were also the founders of a law firm, and a damned good one at that. Seven hadn’t found anything suspicious about them. And since they were filthy rich and the room Hunter rented had a soft bed, Seven had been content with the man’s choice.

“Scott said it’s cool,” Hunter said, glancing up from this phone.

“Thank you.” Theo’s smile seemed a bit wobbly to Seven.

“Of course.” Hunter’s hand left his skin and was reaching to squeeze Theo’s arm and Seven had to stop himself from ending that contact.

But fuck, he wanted to squash Theo Kada.

“Hang on a second,” Hunter said, and was out of his chair and out the door of the cafe before Seven could shove out of his own chair.

“Where are you going?” Theo sounded scared.

“I’ll be right back,” Seven growled. “Stay here. Don’t move.”

He shoved open the door with a crash and grimaced. Damn it, he was losing his cool. Hunter had gone right, so Seven went left through the rain and around the building. He slipped along the wall and into the dark alley behind the coffee shop.

Once there, he paused with his back to the building and eased his breathing. The neighborhood wasn’t noisy, but it wasn’t too quiet either. It was somewhere in the middle with sounds ramping up when cars passed out front. The rain made it worse as it pinged off awnings and emergency ladders.

He sensed rather than saw Hunter next to him and Seven eased closer, his heart pounding in his chest at how easily Hunter had appeared.

Reaching down, he locked their damp fingers together and thought he heard a snicker from Hunter.

“What is it?” he whispered.

“I’ll protect you,” Hunter murmured.

Seven grunted. “Did you see something?” he said, barely audible this time.

“Nothing, I guess.” Hunter breathed the words for his ears only. “I thought I did.”

When Hunter tugged him back toward the front of the building, Seven tossed a look over his shoulder.

From what he could see through the driving rain, the alley was empty, but there were a shit ton of pitch-black places. He pulled Hunter to a stop when he spotted the silhouette of a man in the shadows. Hunter must have seen it too because he pivoted. Stalking the short distance to the back of the alley again, they reached the darkness to find it empty.

“A trick of the light?” Hunter whispered.

Seven stayed silent. It hadn’t been a trick of the light, but whomever it was, was long gone. They needed to get back to Theo. Hunter must have thought the same and hurried toward the front of the coffee shop. Opening the door, Seven ushered Hunter inside and then shook the rain from his shoulders.

Theo stood by their table with wide eyes.

“What’s going on?” the man asked.

“Nothing,” Hunter softly assured Theo before taking a seat. Pulling his damp shirt away from his skin, Hunter shook it before sipping at his coffee as if nothing had transpired.

Seven was slow to join them.

He didn’t believe Hunter’s “nothing” comment at fucking all.

Someone had been in that alley.



CHAPTER FOUR

Hunter

The bed shifting brought Hunter from a deep sleep to find it was still dark outside. A quick glance at his phone on the bedside table showed it was five minutes after 6 A.M.

Rolling to his side, he found Seven sitting on the edge of the bed, back to him, rubbing his hands over his face to shake off sleep. Scooting up, Hunter crowded his naked form up behind Seven and ran his hands up the man's back, looping his arms over Seven's shoulders. When Seven leaned back against him, Hunter nuzzled into the ruffled hair at his temple, his lips brushing over the shell of Seven's ear. Seven's head fell back against his shoulder and Hunter ran his hands down the front of the man's chest and stomach, reaching down to take ahold of Seven's cock. In a matter of seconds, Seven's dick jumped in his hand and grew hard. The man gave a soft, low groan, his hips undulating, thrusting his cock into Hunter's hand.

Hunter sank his teeth into the side of Seven's neck, bringing out a hiss of sound. Seven's hands came up and took ahold of his arms before the man turned and pushed him back on the bed. Hunter sprawled onto his back in the soft sheets, his eyes glued on Seven's glittering gaze. He lifted his legs and wrapped them around Seven when the man prowled up and over him. They took turns topping and last night he'd come out on top. This morning, he wanted to feel every fucking inch of Seven inside of him. He slapped around for the lube on the nightstand. They'd done away

with condoms last year after Seven had produced test results. Hunter had shown his own and the unspoken agreement that they'd be exclusive was given. Dumping the lube in his hand, he reached down and smeared some on Seven's dick before covering his own balls and ass.

Seven leaned back and watched. The room was growing lighter with the rising sun but still cast enough shadows to retain the intimacy. Gripping Seven's hard cock, Hunter pulled and the man came forward, dropping down. Hunter's hands were caged at each side of his head, he pulled his knees up and Seven reached down to position the head of his cock.

Their gazes locked.

The head of Seven's cock pushed into his ass. The air left Hunter's lungs as his lips parted. Hunter groaned when Seven slipped in farther, and Hunter's eyes widened. Seven's head dropped and took his open mouth in a hard kiss. Hunter could do nothing but take the biting kiss as his body was taken in a long, hard slide.

"Fuuuuck," he moaned into Seven's mouth.

The man slid deep and stopped moving, only to reach between them and take Hunter's hard cock into his fisted grip. The twisting squeeze brought his release close. Fuck, he wanted to come so bad. He needed to fucking come!

"Yes!" Hunter growled, his hands gripping Seven's shoulders hard when the man refused to be rushed.

Hunter bit at Seven's mouth and rocked his hips. Seven slowly pulled part of the way out and Hunter moaned when his tongue was sucked. In the next moment, Seven slammed home and Hunter couldn't have said a word to save his fucking life. The bed shifted, rocking back and forth with Seven's savage pace. Hunter slapped at the sheets, fisting them in his hands. Between Seven pistoning into his ass and the man's twisting grip on his cock, it was only seconds before Hunter shouted and came. The sound rang out muffled against Seven's gasping kiss.

Through every thrash of his body and pulsing throb of his cock, Seven kept jerking him, milking him of every single drop of come. The man's thrusts became sporadic until Seven's hips snapped, stilled, and the man groaned, emptying hot come into

his ass. After several moments, Seven collapsed down on top of him, breathing harshly. The man's cock slipped from his body and Seven eased only his hips up so Hunter could straighten his legs and then Seven was back sprawled over him. Hunter let his arms go slack and closed his eyes. They lay like that, plastered together, sweaty.

He dozed and so did Seven, and surprise held him mute when Hunter opened his eyes about 10 o'clock to find Seven still in bed with him. The man was lying on his side facing him, face cradled on one arm, sleepy blue eyes open and locked on him.

Seven hadn't disappeared between 6:20 and then.

"You're still here." So what if his words sounded a bit breathless. He was stunned, surprised, and so fucking happy.

"How do you know Theo?"

Hunter blinked the sleep from his eyes and shifted on the bed. "We used to work together years ago, why?" He and Theo hadn't really worked together, but that was close enough to the truth. He wanted to have a conversation with Seven about his past, but now was not the time.

"Do you know who that was outside the cafe last night?"

Hunter frowned. "No, I don't."

"It's weird, your friend showing up out of the blue," Seven said.

"Theo? Why? You don't have friends pop by when they are in from out of town?" Hunter teased, relieved at the topic shift.

Seven squinted at him, looking so goddamned sexy that all Hunter could do was smile.

"I'm hungry." Seven's bottom lip poked out.

Hunter's laughter bubbled up. "So am I."

"We could go out for breakfast."

"We could, but the house has a cook."

"They do?"

Hunter reached out and trailed a finger down Seven's cheek and tugged at his closely cropped beard. He knew Seven knew

they had a cook, and it was cute how the guy tried to hide the fact he'd investigated his landlords.

“Yep. We can have eggs, sausage, hashbrowns,” Hunter said.

Seven hesitated.

The man's pause spoke volumes.

Hunter dropped his hand and rolled away. He got it. Seven was a no attachments kind of guy. He didn't get far when Seven lunged and caught him. With his back to Seven, the man crowded in close and nuzzled his nape.

“You had me at hashbrowns.” Seven's voice came muffled against his nape.

“If only I'd known it was that simple,” he teased, not able to hide his laughter or relief.

“You calling me easy, Johnson?”

He laughed when Seven used his last name. The man only did it when they joked around, but Hunter loved it. He took it for the endearment that it was. He tipped his head back so he could look into Seven's eyes at an angle.

“So what if I am?”



They didn't get down in time for breakfast, but rather lunch. The cook smiled and indulged their request for morning food. They ate with gusto and Hunter was just cleaning his plate when Theo appeared in the doorway to the massive dining room. His friend was dressed, and it looked like Theo might have been up for a while.

“Hey.” Hunter waved Theo to the chair next to him before lifting his cup of heavily creamed coffee to sip at.

“Mornin,” Theo said, slipping into the chair. He took the coffee the server offered but declined lunch. “I had a big breakfast with Bethany, Scott, and Tim this morning. They showed me the whole house before they left for their office.”

“Yeah, they ride together on Fridays,” Hunter said, finishing off his coffee.

“Must be nice,” Theo said, darting a look at Seven, who hadn’t even acknowledged him.

Hunter could have told Theo not to take it personally, that Seven was cool toward everyone, but he didn’t. It was none of Theo’s business to know about Seven.

“So, what brings you to town, Theo?”

Theo threw Seven another quick glance and then turned to Hunter. “Can we talk privately?”

Hunter frowned and studied his friend for a long moment before he turned to Seven. “I’ll be right back.” Hunter lifted his jacket from the coat rack near the door and slipped it on.

“I’ll be right here,” Seven replied silkily.

Hunter wasn’t sure how to take the tone of voice, but he was more curious now than ever about the reason Theo, after all these years, had looked him up.



CHAPTER FIVE

Seven

Seven had spent the morning in Hunter's bed. Mainly, because it was becoming harder and harder to leave Hunter each time they met up.

He eased back in his chair until the door to the patio closed and then he was up and stepping out of the room and into the hallway—which was really more of a foyer.

Pulling out his phone and dialing a number, he leaned a shoulder near a painting and waited impatiently for the other end to answer.

“What.” Annoyance filled the man's voice.

“Don't be an ass. I need you to give me everything on a Theodore Kada.”

“Do I look like your fucking assistant?”

Seven smirked, heading down the hallway to the far end patio. “No.”

The silence lingered over the phone and a few moments later, Ice responded.

“I'll do it, but it's going to cost you.”

“Name it.”

“I'm in on whatever the fuck is going on.”

“Who says anything is going on?” Seven murmured, stepping out into the cold morning and closing the door quietly.

Ice snorted with disbelief. “I know you. You always have some shit going on.”

“What about the PI? Anything on that?”

“Nothing yet,” Ice said. “It’s only been a few days.”

“You made calls though,” Seven said.

“I did.”

He knew Ice wouldn’t let him down.

“Tell me what the detectives on Lisa’s case say,” Ice said.

Seven’s leg suddenly ached and he stopped to rub at it.

“That the case is growing cold.”

“Then let’s heat it up,” Ice clipped.

“Let me figure out what the fuck is going on with this Kada guy and then we’ll sit down and go over some stuff.”

“So, where are you?”

“At Hunter’s.”

“Ahhhh”

“Don’t ahhh me.”

“Then don’t make it sound like it’s nothing,” Ice advised.

Seven grunted. It hadn’t been all that bad hanging around this morning, and he thought maybe he’d do it again in the near future. Something about waking up next to Hunter made him feel...he couldn’t quite come up with a word yet, but yeah.

Ice snickered at his silence and Seven gnashed his teeth.

“I’ll get back to you when I hear from the PI,” Ice said and hung up.

Seven tucked his phone away before slipping between two tall hedges that would take him within ear shot of the patio where Hunter and Theo were talking.

Only they weren’t there.

Making his way down the gray cobblestone path, he cut around the tall hedges and down the side of the house. The place had six lower-level patios and four balconies. Not to mention, the library, gaming room, two dens, and fourteen other rooms.

Damn it.

He should have put a bug on Theo. Reaching the east side patio, he made his way down to the small gate. From there, he walked the length of the back of the mansion, giving the gardener a quick nod. No sign of them on this side of the house either. Reaching the second gate, he shut it on his way through and made his way toward the front of the house.

Shit. He stopped walking. Hunter and Theo could have finished by now and be looking for him.

Bang, bang, bang!

The hair on the back of his neck lifted and his heart thundered when gunfire peppered the air near the front gate.

Seven sprinted down the side of the house just as the sound of tires squealing filled the air. He reached the padlocked side gate of the house, grabbed for the top, and pulled himself over in one go. He dropped to the concrete on the other side and entered the circular driveway at a dead run.

Both entry gates stood open and the driveway was completely empty.

Seven ran full out to the blown-out guard shack and stopped in the doorway as the guard crawled to his knees, brushing glass from his head and shoulders.

Seven assessed the shattered glass of the guard shack, noticing several shell casings on the ground. He spun and spotted black tire marks burned into the driveway where several vehicles had peeled out, leaving behind an acrid smell combined with gunpowder.

“You okay?” Seven stepped forward to grip the guard’s shoulder and help him into a chair.

“Yeah. They came out of nowhere.” The man’s voice shook; reaching for the phone, his fingers hovered over the buttons. Presumably to call 911, but Seven needed answers before the cops put a halt to anything.

“Show me,” Seven ordered.

The guard forgot the call and turned to the state-of-the-art computer that ran the security system and cameras. Seven stepped closer as the man’s fingers flew over the keys. The recorded driveway flashed up and the guard hit the back button until two dark SUVs converged on the front gate. They fired several rounds from what he had suspected—a military grade automatic rifle. When the rounds had punched into the glass, the guard was ordered to open the gate. Shakily, the guard hit the button and the black wrought-iron gate slipped back, but before the two vehicles could enter, another SUV shot out the other side of the driveway.

The guard grimaced. “I panicked, but Mr. Olsen has said before not to risk my life.”

“Mr. Olsen is correct.” Beneath the hail of bullets Seven saw on the tape, if the guard hadn’t opened the gate, he’d be dead.

“Zoom in on that vehicle.” Seven pointed to the third SUV on its way out of the other driveway exit, and the guard clicked a few buttons.

“Pause it there,” Seven snapped when the vehicle passed right in front of the camera. Hunter sat in the driver’s side and spun the wheel as the SUV shot forward and onto the street. The other two SUVs backed out and with tires spinning, both took off down the street after Hunter.

Seven stepped closer to the computer and hit the view to zoom in on the inside of the vehicle. There was nothing grainy or grayed out about this system. The camera had been placed high and angled down to catch every single detail.

Clear as fucking day, Seven saw the gun in Theo’s hand from where the guy sat in the passenger seat of a vehicle.

Theo is a dead man. That little motherfucker is fucking dead.

Seven yanked out his phone and pulled up an app and checked Hunter’s whereabouts. The blinking red dot was moving south. Seven glanced back at the screen.

“Get Mr. Olsen on the phone for me.”

Without a word, the guard jerkily dialed the number. Seven took the phone and stepped back out of the small shack, standing

on the cement step.

“Jeffery? What’s wrong?” Scott Olsen said.

“Scott, it’s Seven.”

“What’s wrong?”

He liked that about the guy—Scott wasn’t one to beat around the bush, and that was what made him a great attorney. During his research on them, Seven had found that the law office hadn’t lost a case in fifteen years.

Without mincing words, Seven told Scott about the gunmen, the two SUVs, and what he’d seen on the gate camera with Hunter driving away with Theo. Oh, and they needed to invest in better glass for the guard shack!

“That’s all I know right now, but it’s clear as day that Theo has a gun.”

“Pointed at Hunter?”

“Honestly, I’m not sure.”

“What the fuck?” Scott said. “I met Theo this morning.”

“I know. I just met him last night,” Seven said. “I’m having him looked into as we speak.” Seven sent his fingers through his hair. He didn’t know what Theo was up to, but the question on his mind and one he kept repeating to himself was...why hadn’t Hunter come back inside and gotten him when the shooting started? Why drive away with Theo?

Seven could have helped. There was no way in hell he would have let those men chase Hunter out of here. This was all kinds of fucked up. He clenched his teeth to keep his body still as his mind raced.

“Okay. Let me call my security team. I’ll have them track the vehicle down,” Scott said.

Scott could do what he thought best, but Seven was going after Hunter.

“I rode over with Hunter last night. Can I borrow one of your cars?”

“Take Tim’s Jag. Put Jeff on the phone; he can give you the keys. I’ll have him call the cops.”

“Have Jeff send me that clip of the gunmen.”

Handing the phone back to the guard, Seven waited until he had the keys. The guard hit a button on the screen and one of the multitude of garage doors rolled opened. Instead of the bright red Jag he was expecting, Seven found a gleaming black SUV. Leave it to Tim to own a 2023 Jaguar F-PACE.

The powerful engine roared as he pulled it out of the garage, through the gate, and down the street.

Just then, his cell lit up with Hunter’s name and he snatched the phone up.

“Hunter?”

“Yeah. I’m sure you saw that.”

“What the fuck is going on?”

“Some very bad people are trying to kill Theo.”

“I’m going to kill him myself. Now tell me where you are.”

“You’re on speaker.”

“Tell someone who cares. Where are you?”

“Just entering the 101 Freeway.”

“And your tail?”

“Caught in traffic behind me.”

Seven racked his fucking brain for an answer to this but came up empty. “What do you need?”

“I have something in mind. I’ll call you back.”

“No! Stay on the fucking phone. I’m in Tim’s SUV. I can catch up to you.”

“Not in this traffic. Seven, call Pegasus. I’ll call you back.”

Seven gnashed his teeth and ran the red light in front of him. A truck coming the other way narrowly missed him—horns blared.

“Trust me,” Hunter whispered.

“I do trust you, baby.” He and Hunter had never used endearments, but the word *baby* fell from his lips like it had been there all along. “It’s Theo I don’t trust,” he continued.

“I know,” Hunter said and ended the call before Seven could say anything further.

Seven knew Ice would work his magic on information on Theo Kada, but until then, he was flying blind. When the line went dead, Seven punched the gas. He reached the freeway and just as Hunter had said, it was gridlocked. Bumper to fucking bumper traffic and there was no way in hell anyone was catching up to Hunter, much less the bad guys on his tail.

Hopefully, the two SUVs after Hunter and Theo were locked in the same mess.

Making a decision, he flipped a U-turn and punched the gas.



CHAPTER SIX

Hunter

“Slow down,” Theo said, grabbing with one hand at the dashboard.

Hunter threw Theo an impatient look before he gunned the vehicle onto the freeway. Slow down? Was he fucking stupid? It was a good goddamned thing he and Theo had been sitting in his SUV when those bastards rolled up.

He pressed the accelerator and sped at top speed along the access road that would get him a ticket if caught. A few moments later, he merged between two big rigs.

Finally, the pair of SUVs were lost in his rearview mirror.

It was another five minutes before he took a moment to brush the glass from his shirt. The window had shattered from the hail of bullets. Thankfully, none had hit him or Theo, but someone was going to pay for this. He got over one lane and sped up until the traffic slowed—fucking bumper to bumper.

The SUV’s phone rang, and a number flashed with the incoming call.

Fuck. He gazed at the number...*so last night hadn’t been my imagination.*

“Aren’t you going to answer it?” Theo said.

“Yeah.” Instead of hitting the answer button, Hunter snatched up the phone and turned off the Bluetooth before he brought the phone to his ear.

“So that was you.”

“You’re still good Hunter, but you’re losing your edge.”

“How so?” he asked between his clenched teeth, ignoring Theo’s curious eyes.

“Five years ago, you would have caught me in that alley,” Jaxon West said.

“Five years ago, I was a different person,” he sighed, glanced in the rear-view mirror, and switched lanes again. “Why didn’t you stay to talk?”

“You had a shadow.”

Hunter smiled. Seven. He was so much more than a shadow, but Jaxon didn’t need to know that.

“Where are you?” Jaxon asked sharply.

“I’m on the road, why?” He gripped the phone tightly. “Wait...did you have something to do with the men at my house?”

“What men?” Jaxon snapped.

“Five of them from what I could see. Two dark, nondescript SUVs, guns, lots of bullets.”

“Fuck, listen to me.” Jaxon’s sigh came hard over the line. “Is there somewhere you can lay low?”

“I’m not alone.”

Jaxon snorted. “I know Theo is there, probably cowering in the passenger seat.”

“Be nice,” Hunter said and squeezed the wheel and phone simultaneously.

“When have I ever been nice?” Jaxon asked, followed with, “But he is there with you, right?”

“Yes. How’s the bodyguard business?” Hunter murmured.

“It keeps me out of trouble.”

“But not completely,” Hunter countered.

“No. Not completely,” Jaxon agreed.

Which meant that Jaxon still had his foot in Erebus.

“You think that’s a good idea?”

“I think it’s better than the alternative,” Jaxon said.

“What alternative?”

“Not knowing what the fuck is going on over there,” Jaxon said, and Hunter heard a hint of anger in the man’s voice.

“Do you know what this is about?”

“I have an idea, but not over the phone. We’ve already been talking too long.”

“Yeah,” Hunter softly agreed.

“Find someplace and send me a message. I’ll come to you.”

“I will.”

Jaxon hung up before he could say more, and Hunter tucked the cell phone into the inside pocket of his coat. Suddenly, he was fiercely glad Jaxon was in on whatever the fuck was going on. It would make any shit coming down so much easier to handle. In hindsight, though, if Jaxon West had been brought in, something was very wrong. The call to initiate West could only have come from Dave or higher. They didn’t call in people like Jaxon unless something had gone down or was about to. Hunter could surmise a dozen possibilities. He tossed a look at Theo, who sat clutching a gun to his chest.

“Put that away.”

“No.” Theo frowned and gripped it tighter.

“I won’t let them catch us.”

“I’m not taking any chances.” Theo’s chin tipped up and Hunter snorted.

Theo was paranoid and it had probably saved his life more times than not. Hunter couldn’t fault the man for that.

“Who was that on the phone?”

“Someone who may be able to help.” Hunter shot Theo a look.

“They’ll just get dead.” Theo looked glum.

Hunter hoped the hell not, but he saved that comment.

The traffic going north on the freeway cleared up, and some forty-eight minutes later, he got off on the next exit. He’d drive around the area for a while and make sure he hadn’t been followed, but the place he had in mind would be perfect.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Ventura, CA - Pegasus bunker - Undisclosed location

Seven

After stabbing the button for the fourth time, the gate to the Pegasus parking lot finally opened for him.

Seven screeched into a parking spot and exited the SUV to find Link standing at the open doorway. It had taken him a fucking hour to get from Bel Air to Ventura and he was in no mood for the smart-ass grin Link gave him.

“Having trouble getting in?”

“Not fucking funny,” Seven snapped.

Link’s eyes grew wide. “What’s wrong? Where’s Hunter?”

Link was very fucking astute. Coming up in the doorway behind Link stood Pegasus operative Declan Weller, who went by Eagle, which was his Army handle.

“Is Ace here?” Seven said.

“Yeah, in his office,” Eagle said quietly. “You didn’t answer Link’s question.”

“I’ll answer it only once and to all of you,” he said and stepped past them. Pulling his phone out, the video clip had come

through from the guard.

He walked into the bullpen and found it almost empty, which was odd considering the size of Pegasus. There had to be close to fifteen operatives by now. Or hell, it could be more, he wasn't sure.

"What's going on?" Kellum looked up from a computer screen that both he and Fisher were looking at.

"Where's Ace?" Seven said, and Fisher jerked his head toward an open door at the far end.

Seven stalked across the bullpen and reached Ace's open doorway. The Pegasus boss wasn't alone and both Ace and Jacob looked up from the stack of files on the desk.

Seven rapped on the doorjamb as a courtesy and Jacob's face broke into a huge smile.

"Seven," Jacob said, waving him into the room.

Seven had had the pleasure of working with Jacob Burns during a brief assignment last year. The man had the technical savvy to break into the Pentagon if he wanted.

"Jacob." Seven gripped the cell phone in his hand.

"What's wrong?" Ace said with a frown, and Seven stalked to the man's desk to hand him the phone with the video clip open.

"I've already spoken to Hunter. He's going to call us once he gets to wherever he's going," Seven said, and it irritated him to no end that he wasn't with Hunter.

Ace squinted at him and then poked at the start button, but the man's fingers missed the tiny button on his phone. With a snort, Jacob took the phone and placed it on the desk before hitting the start button. Several bodies filed in through the open door without an invitation because that was how they worked around there. Nobody's business was sacred. It was one of the reasons Seven hadn't taken Dave up on his job offer.

"No fucking way," Jacob hissed after the small clip of Hunter and Theo played out.

"Put it up on the big screen." Ace ran a hand down Jacob's back as if to calm the agitated operative.

Jacob snatched up the phone, punched at something, and then turned Ace's laptop. Jacob's fingers flew over the keyboard and in seconds, the monitor on the far office wall filled with the hail of bullets and the car chase of Hunter and Theo leaving the Olsen, Hobbs, and Adler mansion.

"What the fuck is going on?" Creed's deep voice growled. Seven hadn't seen the guy come in, which was a note on how distracted he'd become because Creed was hard to miss.

"His name is Theodore Kada," Seven said, pointing to the man in the passenger seat.

Kellum, who'd slipped through the open door and stood next to Jacob, frowned at the screen. "Why does he have a gun on Hunter?"

"The gun is not actually on Hunter. Those two vehicles—" Seven gestured to Jacob to pause it on the two SUVs. "They were after Kada, from what Hunter said."

"I know of Theodore Kada," Link said, his voice ringing out in the sudden silence.

Seven turned toward Link, whose attention was locked on the screen. Seven moved closer and he had to hand it to Link, the slighter man didn't back up one fucking bit. Not many stood their ground when Seven turned toward them.

Link's eyes changed, though—a flat, deadly stare that silently said *come at me, motherfucker, and it will be the last fucking thing you do on Earth.*

Eagle stood to his full height and the big bastard glared at them all. Every single one of them knew if they fucked with either Link or Eagle, they were taking on both. Seven didn't want any trouble with that duo, but he'd be damned if he'd stay silent while Hunter was out there.

"How do you know Theo?" Seven asked Link.

"I said I know *of* him," Link said. "I came across a case file a few years ago."

"A case file?" How the hell did Link come across a case file a few years ago? Hadn't the guy been in the military?

"Yup," Link drawled.

“And you recall this guy’s name?” Seven frowned when Link didn’t elaborate.

“Mhmm,” Link said, remaining stingy with the info.

“How do you remember that shit?” Eagle muttered at Link.

Link snapped Eagle an annoyed look. “Because unlike you, I have a brain.”

Eagle’s face closed up and in the next instant, the big man stalked out of Ace’s office. A muscle ticked in Link’s jaw before he crossed his arms stubbornly and glared at the rest of them.

Ace pointed a finger at Link. “Make it right with him. Half my team is on another job, so I’ll need every person on site on this. So go do it now,” Ace growled, and in the next moment, Link disappeared out the door.

Seven sighed; it sounded like Link had a photographic memory, and that might come in handy. But now they’d gone off topic, damn it. Seven didn’t even want to know what that shit was between Link and Eagle; he had bigger things to handle.

“How the fuck are we going to find them if Hunter doesn’t call?” Fisher asked.

“I know where Hunter is. I put a tracker on his phone,” Seven admitted, and saw the exact moment Ace realized he’d encroached on Hunter’s privacy and possibly any Pegasus related jobs the man had done.

“We are going to talk,” Ace snapped.

“Anytime,” Seven said, clenching his fists.

He didn’t report to Ace, and he had already lost a loved one—he was not going to lose Hunter.

He and Ace stared at each other for a long moment. When Ace seemed to come to some silent decision and relax, Seven let out the breath he was holding. He really did not want to get on Ace’s bad side. Nobody in their right mind did. The commander of Pegasus was not one to fuck with. Ever.

Ace turned his focus on Fisher.

“What?” Fisher said a bit defensively from the look of challenge in Ace’s steel blue eyes.

“I’ll need you on this.”

“I’m here, aren’t I?” Fisher shot back with a glower.

The standoff settled thickly in the room. He didn’t envy Ace’s job. Dealing with Pegasus operatives was like dealing with a bunch of wild fucking animals.

“Knock it off, Fish,” Creed snapped with a scowl, and Fisher glared at the bigger man before he shrugged and propped a shoulder against the wall.

The tension in the room eased a bit.

“What’s the plan?” Seven turned his attention back to Ace.

“That depends.” Ace pulled his gaze from Fisher and zeroed in on Seven. “Are you in?” the man flatly asked.

Seven closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. Fuck. He knew what Ace was asking.

He had a choice.

Join Pegasus or he wasn’t included.

“Babe.” Jacob’s soft murmur drew Ace’s attention and Jacob pointed to the buzzing cell phone on Ace’s desk. Seven got a quick look as the name “SecDef” flashed on the screen before Ace snatched up the phone with a frown.

“Hey, Dave, what’s up?” Ace greeted, turning away from the room. The big man stood with his back to them.

Seven waited along with the rest of the men for Ace to finish the one-sided conversation. Other than greeting Dave, Ace hadn’t said a word.

“Understood. Will do,” Ace murmured, hung up the phone, and turned to face them. “That was the former SecDef. He’s sending in a man who can give us some insight into what’s going on.”

“What *is* going on?” Seven asked.

“Honestly? Dave felt it better coming from this man.”

“Who’s he sending?” Link said.

“Jaxon West.”

Seven frowned. He had no idea who the fuck Jaxon West was, but if he got in his way retrieving Hunter, he'd flatten the man.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Hunter

“Really, Theo, you can put the gun away.”

“I can’t. What if we’re being followed?”

“Look behind us,” Hunter ordered.

Theo glanced out the rear window before he turned around with a sigh and finally tucked the gun away in the side of the door.

“I don’t know what to do,” Theo said for the tenth time.

“I know. I should have gone inside for Seven. He could have helped us.”

“He doesn’t like me,” Theo huffed. “Besides, the men chasing us will put a bullet in his head.”

“Anyone who tries to shoot Seven is a dead man.” Hunter squeezed the steering wheel and took a deep breath before continuing. “And don’t take it personally. Seven doesn’t like anyone.”

“He likes you,” Theo pointed out.

Hunter smiled and eased over into the fast lane. Seven did like him. In fact, they were together—even if Seven was balking. It would only be a matter of time.

Theo sniffed.

“When Seven gets here, you’ll have to come clean.”

Theo turned to look out the passenger window. “He doesn’t know where we are.”

“He’ll show up, trust me.” Hunter knew without a doubt that Seven would find them soon enough.

His lover knew exactly where he was at this very moment via a tracking app on Hunter’s phone that Seven had installed several months ago. Hunter liked the idea that Seven was tracking him, keeping tabs on him. He found it funny as hell that Seven thought he didn’t know about the app. He was a Pegasus operative, and one of the first things they did was check their fucking phone on a daily basis. Of course, Seven had been very skilled at hiding the encroachment; so much so, Hunter had been fucking impressed.

“Tell me who wants to kill you,” Hunter said.

“I don’t actually know,” Theo murmured quietly, gazing out the side window.

“You know enough to know the men after us are killers. What else?”

“I...don’t know.”

He squinted when Theo wouldn’t look at him, a sure sign that he was lying. The guy had a pretty good idea what the fuck was going on, but for some reason, Theo didn’t trust him and that irritated the fuck out of him.

“You don’t know why you were being shot at?” Hunter snapped, squeezing the wheel. “Do you know how ridiculous that sounds?”

“Don’t you think I know that!” Theo charged back, chin tilted, refusing to enlighten him.

And Hunter knew in that moment that the time for holding back was at an end.

“Look, I know about Erebus.”

Theo turned in his seat toward him, face pale, mouth gaping.

“How much do you know?” Theo finally whispered.

“More than you realize.” Hunter rubbed at where his shirt covered the dragon tattooed on his chest—a symbol of the

society.

Theo's fists clenched on his thighs and Hunter felt the man's gaze burning into the side of his head, but he didn't take his eyes from the road.

"How much more?" Theo's voice grew tight.

Hunter blew out a breath. "I know that Erebus Society reports to the former SecDef and has for years."

Theo gasped, his mouth hanging open for a moment before snapping closed. Hunter heard the guy's teeth click together.

"Well, fuck. If you know that, then you know everything," Theo whispered.

"Mhmm."

"How did you find out?" The man's voice sounded bewildered. "About us?"

Hunter tapped the steering wheel. There were only a handful of people on Earth who knew of Hunter's past—including Dave. There were more who didn't know of his past and that included his older brother, Parker, and Seven. Hunter had only kept Parker in the dark to protect him. And he hadn't talked to Seven about his previous employment because frankly, the guy didn't stick around long enough to talk. But fuck it, keeping secrets was no longer an option.

After a moment, he decided to be honest with Theo since he wanted the same in return.

"Let's just say...I've walked your path."

Hunter had Theo's complete attention before the guy gave a bark of laughter. "How did I miss that?"

"It was a long time ago."

"Before or after we met?"

"I left Erebus around the time we met." Hunter avoided answering the question directly and changed lanes to take the nearest exit. After five years of friendship, Theo still knew nothing of Hunter's involvement in his recruitment. Hunter intended to keep it that way. It had all started when the SecDef had approached him to scope out Theodore Kada for a possible

position in Erebus. During Hunter's investigation, he and Theo had become friends. Not best friends by any means, but friends who shared a drink or watched a game on occasion at the local sports bar. At Hunter's recommendation—and unbeknownst to Theo—Hunter had given Dave the green light.

“I can't believe you didn't fucking tell me you are part of Erebus.”

“*Was* part of,” Hunter corrected Theo. “You were coming in as I was opting out. There didn't seem to be any point.”

“Any point? We're friends.”

“Do you tell all your friends what you do for a living?” Hunter turned the tables.

Silence rang in the cab and then Theo sighed. “No. Shit, you're right.”

“Besides, you never told me you were with them,” Hunter pointed out.

“But you knew,” Theo said.

Yes, and so do a handful of other trusted people, but he kept that to himself. Erebus wasn't that far removed from Pegasus and Phoenix. With one or two major differences...where the teams backed up and assisted law enforcement, Erebus didn't. Where Phoenix and Pegasus had rules, Erebus didn't follow rules. Where the units worked as a group, Erebus members worked alone.

The flat-out reality was that Erebus assassins were cold-blooded killers.

Hunter shrugged instead of speaking.

“Okay, okay. I get it.” Theo gave a small huff.

“So, what's going on?” Hunter asked. Now that he'd come clean with Theo, he hoped the guy would do the same.

“We have an internal problem,” Theo murmured.

Hunter frowned. “What's that?”

“It's Malcolm. He took a few murder-for-hire jobs without Solomon knowing,” Theo said in a rush.

Murder for hire jobs usually involved innocents being killed for greed, jealousy, and a whole host of other trivial reasons. The money for those jobs was usually off the charts.

“That doesn’t sound like Malcolm.” Hunter squeezed the steering wheel again.

Had Malcolm changed that much over the years? Maybe. And if he had changed, then it made sense for Dave to call Jaxon.

Hunter still questioned why Theo had come to him, but that could wait.

“Does Dave know about Malcolm?” Hunter said.

“No, I don’t think so, but I told Solomon when I found out. Maybe he called Dave?” Theo crossed his arms and seemed to fold into himself.

Solomon Mercy was one bad ass motherfucker who ran Erebus Society for the SecDef. Although Hunter knew him to be a fair man, if Solomon had proof that Malcolm was taking off-the-books jobs, Malcolm was as good as dead. Hunter rubbed at the sudden ache in his chest. He still couldn’t wrap his head around it.

“How did *you* find out about Malcolm?” Hunter frowned.

“I overheard a guy who does murder for hire. He was bitching one night that Malcolm stole several of his contracts. I went to Solomon.”

Hunter stopped at the traffic light just off the freeway before making a right and continuing into the warehouse district.

“Where are we going?” Theo glanced out the window.

“I know a place we can lay low.”

“Where’s that?” Theo looked suspicious.

“A safe house until we can figure this out.”

Hunter wasn’t sure of anything at this point. All he knew was that Theo had men trying to kill him. Had Malcolm sent them? On the heels of that thought, Hunter wondered how close Solomon was to catching Malcolm. He knew personally that it wouldn’t be easy taking Malcolm down. And he had serious doubts Solomon had the capability to do it alone. There was no

doubt Solomon's skills were excellent, but Malcolm...he was old school. Malcolm could come in the daylight when a person thought they were safe and end it all.

Hunter pulled into a deserted warehouse parking lot a block from the safe house—which was hidden inside another warehouse. He eased through the empty lot and flipped a U-turn before backing into a spot at the end of the building that butted up against a hill with trees. Shutting off the engine, Hunter sat watching their surroundings.

“Theo?”

“Yeah?”

“Why did you really come to see me?”

“Malcolm asked me to.”

“Don't you mean Solomon?”

“No.”

Well fuck, that put a whole other spin on things.



CHAPTER NINE

Seven

The knock on Ace's back office door—the one that came from the outside—had Seven pulling his weapon, aiming it at the door.

Every Pegasus operative pulled out their own guns. Including Eagle and Link, who had rejoined them.

In the next moment, Ace's phone lit up.

“Stand down,” Ace said after checking his phone, and the operatives tucked their weapons away.

Jacob popped a look at the screen and then Ace.

“I'll answer it,” Jacob said, and in two steps was at the door.

Seven didn't take orders from Ace, so he had no intention of lowering his gun when the long haired, tattooed man stepped inside. The guy could have stepped off a rocker's sexiest man of the year calendar. Not only good looking, but he was big and wore leather. Not his type, but Seven could acknowledge the man was attractive.

Blue eyes traveled around the room before landing on him, and Seven's grip tightened on his Glock. He met the guy's stare head on and squinted when the very corner of the man's mouth quirked.

“Hunter's shadow,” the guy murmured.

Seven didn't even twitch; his gun stayed solidly pointed at the man's chest, center mass.

"Jaxon." Link strode across the room and gripped the man's hand. Eagle stayed where he was and gave the stranger a sideways salute.

"Welcome to Pegasus," Ace said, and swung around to the room after Link stepped back. "Men, this is Jaxon West, and he has a pretty good idea of what the hell is going on and what we are up against."

Jaxon shrugged out of his leather jacket and tossed it aside but hadn't taken his gaze from Seven.

"Seven, put the gun away," Ace said.

Seven thought about it for a few seconds but then decided he felt better with his weapon out. "No."

"Seven," Link said. "I can vouch for Jaxon."

Jaxon's lids narrowed when the tension in the room built but Seven didn't give a rat's ass.

"Why you?" Seven asked in the tense-filled room.

"What?" Jaxon frowned and crossed his tattooed arms against his chest, straining the black t-shirt.

"Why out of all these operatives—" Seven waved his weapon, "—would they call you?"

"I would have thought you'd want to know why I called you the shadow." Jaxon smirked.

"You were in the alley."

That surprised Jaxon; it was hard to miss the knee-jerk reaction on the man's handsome face nor the respect filling Jaxon's gaze.

"So I was, but I come in peace. I'm one of the good guys, honest."

"That's good to know, but I don't know you. So again, why did they send you?"

"What I'm going to tell you stays in this room," Jaxon told him before running his eyes over the group. It was quick and probably nothing and nobody else seemed to notice, but Jaxon

held Creed's eyes for just a tiny bit longer and it got the hairs on Seven's neck standing up.

What the fuck was going on?

Link took that moment to move Eagle from the doorjamb and closed Ace's office door. Good damned thing the man's office was massive otherwise Seven would have felt too closed in. At that moment—and because it was beginning to feel like overkill—Seven tucked his weapon away.

“I used to work for an organization called the Erebus Society. They usually report to the current SecDef of the US, who in turn reports to the President. The group was founded over a century ago,” Jaxon said.

“What kind of organization?” Kellum asked, tapping furiously at his computer.

“Assassins.”

“Why haven't we ever heard of them?” Kellum asked, looking up from the keyboard when the rest of the men stayed silent.

“Two reasons that I can think of right off the bat. They're a secret society and they don't always play by societal rules.”

“Erebus...is the personification of darkness and shadow,” Kellum said with his finger on his laptop screen, and all eyes settled on the techie. Kellum blushed. “What? It's from Greek mythology.”

“Okay then,” Seven said, turning back to Jaxon. “You said current SecDef. Is that who they report to now?” He needed to get the hierarchy established.

“No, they report to Dave,” Jaxon said.

Seven wasn't all that surprised; the former SecDef had his fingers in a lot of things.

“When Dave retired,” Jaxon continued, “he offered to stay on as a favor to the President and head up the specialty teams.”

“Specialty, like Pegasus,” Seven said, and it wasn't a question.

“And Phoenix, and Erebus, and—” Jaxon stopped with the list and dropped into silence.

Hell, the US government probably had a plethora of specialty teams to do whatever job was needed, even if that meant outside of the law, but Seven wasn't interested in any other team. All he wanted was to get to Hunter and get this mess cleaned up because frankly, he didn't like it when he couldn't reach Hunter. *That's probably because Hunter has always been there when you have gone looking for him.*

He ignored the voice in his head, but again, the idea that maybe he could stick around more niggled its way in. The not knowing was the worst thing, and his gut clenched. He tugged out his cell phone to check the blinking red dot that would give him some relief.

What the fuck? Hunter's dot showed him to be about twenty minutes from his location. While the blinking light told him that Hunter had stopped driving, it didn't tell him whether or not Hunter was safe. Seven's fingers flew over the text box.

Seven: Check in.

Hunter: Are you at the bunker?

Seven: Yes

Hunter: I'm safe. I'll call in a few minutes, stay put until we talk.

Seven: ...

It took every ounce of his will to *stay put* as Hunter said, but he trusted the man—so he'd do it. At least for now, and only because Hunter was safe. His worry eased, but not the acid feeling in his gut.

“I've got a question.” Eagle raised his hand, and everyone, including Seven, turned to the lounging operative. “Where the hell was Erebus when Ross and Stefano were taken in Aruba?”

Every set of eyes spun back to Jaxon.

“Erebus doesn't get involved in things like that.”

“You mean they don't help people,” Eagle said.

“No. They might inadvertently help by eliminating someone, but that’s just an off chance reward,” Jaxon said.

“Off chance reward,” Eagle murmured with a flat look.

“We didn’t need them,” Link told Eagle. “We were fine in Aruba.”

“True.” Eagle shrugged. “Was just sayin’.”

“So why are you telling us now?” Seven asked, aiming a squinted look at Jaxon. “And how does this involve Hunter and Theodore Kada?”

“Because one of Erebus’ members, Malcolm, has gone rogue. And there’s a possibility that he is after Theo,” Jaxon said.

“Oh, so now they want *our* help,” Eagle snapped, and his big fists squeezed.

Eagle did have a fucking point, and as much as Seven wanted to get back to the topic at hand, he also wanted to hear Jaxon’s answer.

“Look, we wouldn’t be here if one of Erebus hadn’t gone rogue!” Irritation thickened Jaxon’s growling voice.

Seven snorted with disbelief. “They’ve *never* had a member go rogue before?”

Jaxon held his gaze. “I didn’t say that. But this one got away from us.”

A chill swept down Seven’s spine. If Malcolm was trying to kill Theo, that put Hunter in the crosshairs between an assassin and his mark.

Just fucking great.



CHAPTER TEN

Hunter

“Come on.”

Hunter opened his door and stepped out of the SUV.

“What?”

“We’re going the rest of the way on foot.”

“Yeah. Yeah, yeah, you’re right,” Theo said, grabbing his gun and jumping out. “Good idea.”

Hunter honestly wasn’t sure how Theo had made it this long working for the Society. Solomon must have his uses for the hyper man. His main concern was getting Theo into the safe house and calling Seven.

One thing he’d get out of Theo was why the fuck the man had been with Malcolm after finding out that he was taking contracted orders. There were so many unanswered questions, but those could wait until after Hunter had them both secure.

Walking to the rear of the warehouse, he skirted the industrial trashcans and made his way slowly along the back wall.

It was nearing noon, but the area was deserted and the buildings sat empty—the impact of people working from home and the changes in the economy. Pegasus bought the warehouse several months ago and renovated it. Of course, nobody could tell who purchased it on paper because Chief Rossi had buried that

information. As soon as Hunter got them inside, he would call Ace. With most of the team on a job in Colorado, he knew the unit was spread thin right now.

Hunter honestly hoped Seven would come and work for Pegasus. It would be nice to work with the man on ops. At least that way, he'd see Seven more than every few weeks.

Reaching the end of the second building from where he'd parked, he stopped and studied the empty parking spaces between them and the safe house.

All seemed quiet. Good, the last thing he needed was to lead the men after Theo here. Covering the short distance to the side door near the back of the safe house building, he opened a small panel and placed his eye to the screen. After the scanner blinked, Hunter punched in the nine-digit code.

Once inside, he threw the locking mechanism and disarmed the beeping alarm.

“Wow.” Theo gaped as he looked around the massive foyer.

“Yeah, it's something, all right.” Hunter waved a hand. “Pick a unit. There's six.”

The place wasn't like a typical safe house for people. Due to the bombing at the bunker a little over a year ago, this was a place for the unit to use if the bunker ever became compromised again.

From the entryway, eight doors led from the foyer and six of the doors led to fully equipped and stocked apartment units with enough supplies to last a few months if needed. The other two were for meetings and electronics.

Hunter didn't plan on being here for long. He walked to one of the eight doors and did the same with the eye scan and code.

“Where are you going?” Theo asked with his hand on one of the doors.

“To make a call,” Hunter said and entered the comms room. It was huge, with a conference table and a small office set off to the side. He shut the door on Theo and walked to the large desk in the corner. He flipped the switch and the wall monitors came on. Each one showed a different angle of the warehouse, the street out front, and several warehouses down both ways from his

position, and even one out on the main road leading into the area. The state-of-the-art system synced to the cloud as well as provided real-time feed.

He sank down into the black leather chair behind the desk and thought about calling Seven's cell phone, but then decided to call Ace's office phone instead just to kill two birds with one stone.

"Hunter?" It was Jacob who answered.

"Yeah, it's me. Is Seven still there?"

"He's right here," Ace answered this time.

"Hey," Hunter said softly. He could imagine the frown on Seven's face.

"Hey back. You good?" Seven said.

"Yeah, I'm at a safe house. We lost the tail. I have Theo sequestered in one of the units."

"Is Theo talking?" Ace again.

Hunter paused. Just how much could he say? He wasn't even sure that Ace knew about Erebus Society.

"It's complicated. I can't tell you more than that until I know more."

"Hunter? It's Jax."

Okay... telling Pegasus about Erebus would be a whole lot easier with Jaxon there.

"Jax? Did you fill them in?" Hunter asked.

"As much as I could," Hunter knew Jax probably left out a lot.

"Okay. It's better to come at this slowly until we can pinpoint where Malcolm is," Hunter responded carefully.

"I agree," Jaxon said.

"It's your call," Ace told Jaxon, which surprised the hell out of Seven.

"Slowly? What the hell?" Seven snapped.

"Seven, stand down," Ace growled.

“Screw this. I’m not standing down.” Seven snapped the words and then a door slammed. Hunter wasn’t sure if it slammed open or closed.

“Seven?”

“He’s gone,” Ace muttered.

“It’s okay, he’s on his way to me,” Hunter said.

“So...” Jacob spoke this time. “You know he has a tracker on your phone?”

“Give me some credit.” Hunter smirked. “I knew it the day he put it on there.”

“My bad,” Jacob snickered.

“Hey, Jax?”

“He left the room after Seven along with Eagle and Link,” Ace told Hunter with a frustrated sigh.

“So, we should probably get a small op together,” Hunter said.

“I’ll send everybody I have available to your location,” Ace said.

Hunter smothered his sigh. Involving the unit wasn’t the way he wanted this to go, but at least he knew the way Pegasus worked—they moved as one while Erebus worked alone. The only thing Hunter could do was make sure Pegasus knew what they were up against.

“Make sure they’re discrete. I mean, moving like fucking shadows. And for the love of God, do not call Parker.” No way in hell did Hunter want his older brother involved in any of this.

Parker had been the chief of police of Ventura County... Hunter could only imagine what Parker would think if he found out about his past. As far as his brother knew, he had done mercenary bodyguard type work.

Ace snorted. “I’m smarter than that.”

“Hang on, Ace,” Hunter said when he caught movement on the monitors.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Seven

Out in the parking lot, Seven made his way to the Jag and slipped behind the wheel.

He'd take care of this shit on his own. He didn't need nor want Pegasus' help. Or that tool, Jaxon West.

Out of habit, he flipped the lock on the car's doors. It would be just like Link to try and slip inside. Just about that time, the man in question tapped on his window.

"Let me in, Seven."

"No." He held the man's gaze through the slightly tinted windows.

"Open the door."

Damn it. He clenched his jaw and studied Link for a long moment. Jaxon walked up and stood beside Link.

Well, fuck.

It wouldn't be a bad idea to have at least a little help. Would it? It wasn't like he could say he didn't have the room.

Seven flipped the locks and both men slipped inside.

Seven snorted when Link, from the passenger seat, threw the locks once Jaxon was enclosed in the back.

"Just in case," Link smirked.

“Of what?” Jaxon said.

“I’m being followed.”

Jaxon snorted. “By who?”

Seven grunted. “Link’s always being followed.”

Link frowned, glanced around, and then spotted Eagle standing at the back door of the bunker. The big man was leaning against the wall, his eyes locked on them.

“Yeah, I suppose I am,” Link said softly, and Seven thought he spotted a small smile on the man’s mouth before the phone rang.

Seven lifted a finger to his lips and then answered the call via the overhead speakers.

“What did you find out?”

His friend sighed. “Theodore Kada works for something called Erebus.”

He could have heard a pin drop when Ice’s words rang out in the vehicle.

Seven turned in his seat to hold Jaxon’s gaze. That was a tidbit of information that Jaxon hadn’t shared. Oh sure, he shared that Malcolm was after Theo, but not that Theo worked for Erebus.

“What else?”

“Something’s going on over there. I’m not sure what. I put in a call to the guy who runs it, but I’d stay clear if I were you,” Ice said.

Jaxon’s mouth opened, but Seven held up a finger for silence and Jaxon kept quiet.

“Do I even want to know how you know the guy who runs a group of assassins?”

The silence was abrupt and so quiet, Seven imagined he could hear his own heartbeat.

“How the fuck do you know what they do?” Ice’s voice changed, and Seven squinted at Jaxon before tossing Link a glance.

“Let’s just say...they aren’t as secret as they think they are.”

After a long moment, Ice finally spoke. “Look, you stay away from Erebus. They’re into some really dark shit.” Ice hesitated, and then his friend seemed to come to an entirely different conclusion. “On second thought...You might want to think about hiring them once you find out about Lisa.”

“Maybe.” Seven damned sure wasn’t going to let someone else have the pleasure of killing Lisa’s killer.

“I need to know what went down recently and how Theo Kada is caught up in all this.”

“I don’t know if I can give you all the answers,” Ice growled.

“Get me what you can,” Seven said.

“I’ll try, but it’s going to cost you.”

“Name it.”

“I’m in on whatever the fuck is going on.”

“Who says anything is going on?” he murmured.

“I know you. You always have some shit going on. Besides, if this Erebus is involved, it’s going to get ugly,” Ice said.

“How do you know that?”

“Let’s just say...I know a guy,” Ice said flatly and ended the call.

Seven clenched his teeth and flipped his gaze to Jaxon in the rearview mirror. “What exactly happened with Theo Kada?”

Jaxon sighed and looked out the window before turning back to them both. “That’s something I need to find out. Right now, my bigger concern is finding Malcolm and Solomon.”

“I think you’re not telling us everything,” Seven said at the mention of a new name. “What are you holding back?”

A muscle ticked in Jaxon’s jaw. “I’m going to tell you something that you’ll keep to yourselves.”

“The only other person I’d tell is at a safe house,” Seven pointed out. And it was true. Hunter was the only guy he’d share any type of secret with.

“Hey.” Link shrugged. “I’m a fence post.”

“A fence post?” Seven shot Link a frowning glance. “What the fuck does that have to do with anything?”

“Fence posts don’t talk.” Link smirked and Seven rolled his eyes at the smartass.

“Yeah, yeah, okay well...” Jaxon said. “After Malcolm is eliminated, Dave wants a clean sweep. He’ll be looking at replacing Theo and Solomon.”

“Who exactly is Solomon?” Seven asked.

“The head of Erebus.”

“So, what...” Link squinted at Jaxon like he’d grown a second head. “Dave wants to fire them?”

“He wants them retired.”

Seven put two and two together—there was retired in normal society terms and then there was retired in hitman terms.

“I assume Dave’s not going to offer them severance packages,” Seven said dryly.

Jaxon rubbed his mouth. “As far as Dave is concerned, Solomon has lost control of Erebus. That can’t be allowed.”

“And what is Theo then, collateral damage?” Link snapped.

“A loose end,” Jaxon murmured.

“For fuck’s sake...” Link’s voice trailed off like he wanted to say something more about all that but then wasn’t sure what to say.

Seven could fucking relate; he was kind of speechless himself.

“Is that what you do to all your ex-hitmen, kill them?” he managed.

Jaxon gave Seven an impatient look. “No, only the ones who can’t be trusted. Look...” Jaxon continued, “Erebus operates on the fringes of society. Their orders come down from the President. Anyone who can’t be trusted needs to be neutralized.”

“Is that why you were called?” Seven said.

Jaxon nodded.

Holy fuck. Was Jaxon a cleaner? Bodyguard by day, assassin's assassin by night?

“So where is Solomon now?” Link asked.

Jaxon pulled a hand down the hair on his face, looking thoughtful for a moment before he spoke. “He seems to have disappeared.”

“So, he could be anywhere,” Seven suggested.

“Mmm,” Jaxon said, and Seven wasn't sure if that was a yes or no.

A conversation Seven had had with Dave last year came to mind, and now it all made sense. Dave had asked him if he wanted to join Phoenix. The man's exact words were: *Come join Phoenix, Pegasus, or something else*. That *something else* may very well have been the Erebus Society...or another type of unit. Seven imagined Dave had multiple covert teams.

Knuckles rapped sharply on the glass and Seven jumped.

Link made a sound in his throat and growled. “Son of a bitch!” Link rolled down the window for Eagle and the bigger man bent at the waist and folded his arms on the open window frame.

Kellum hovered behind Eagle.

“What?” Link snapped, glaring at Eagle.

Owen, Creed, and Fisher spilled out of the building geared up, carrying extra gear and weapons bags.

“We're heading out,” Eagle said. “You coming?”

“You can follow us.” Link pushed the button and started rolling up the window, forcing Eagle to back up or get pinched by the glass.

Someone must have been watching because the security gate snapped open and Seven pulled through the opening, sending the SUV's tires squealing on the asphalt.

He'd wasted enough time on this shit; all he wanted now was to get to Hunter. He punched the gas.

Link reached for the handle overhead and braced one leg to keep from slamming into the door when Seven took the corner.

“You don’t want to get pulled over,” Link pointed out.

“Who says I’d stop?” Seven growled just as he flew down the access road. He wasn’t going to risk the traffic on the freeway when he knew a back road that would take him to Hunter’s location.

His mind raced. They still needed to find out why Theo had sought out Hunter. And what was Hunter’s involvement in all this Erebus business?

The possible answer to the last question made Seven’s chest squeeze.



CHAPTER TWELVE

Hunter

Leaving Ace waiting, Hunter shoved back from the desk and slammed out of the comms room.

Striding across the hallway to the suite Theo had chosen, he pushed the partially closed door open.

“You’ve got a tracker on you.”

“What?” Theo turned from the mini bar with wide eyes.

“They found the SUV.”

“Fuck!” Theo yanked out his phone and emptied his pockets on the brown bedspread.

“Jesus Christ, Theo! How the fuck have you lasted this long with Erebus?” Hunter snapped and yanked up the man’s wallet. He started tearing out items and tossing them to the bed—ID, credit cards, insurance cards, and receipts.

“I kind of haven’t.”

At Theo’s whispered confession, Hunter stopped what he was doing and gave the guy his full attention.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve been helping Malcolm.”

“What the fuck?” Hunter gaped. “You’ve been taking contract jobs?”

“No! I haven’t been in the field or taking any jobs,” Theo insisted.

Okay...it took a moment to wrap his head around what Theo was trying to say. So, Theo never took on jobs for Erebus, or anyone else for that matter? Malcolm must have seen the same thing Hunter did at this moment—Theo wasn’t cut out to be a killer. Hunter only wished he’d seen it before he’d recommended Theo to Dave in the first place.

“How have you been helping Malcolm?”

“I set up the jobs and um...finalize the transactions.”

“Does Solomon know?”

“Yeah, he said that was fine.” Theo’s head tilted in thought. “It was just after you left, right when I came on. Solomon said he no longer wanted that part of the job anyway.”

So, what the fuck did Solomon actually do, Hunter wondered.

“Let me get this straight, you’re both the contact and the money man for Erebus?”

“Yes.”

Hunter lifted Theo’s phone from the bed and checked it for any type of device or app. It came out clean and he handed it to Theo.

“Get Solomon on the phone.”

Theo stood with the phone in his hand.

Hunter lifted each credit card from the bed until he found one with a patch of something pasted to the back. He dug at it with his fingernail until the small tracking device came free. Taking it to the sink, he placed it beneath running water and then broke it into pieces to be on the safe side before striding from the room.

Entering the comms room again, he lifted the phone.

“Ace?”

“I’m here.”

“We’ve been compromised.”

“I’m sending the unit now,” Ace said and ended the call.

Hunter turned to the wall of monitors where his SUV had its doors wide open. With the broken driver's window, it would be an easy breach. It would only be a matter of time before they were located.

Damn it. He was fucking slipping. A few years ago, he wouldn't have brought Theo here without searching for a tracking chip.

"Do you know any of these men?" Hunter pointed to the screen and Theo, hovering at the door, moved in to take a closer look.

"I've seen them before," Theo whispered.

"Get Solomon on the phone," he said for the second time.

"I can't." Theo rubbed his knuckles against his mouth, staring at the monitor where the SUV's doors stood wide open.

"What aren't you telling me?"

"The last thing Malcolm said before Solomon found us was to have zero contact. Malcolm said to call you and you'd know what to do."

"Now you need to tell me why you were with Malcolm and not with Solomon."

"Because after I told Solomon what I'd overheard, I realized that Malcolm wouldn't have done that! He just wouldn't. So, I told Solomon that, but he didn't want to listen."

Hunter gaped at Theo. "You could have told me that in the fucking car, Theo, instead of your 'I don't know,' bullshit. You made me think that Malcolm had gone rogue."

"Well, he may have!" Theo snapped. "I don't really know."

"But it was you who overheard the guy talking about Malcolm taking those jobs," Hunter reminded the man.

"I know." Theo nodded, guiltily wringing his hands. "But it's Malcolm, Hunter."

He knew how Theo felt. To think that a man he admired and respected had gone off the rails wasn't sitting well.

"Okay...so you went to Solomon and told him you thought Malcolm was innocent and then what?"

“Solomon shut me out, so I went to Malcolm.”

“And that’s when Solomon found you two together,” Hunter probed.

“His men found us, yes,” Theo whispered.

Solomon had men? The head of Erebus having a crew at his disposal was news to Hunter, but he kept that to himself. Theo’s story sounded a bit sketchy. If Malcolm was innocent, then why run? Although, with a hitman’s squad after you, you may run and ask questions later.

“So, you do know who is trying to kill you.” He glared at Theo, who looked away guiltily. “How’d you get away?” he continued when Theo didn’t say anything.

“I’d only just gotten there a few seconds before those men arrived, and Malcolm shoved me through the bathroom window of the motel so I could run. He thought it better to split up.”

Fuck. That sounded just like Malcolm to do something like that.

“Did Malcolm tell you he was innocent?” Hunter said.

“In the seconds I was with him, I never got a chance to ask him. I don’t know the truth! And now Solomon thinks I’m involved with whatever Malcolm was doing. And Malcolm probably thinks that I led Solomon to him!”

Theo was caught in a no-win situation between two highly trained killers.

“Has Malcolm tried to contact you since?” Hunter squinted.

“No. He’s gone dark. They’ve all gone dark.” Theo gulped. “And I need to tell you about the money.”

A movement on the monitor caught Hunter’s attention. The men were growing near to their location. Even though the bug was destroyed, it would have shown Theo’s last location.

The question of whatever money Theo was talking about could wait.

Hunter yanked open the desk drawer, pulled a key, and walked to the armory cabinet on the wall. He unlocked the box

and placed his eye to the scanner. The hidden door popped open to reveal a weapons room.

“Stay here,” Hunter told Theo.

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to prevent them from finding our location.”

“But what if they were sent by Solomon and I get dead?” Theo’s teeth worried his bottom lip.

“They won’t get close enough.”



Going out in daylight wasn’t always the best course of action, but Hunter was very good at what he did. He had swapped out his coat with a grungy black overcoat he’d snatched from one of the pegs in the weapons room.

The larger coat hid the Taran Tactical Innovations TR-1 Ultralight rifle. The weapon had a thirteen-inch forearm with a Bravo Company mod, BCM, pistol grip, and was equipped with a sound suppressor. Let’s just say the weapon was a badass motherfucker. Tucked at his other side was a Glock 34 with the combat master package with a similar suppressor. He preferred a Glock 26, but this longer version would do in a pinch.

Hunter had thought about using the Microtech Cypher OTF knife he had strapped to his leg but figured he’d pull that out if things got up close and personal.

Instead of walking behind the building’s structure, Hunter headed into the thick trees and foliage that covered the tall hill behind the building. From beneath nature’s cover, he worked his way toward the perps. The security camera had shown the same five from the mansion on the monitor—three in one SUV and two from the other. He’d think about getting rid of the vehicles later.

His plan was to stay hidden and pick off as many of them as possible.

Reaching a higher vantage point, he settled on the ground, took position, and lifted the rifle’s scope to his eye. Slowly, he

scanned the area. It took a bit before he found a target. Two of the men were walking behind the neighboring warehouse, guns out, dressed in dark clothing. Both men were loaded for bear. Releasing his breath, Hunter picked off one and then the other.

He moved then, keeping to the high tree line. Shoving through the underbrush, he was able to see the edge of the building where he'd parked his SUV. As he'd suspected, the door to the neighboring warehouse stood open. He wouldn't be entering after them. With two down and three to go, he wouldn't need to go inside, they'd come out when the other perps didn't return their radio calls. It really was a waiting gam—

The buzz of his cell phone cut off his thoughts and he glanced at the text.

Seven: Don't shoot me. I'm behind you.

Hunter smirked and tucked his phone away before he slightly turned.

“You make a tempting target,” Hunter told the sexy man.

Seven snorted from his three o'clock; the guy stood close but not too close. How the fuck had Seven managed to get several feet from him without his knowing? Fuck, he really must be slipping.

“How'd you do that?” he muttered quietly.

“I moved when you moved,” Seven said just as quietly, gesturing to the crunchy undergrowth of branches and leaves. Just the sound of the man's voice sent Hunter's heart racing.

“Talented,” he goaded.

“You have no idea,” Seven rasped, finally reaching him. The man's hand wrapped at his nape and yanked him close.

Hunter leaned his forehead against Seven's, and they stayed that way for several moments. He drank in every fucking inch of Seven, and for the first time in hours, he felt whole. Seven's breath became harsh and the man's beard scratched against his face and neck. Sliding one hand to Seven's hip, Hunter pulled the man closer.

A crunch in the underbrush had Hunter lifting his free arm and weapon in the direction of the noise, only to have his hand

pushed down by Seven.

“They’re friendly,” Seven murmured against his jaw, and that was when Hunter saw them.

Link, with Owen slightly behind him, were coming through the trees. While the two men moved quietly, they weren’t as silent as Seven. Link and Owen wouldn’t have gotten as close to Hunter as Seven had.

Both men were dressed in black tactical, military grade gear. They looked like a couple of ninjas—come to think of it, Seven was wearing the same thing.

Had Seven made a decision? Before he could voice the obvious question, his attention was caught by the movement in the parking lot. One man had come out of the warehouse and Fisher stood over the body.

“Fisher took care of the one you missed.” Owen jerked his chin toward Fisher.

“And Eagle and Creed went to the safe house,” Link added.

“Theo doesn’t know them.” Hunter shook his head and yanked out his phone. Just as he was sending a text, he received one.

Theo: HELP!

“Looks like they’re there,” Hunter said before responding to Theo’s text.

Hunter: They’re friendlies.

Theo: I don’t think so, they are wearing masks.

“Wait... there was more than one more perp, there were three of them!” Hunter growled at Owen. “Are Eagle and Creed wearing masks?”

“Fuck no,” Link responded with a snort as if the idea was ludicrous.

“Shit,” Hunter said and shot a text to Theo as he ran through the trees and back toward the building.

Hunter: Hide!

There was no response from Theo, but Hunter wasn’t worried. The safe house was like a fortress; there was no way

inside to get to Theo as long as the guy stayed put. Not unless Eagle or Creed opened the door.

“Jaxon West is with Eagle and Creed,” Seven said, running at his side.

Yeah, having Jaxon there would help. The ex-assassin’s skills were unparalleled, but Hunter still hoped like hell that Theo did as he was told and stayed inside. One thing was for sure, he was fiercely glad that Seven was once again at his side.

And with Pegasus on the job, they’d have this shit wrapped up in no time.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Seven

As he ran, Seven tugged at the collar of his black, skintight, long-sleeved shirt.

Earlier, when they'd met up just shy of the block where the safe house was located, Owen had thrust a bundle into his arms, along with pants Seven was sure were Eagle's. They were roughly the same size. Seven now wore the same garb as the other Pegasus members—black shirt and pants.

He knew what the offering of gear meant. They'd accepted him as one of their own. They also expected him to give Ace an answer when this was all over. Granted, he did feel less exposed in the dark clothing, but he'd be damned if he'd be forced into working for Pegasus.

It would be his own choice.

“Creed, Eagle, copy?” Link's voice kept repeating into the earpiece.

Seven caught Hunter's arm and pulled the impatient man to a stop. When Hunter swung around on him, Seven held out the small comms device. Sheepishly, Hunter tucked it into his ear before sprinting forward again.

Seven suspected that he and Hunter had a fuck ton to talk about, but it would all have to wait until they had some down time. And he'd make damned sure they had that down time.

Reaching the line of trees that sat parallel to the safe house, they spotted one man holding a gun on Creed, who didn't look too happy, if the scowl on his face was any indication.

Fisher came up just as fast as they had to the warehouse. The guy was super fucking quick. Seven had run into Fisher several times while tracking Pegasus from the shadows. They'd recognized something in each other—that they both wanted the same thing. Fish wanted to keep Pegasus safe, and while Seven did care about Pegasus, his main focus had been on Hunter. From that point on, it wasn't unusual to find them both lurking in the same shadows, and on occasion, they'd backed each other up.

“Shit!” Hunter hissed, catching his attention. “The door's fucking open!”

“How the fuck did they get inside?” Link muttered and lifted the M16 in his hands. With one shot, Link put a bullet in the man holding the gun on Creed. The round punched a hole in the guy's chest and Creed sidestepped to avoid the spray of blood.

Hunter sprang forward and Seven stayed on the man's six. Together, they left the safety of the trees and sprinted across the parking lot to the safe house.

Lifting a hand to press the earpiece, Link snapped, “Eagle, you better fucking answer me.”

Silence was the only response.

“Creed, where's Eagle?” Owen asked this time as they grew near.

Creed lifted his gun from the ground and jerked his head toward the open door before checking the clip on the weapon. “Inside with Jaxon.”

“How'd the door get open?” Hunter asked.

“Two fuckers came up on me after Eagle and Jaxon went inside.” Creed grimaced.

“Okay, let's plan—

Owen's game plan speech was cut off when Link disappeared inside the open door of the safe house.

“Yeah, Sport,” Seven said. “You stay here and plan.”

He didn't wait for Owen's response, instead following Link into the building. Hunter was at his back and behind Hunter came Owen. Creed opted to stay outside and remain guarding the door.

Hunter slapped at a kill switch on the wall just inside the building and the lights and power went out.

"Fuck," Link hissed, but didn't complain further.

They all knew it was better to move through the dark than it was to get picked off one by one in the light. It took moments for Seven's eyes to adjust. Hunter fiddled with the wall and then pulled open the small door of a hidden cabinet. He took out several things, one of which he handed to him and then the others. They were flash grenades.

"There's only one more perp, right?" Seven murmured.

"Yeah."

He could barely make out Hunter's nod.

"Do you think they called backup?" Seven whispered, placing the grenade in his pocket.

"Maybe? I'm not sure," Hunter responded just as quietly.

Link and Owen melted into the darkness and Seven would have done the same, but he felt compelled to stay with Hunter. He needn't have bothered, though. Hunter eased through the dark just as easily as the others, and Seven's respect for Hunter's skills increased. He had a pretty damned good idea of just how Hunter had acquired his skills, and as much as Hunter shared Pegasus stuff with him, there was a shit ton the man kept hidden.

Even though Seven's eyes were adjusted, Hunter was hard to follow, and Seven's heart skipped a beat when he momentarily lost sight of the man in the large foyer-type entryway. Calming his breathing, he stilled and swept his gaze over the darkest areas, the blackness where danger lingered, and it was there that he found his quarry. Hunter was creeping up to a black gaping doorway. Silently, Seven made his way closer. When Hunter crouched, Seven sank to his hunches beside the man.

Snick, snick.

A silencer echoed in the dark and they waited a few more moments until the quiet was broken.

“You asshole.” Link’s hiss came from inside the dark room.

“Clear,” Eagle mumbled.

Hunter stood and raced back across the room to deactivate the kill switch and the lights and power came back on simultaneously.

Seven stepped into the open doorway to find Link crouched in front of Eagle, who was sitting on the floor, leaning against the edge of the bed. A dead perp sprawled face down on the carpet with a bullet in the back of his head. Theo Kada was sitting on top of the bed with his knees pulled to his chest, rocking, eyes wide on Jaxon, who had a gun pointed at Theo.

Hunter placed a hand on Seven’s shoulder and eased past him and into the room, going straight to Theo.

“You okay?” Hunter shouldered past Jaxon.

“Yeah.” Theo gulped and Hunter turned to Eagle.

“What happened?”

“It was my bad,” Eagle grumbled. “I wasn’t paying attention and Jaxon had his weapon tucked away while he interrogated Theo.”

“You’re trained better than that,” Link snapped with a hot glare of anger at Eagle. The fingers Link had in Eagle’s hair told a different story. They moved softly through the strands and Eagle closed his eyes.

Link suddenly sat back on his haunches. Eagle’s eyes popped open and Link glared. “You have an egg-sized knot on your head.”

“I’ll live,” Eagle smirked.

“Take that smirk off your face or I’ll wipe it off,” Link snapped.

“You can try,” Eagle responded silkily.

“I was going to pull and shoot the bastard when the lights went out,” Jaxon said with annoyance.

“So, what, like...gunfight at the O.K. Corral?” Hunter rolled his eyes.

“*I’ll be your huckleberry,*” Jaxon said with a smirk.

Seven's blood boiled and he stalked over to Hunter near the bed before sliding his arm around Hunter's shoulders—Seven gave Jaxon a flat, dead stare.

“Knock it off,” Owen said from the open doorway. “We’ve got to make a plan. We don’t know how long we have until their backup gets here.”

Link shoved away from Eagle as if a hot poker had stuck him in the butt and stalked out of the room. Seven moved from Hunter and held out a hand to Eagle. After a moment, Eagle caught his grip and let himself be pulled to his feet.

“You good?” Owen asked when Eagle swayed.

“Yeah,” Eagle said. “I have a hard head...ask Link.”

“I’d like to know who put you in charge,” Hunter said, squinting at Owen.

Seven stilled. It wasn’t like Hunter to be confrontational. He was more of a *go with the flow* type of guy. This new side of Hunter was surprising albeit sexy as fuck.

“Ace did. You have a problem with that, then take it up with him,” Owen growled and stalked from the room.

“Making friends left and right I see,” Seven murmured.

Hunter squinted at him. “You guys don’t know what the fuck you’re dealing with here.”

“Then enlighten us,” Eagle cut in.

Seven wasn’t backing up from Hunter’s anger. Yeah, it hurt like hell that Hunter had secrets, but there was no way he was letting Hunter push him away.

He wanted to hear all of Hunter’s secrets.

Ignoring the others in the room, Seven lightly gripped Hunter’s wrist.

“Talk to me.”



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Hunter

Well, shit.

Now what?

Being silent was ingrained in him. It very well meant the difference between life or death. Had Jaxon shared everything, including Hunter's involvement?

Of course, that didn't matter; it was time to tell Seven everything.

"You." Hunter pointed a finger at Jaxon. "Are you going to use that on him?" He finished with a jerk of his head toward Theo.

After a long, tense moment, Jaxon tucked his gun away. Theo deflated on the bed with a huge sigh, hugging one of the pillows to his chest.

"Come on," Hunter said and reversed the grip on Seven's wrist to lead him into the wide kitchen of Theo's unit.

The men all filed in after the door was once again secure. They took seats around the conference table that had been designed to accommodate a large group.

Hunter took note of all who were there—Seven, Owen, Link, Eagle, Jaxon, Creed, Theo, and Kellum—and mentally calculated

their individual skills ranging from zero to a shit ton. But why had Ace sent Kellum?

“What are you doing here?” Hunter asked.

“I’m your tech support.” Kellum waggled his fingers and placed three laptops on the table before popping open one. Talk about overkill?

But having Kellum there did make sense and Hunter was suddenly glad for the help. “Can you get into the perps’ phones and find out if they’ve contacted anyone for backup?”

“Sure, bring them to me,” Kellum said, and Creed disappeared along with Owen. Theo got up and started a pot of coffee.

Hunter tapped his fingers on the table, opened his mouth to speak, and then closed it. He was saved from speaking when Creed and Owen returned to dump the cell phones on the table next to Kellum.

They collectively watched as the techie went through each phone. By that time, the coffee was done, and Hunter thought he might have a hole drilled in his head from Seven’s hard gaze.

“No communications have gone out,” Kellum said into the silence.

“You’re positive?” Hunter asked.

Kellum snorted and gave him an *are you kidding me* look.

“Okay.” Hunter smirked and nodded.

The information gave them an edge.

“All right, spill it. What the hell is going on?” Seven pushed, aiming those ocean-colored eyes at him.

“Where’s Fisher?” Hunter said instead.

Owen squinted at him. “He’s outside taking care of the bodies. He won’t be joining us. He feels safer outside, and frankly, I feel safer having him out there.”

Hunter turned to Jaxon. “What did you tell them?”

“Just the bare minimum.” Jaxon shrugged.

“All right. I need to make a call and then I’ll try to tell you what you want to know,” Hunter said carefully, ignoring the muscle that suddenly ticked in Seven’s jaw.

“I’ll make some food,” Theo announced and started pulling stuff from the fridge.

Hunter took out his cell phone and dialed Dave’s number. If shit was coming out about Erebus, he wanted Dave to fucking do it. It was out of the norm for him and Dave to speak. After he’d left Erebus, Dave and he had agreed to act like they didn’t know each other until they were “officially” introduced through Pegasus. It had worked, for a while. That time was over.

“Hunter?”

“Yeah, it’s me.”

“I need an update,” Dave said.

“From what I know, Malcolm broke the code and Solomon thinks Theo is in with Malcolm and is after them both. Theo says both he and Malcolm are innocent. Malcolm sent Theo to me. I don’t know if Solomon caught Malcolm yet or not.”

“Did Seven show up?” Dave’s question hit him out of left field.

“Mhmm.” Hunter’s eyes shot to Seven.

“I was hoping that was the case. Are you alone?”

Hunter looked around the room. “Ah...that would be a no.”

“Who all is there?”

When Hunter stated the names of each man in the room, every single one of them looked at him. Hunter kept his gaze calm and cool.

“I need you to tell them what’s going on,” Hunter said, looking directly at Seven. The man’s face was a stone mask and it worried Hunter. Would they ever recover from his secrecy and lies of omission?

“Put me on speaker,” Dave said.

“Better yet, I’ll put you on a video call. Hold on.” Hunter nodded to Kellum.

A few moments later, Kellum turned the laptop to the room and the screen popped and shimmered before clearing to show Dave.

Dave sat behind a desk in his office. At the sight of the former SecDef, several of the guys straightened in their chairs and gave their full attention to the man.

“Jaxon?”

“Sir?” Jaxon stepped into view.

“I’m glad you’re there,” Dave said, and all eyes in the room went from the laptop to the long-haired bodyguard. “How much have you told them?”

“As much as I could,” Jaxon admitted. “No sense in having them in the dark about everything. I doubt any of them will talk.”

“Damn right we won’t talk.” Owen sounded affronted.

“It wasn’t meant as a slight,” Jaxon growled.

Once the room grew quiet, all eyes turned back to Dave.

“I had hoped to never have this conversation with anyone in your unit, but I’ll tell you what I told Ace an hour ago,” Dave said with a sigh. “Erebus Society has been a well-kept secret way before Phoenix was even a thought—”

“Not so much a secret,” Link interrupted.

Eagle scowled at Link, who rubbed at the back of his own head beneath the disapproving look.

“Sorry, Sir,” Link murmured.

“I understand your frustration, Link. You knew of Erebus from previous encounters.”

“What? How did you know?” Theo gaped at Link.

“I had encounters with a few of them back in my Fury days,” Link said with a shrug.

“You what?” Eagle sounded like he was strangling on the words. “I thought you said you ran across a case file?”

“It was both. A case file and a few run-ins,” Link clarified, leaving out the fact that he’d lied earlier by omission, but then Link had been under a gag order about any ops Fury had done.

The Army Special Ops unit was a three-man specialty team of Dave's consisting of Link, Eagle, and one other soldier.

"Where was I?" Eagle said.

Link rubbed at the hair on his chin, ignoring Eagle's question, and turned his eyes instead back to the monitor.

"But you already knew I knew that I had a run in with some of them," Link told Dave.

"I did."

"Then you also remember that the murder charges in those instances miraculously disappeared."

"Yes. And all I can say is that the people eliminated by Erebus were done so by orders above my pay grade."

Hunter glanced at Seven and found himself pinned like a bug beneath a microscope. Hunter wanted to move closer to Seven, but he stayed at the head of the table.

There was a reason Malcolm had sent Theo to him.

Five years ago, there had been three men in the running to replace Malcolm as the head of Erebus Society. Solomon had been one, Jaxon two, and Hunter had been the third.

Solomon had won fair and square by outwitting them both. If anything happened to Solomon, Hunter knew that Dave would approach him or Jaxon to fill the spot. It would be a futile effort on Dave's part, because there was no way in hell Hunter wanted anywhere near that way of life again. They would have to choose Jaxon.

"So, what you're saying is that the Erebus Society is a hit squad for the Oval Office?" Link said, who appeared to have some lingering anger over the past.

"If you want to put it that way," Dave said calmly.

"What other way is there to put it?" Link snapped and then let out a deep sigh when Eagle glared again.

"There really isn't any other way to put it, Link. We do what we have to do to keep this country safe," Dave said. "It takes a particular set of skills to work within Erebus. And sometimes that

means taking a chance on hiring someone who exists on the fringes.”

“Like Malcolm,” Hunter said.

“Yes,” Dave agreed. “Malcolm was recruited by me, and I saw the darkness, but I hired him anyway.”

“He used to be our leader,” Jaxon murmured, taking a seat.

“What?” Link said.

“Malcolm, he used to lead Erebus,” Jaxon said and calmly folded his hands on the table.

“Theo overheard a conversation that Malcolm was taking contracted work, but how solid is that information?” Hunter asked into the sudden silence.

“It’s solid, Hunter.” Dave sighed. “There’s a money trail and trips that correspond to each hit.”

Well, fuck. That must have been the money Theo had wanted to tell him about. So, Malcolm had turned. In truth, Hunter had seen the darkness in Malcolm. It was one of the reasons Hunter hadn’t been surprised when Malcolm had stepped down.

“So, Solomon is after Malcolm, or hell, he could have killed Malcolm by now,” Hunter said.

“What about me?” Theo said during the slight pause in conversation.

Silence filled the room when Dave didn’t answer Theo. That was when Hunter noticed Dave glance away. That wasn’t like the SecDef at all. What the fuck was going on?

Owen pointed at Jaxon. “You said this wasn’t the first time someone has gone rogue,” he said, changing the subject.

“Last time we had someone go rogue we handled it in house,” Jaxon said at Dave’s continued silence. “That changed when Theo sought out Hunter.”

“Cut the *we* bullshit. Call them what they are,” Link barked. “Fucking assassins.”

“Do you need to take a walk?” Dave finally snapped out of whatever the fuck was keeping him quiet. His growl to Link

came through the video feed loud and fucking clear and the meaning was crystal—*get your shit together*.

Link clenched his fists and then released a long, quiet breath before he shook his head.

Hunter cleared his throat, gaining the attention of the room and Dave. “What do you need from us?” Hunter hadn’t missed that Dave hadn’t answered Theo and neither had his friend. Big eyes caught and held his before Theo turned back to making food, his shoulders hunched.

“I need you to find Solomon and Malcolm,” Dave said. “And bring them to me.”

“Dead or alive?” Hunter asked.

“Either.”

Hunter looked around the room, meeting each man’s gaze. “If anyone has a problem with this order, speak now. It won’t be held against you. You can pack up your gun and head back home. Except for you, Theo. You’re not going anywhere.”

Theo, who’d turned with the can of beans in his hands, gave a quick, jerky nod. The man’s thick, dark lashes were wet with held back tears.

“Like hell I’ll go back home,” Seven snarled, and Hunter pulled his eyes from Theo to Seven.

Hunter fought a rising smile. *Ah yes...there’s my warrior.*

“Anyone else?” Hunter swept his eyes around the room.

Nobody said a fucking word, not even Jaxon, although the guy was giving him a humorous look.

Hunter turned his eyes to the video feed. “There’s your answer, Dave.”

“Good. I put in a call to Stone.”

“No fucking way!” Creed slammed up and out of his chair.

Kellum’s head snapped up at the man’s outburst, the techie’s fingers hovering over a second laptop he’d opened a few minutes prior.

“Creed?” Dave said softly.

Creed clenched his fists at his sides and then released a hissing breath before turning reluctantly to the former SecDef.

“Sir?”

“If there was any other way, I’d go another route,” Dave responded, and nobody said a word.

The men in the room seemed to hold their breaths.

“Jaxon?” Dave said.

“Yes?”

“Call me. To the rest of you, I’ll be in touch. Until then, Jaxon and Hunter are in charge.”

The line went dead and nobody moved other than Theo, who continued putting what looked to be chili together, and Jaxon, who left the room with his cell phone to his ear.

“Who’s Stone?” Kellum asked into the silence.

Creed leveled his burning gaze on Kellum. “My cousin.”

Kellum’s face filled with confusion when Creed walked abruptly out of the room.

“Why would Dave call Creed’s cousin?” Kellum said.

“Indeed,” Owen responded, looking at Hunter.

Hunter felt the weight of Owen’s gaze, but before he said another word to the group, he turned to Seven.

“I need to speak with you,” Hunter told Seven. “Privately.”

Seven said nothing and rose to his feet to stalk from the room.

Dread filled Hunter’s gut, but he squared his shoulders and followed.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Seven

Sweeping into the room after Hunter, Seven shut the door with a thud.

To his surprise, instead of it being a bedroom, he found himself in a large living room area with a kitchen off to the right and a hallway leading ahead of them.

Hunter stopped in the middle of the cream-colored carpet and turned.

“Are you going to be honest with me?” Seven took the bull by the horns.

“I...”

“Look, don’t say anything if you’re going to lie or omit parts of the truth,” Seven growled and spun toward the door.

“Seven!” Hunter snapped, his voice tight with frustration.

It was enough frustration to have Seven reach the door, but not open it. They might as well hash this out. Seven needed to hear it all. If Hunter lied, then he’d leave. It would kill him, but he’d live with knowing that he’d done his best to make Hunter trust him. Throwing the deadbolt, he leaned his back against the thick wood and squinted across the distance between them.

“I won’t lie to you,” Hunter said.

Relief heated his chest and he gave a short nod.

“A little over ten years ago, I was approached by Dave to join a dark unit.”

“Dark as in assassins?”

“Yes,” Hunter nodded as he said the word.

“Does your brother know?”

“No,” Hunter choked out.

“I can imagine you not wanting him to know.”

“Yeah, it would devastate him. He’s a former police chief.”

“Yeah. Everyone seems to be a former something or other. Fuck. The former SecDef is in charge of a ton of shit.”

“You have no idea.”

Something in Hunter’s voice made him freeze.

“Just how many more groups are there?” Seven rasped.

“More than I even know about,” Hunter admitted and briefly closed his eyes.

“How old were you when Dave recruited you?”

“I was twenty-four.”

“A kid.” Seven pressed his lips flat. “You didn’t even have the skill set.”

“I didn’t, but I was trained by Malcolm and I worked for Erebus until I turned thirty. I got burned out and Dave suggested I work for another team. I declined and bounced around for a few years before ending up with Pegasus after they were newly formed.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

Hunter gave a sharp, bitter laugh. “When was the right time to say... *Oh hey, did you know you’re dating an ex-hitman?*”

Seven would bet money Hunter hadn’t even realized he’d used the word dating, but then Seven frowned.

“I don’t give a fuck about your past. Do you care about mine?”

“No!” Hunter snapped. “But with Erebus, there are secrets and a code that isn’t broken. It’s not dinner conversation.”

“Link knew about it.”

Hunter nodded. “Yeah, that was unfortunate.”

“How did Dave keep Link quiet?”

“Link was part of a Special Ops unit known as Fury, who reported directly to Dave and Colonel Liam Cobalt.”

“So not all Fury members knew of Erebus?”

“No, only Link. When Dave discovered how close Link was, he ordered the man to stand down. Link was pissed.”

“Is there no end to Dave’s reach?”

“Sure, there is. Link stayed with Fury, he wasn’t forced. He could have transferred out.” Hunter sent his fingers thrusting through his thick hair, making the ends sweep upward. “Any one of us can leave at any time and go work wherever we want.”

Seven relaxed more against the door, watching as Hunter licked at his bottom lip...it was a nervous tell.

“You can...work anywhere,” Hunter whispered.

Seven huffed. “And be bored out of my mind? No thank you.”

“So...wait? Did you join Pegasus?”

“No, not officially,” Seven admitted.

“Dave told us that you used to call him,” Hunter said. “What was that for?”

That surprised him. “When did he tell you that?”

“Right after you first appeared in that alley.”

“After I left the military, I found out that the former SecDef could resolve a few issues that went beyond law enforcement.” Seven shrugged. “It was a few calls.” In fact, only three, but he didn’t say that.

“Don’t you think it’s weird that we had never met before that?”

“Weird?”

“You know...with the circles we run in, we should have met each other.” Hunter waved his arms about.

Seven pursed his lips.

“What?” Hunter squinted at him.

“I may have been following you before the night we met,” Seven said and added, just to be clear, “but it had only been a few weeks prior.”

Hunter crossed his hands over his chest with a sexy smirk on his lips. “You mean you knew about me before you held me captive in that alley?”

“You weren’t trying very hard to get away that night.” Seven quirked one side of his mouth, avoiding the question directly. He’d been on the trail of the same sex offender as Pegasus, but he hadn’t known exactly who they were yet. He’d only known that the sight of Hunter had him craving glimpses of the man.

“I didn’t want Parker to shoot you.” Hunter’s chin tipped up.

Seven snorted at the thought, but it was probably true. If Parker had had a shot, Seven knew that the man would have taken it.

“I suspect that Creed knows about Erebus.” Seven brought the conversation back to the assassins.

Hunter’s eyes widened slightly.

“What? Dave called in Creed’s cousin. I did the math,” Seven said, releasing a heavy breath.

“Yeah, and you’re correct about the fact that Dave has a reach. Wasn’t it Dave’s idea for you to lead a small unit against Kevin Scott?” Hunter murmured, bringing up the name of the sex trafficking kingpin.

Seven was reminded that Hunter had killed said kingpin by crushing the man’s throat. He should have seen it then, but how could he? He hadn’t known about Hunter’s past.

“Yeah, so?” Seven shrugged, crossing his arms. “I wondered why Dave didn’t just call in another unit.”

“Has Dave ever offered you a job on one of his teams before?”

Seven rubbed his jaw. “Numerous times, but only over the past several months.”

“That’s because he sees something in you. He wants you to be a part of us...in whatever capacity that is.”

“Are you talking about Erebus?” Seven asked and frowned when Hunter gave him a sharp glance.

“You are good at hiding in the shadows and eliminating bad people.”

Seven couldn’t argue; he’d snuffed out plenty of sick bastards and had zero regrets.

A sudden thought occurred to him and he didn’t like it.

“So, Dave having me form that team was what...a way of vetting me?” Seven questioned, and couldn’t keep the incredulousness out of his tone. Well, no wonder Dave had continued offering him a job after they’d busted the sex trafficking ring. Seven had passed some fucking test of Dave’s he didn’t even know about.

“Well, Dave said you were one of the good guys, but really...nobody knew you. So yeah...kind of.” Hunter shrugged.

“He sure was quick to side with Adam when they thought I was in with that same sex offender,” he responded tightly.

“That’s true, they were duped.”

“But you weren’t.”

“No.” Hunter shook his head. “I knew it was a setup.”

“And us? Did you keep that up so I’d cave and become one of the team?” Seven snapped, still irritated.

“No! How can you think that?” Hunter gaped at him.

“What am I supposed to think?” he growled.

“You fuck.” Hunter stalked toward him and Seven widened his stance.

When Hunter reached him, Seven gripped the back of the man’s neck. He’d had no trouble controlling Hunter like that before. But that was then and this was now. Seven was yanked from in front of the door and shoved aside like he wasn’t two hundred and fifty-five pounds of pure muscle.

Hunter reached for the deadbolt, but Seven was on him. He yanked Hunter back with a fist to his shirt and shoved. Hunter

went nowhere and sent an elbow into his stomach.

The air left Seven, but he swung his arms wide and caught Hunter around the waist. Hunter growled and kicked back but Seven had anticipated the hit and sidestepped. They went down to the carpet in a tangle of arms and legs. Seven was rolled, his back slammed to the floor, and the wind knock out of him. Hunter tried to shove upward, but Seven locked his legs around the man's waist.

They were both gasping for air and Seven brought up his forearm to protect his face when Hunter tried to head-butt him. Snarling, Seven rolled and flipped them until Hunter was beneath him. He nudged his thigh between Hunter's legs and tucked his face into the man's neck before he placed his whole weight down on Hunter and waited. They may be the same size, but he outweighed Hunter by several pounds.

Seven felt the moment when the fog from Hunter's anger cleared and the fight went out of his body. Seven lifted his head and Hunter's fingers sank into his hair.

"You asshole," Hunter growled.

"I am," Seven agreed and took Hunter's mouth in a hard kiss. It was brutal and their lips mashed together. Seven tasted blood. Hunter bit at him and the hands in his hair fisted. Seven was sure Hunter would come away with some of his hair.

But then the kiss turned and became easier...almost tender and oh so fucking hot and hungry. Seven moaned into Hunter's mouth and laved at the man's tongue.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it," Seven whispered into the kiss.

"I know," Hunter groaned back, yanking at his shirt.

Seven lifted up and pulled his shirt the rest of the way off, then untied his shoes and kicked them away before starting on his pants. Hunter stripped in record time, jumped to his feet, and with his naked ass flashing, raced to the bathroom. The man returned shortly and triumphantly with a bottle of lube.

Seven crooked a finger but Hunter shook his head. "I'm not getting carpet burn when there's a comfy bed right here."

"Where's your sense of adventure?"

“Right here.” Hunter proceeded to stretch out on the bed and lube up his cock.

Seven climbed to his feet and stalked up and onto the bed on his hands and knees. He straddled Hunter’s hips and smoothed his hands up the man’s chest—fingers lingering on the sexy dragon tattoo. Hunter reached between them and positioned his cock and Seven lifted up. When the head of Hunter’s cock was at his crack, Seven eased down.

“Nnnnh.” The sound left Seven’s throat when Hunter’s cock popped into his ass.

Hunter’s hands gripped his hips before they smoothed up his back and his cock slipped deeper inside. The air left Seven’s lungs and he rocked back until Hunter’s cock was all the way in. Reaching down, Seven gripped his own dick and stroked it, rocking in time with Hunter’s thrusts.

He was already so fucking close. He sat upright, jerking his cock, and let Hunter guide the pace. Snapping his hips, Hunter ran one hand up and across his chest, pinching at his nipples.

Seven lost it, and his orgasm rolled up and over him. Hot seed squirted from his dick and he jerked harder and faster, milking his dick completely. Hunter’s hips picked up speed and pistoned upward.

Seven curled forward with a harsh groan. Hunter answered his groan and emptied himself with several jerking thrusts. Collapsing, Seven sprawled over Hunter, matching the man’s gasping breaths with his own.

Dozing, he wasn’t sure how much longer it was before Hunter gently rolled him off.

“Don’t go.” Seven flung his arm over Hunter’s stomach.

“Going to stick around, are you?”

Seven blinked open one eye and found Hunter’s blue gaze gleaming with banked yet challenging laughter.

“I am.”

“Good. Then so will I,” Hunter said.

He blinked open his other eye to look directly at Hunter. “Promise?”

Hunter gave him an odd look and then smiled as if going along with him and whatever crazy scheme this was. And maybe he did sound crazy after dodging what they'd had together for months.

“You have my word.” Hunter snickered.

Damn it. He wanted Hunter to take this seriously!

Oh, how the tables have turned. Before it was him avoiding commitment, now all he wanted was to tie Hunter to him for the rest of his life.

He just had to figure out how to do that.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Hunter

Glancing up from the disassembled weapon on the table, Hunter gave Seven a quick smile.

He found Seven's earlier efforts to confirm a commitment between them endearing. And although it hadn't been spelled out, Hunter knew Seven wanted a relationship with him. The guy just seemed out of his element and Hunter was going to make him sweat a little bit.

He smirked when Seven settled in the chair across from him at the small table for two inside their unit. Running the microfiber cloth over the firing pin before selecting another piece to clean, he glanced up.

"So, did you ever work for Solomon?"

Hunter nodded, even though 'work for' wasn't exactly correct. Assassins didn't report to anyone, they took jobs or didn't when the head of Erebus reached out. They had a code they agreed to and followed when they joined, but other than that, there was usually zero contact between them.

"Solomon came on board about a year before I left," Hunter said, but he was reminded that he really didn't know that much about the man. "Before Solomon, it was Malcolm."

"Malcolm?" Seven looked surprised.

“Yeah,” Hunter said with a wry smile. “Malcolm was in charge of Erebus way before Solomon got hired.” He continued cleaning and wiping the weapon pieces before he set the cloth aside and began assembling it back together.

“Did you get along with Solomon?”

“Yeah, I didn’t see him much, but I didn’t have any problems with him. It was Malcolm who’d trained me, so…” Hunter shrugged. “Solomon wasn’t my jam.”

“What do you mean, your jam?” Humor swam in Seven’s eyes, making Hunter smile.

“Solomon offered jobs that I questioned.” Hunter paused, holding the assembled gun.

“Like jobs Malcolm is accused of taking?”

“No, not quite contract-killing jobs, but some of the marks didn’t seem to have been investigated enough.”

“Did you ever tell Dave about Solomon’s questionable jobs?”

“I did. Dave had a lot on his plate back then.”

“Ten years ago would have been around the time of ISIS and the war in Iraq.”

“That’s correct. I know Dave offered Solomon a lot of money to take a contract in Iraq.” Hunter lifted the cloth to polish his weapon.

“So, Dave figured he’d get Solomon out of the country and maybe he wouldn’t come back?” Seven smirked when Hunter shot him a surprised look. “What? I can think like an assassin if I need to.”

“Please don’t.”

Seven searched his eyes for a long moment and then slowly nodded. “Deal.”

Once Hunter was done with the cloth, Seven picked it up and began moving it over the Glock he’d pulled from his shoulder holster. It was a nice 9-millimeter that Hunter had envied.

“So, how does it work?” Seven said.

“What do you mean?”

“You all seem to have moral principles.” Seven gestured with his free hand. “Like a rule of conduct.”

“We had to sign Dave’s code of ethics agreement before we took any jobs.”

“Do you think that Malcolm did what Solomon said he did?”

“Well, Solomon didn’t really say Malcolm did anything. Theo overheard the talk about Malcolm from an outside source and you heard Dave say there’s evidence against Malcolm,” Hunter pointed out as he stood and snatched the cup of cold coffee from the small table and popped it into the microwave.

“Yeah.” Seven tipped his head and studied the gun in his hand.

Something about the way Seven agreed gave Hunter pause.

“What?”

“Do you have any idea of how many times evidence has been planted?”

Hunter frowned. “Theo would have caught that.”

“Why? Is he trained for that?” Seven asked.

“Well...no.” Hunter stared at Seven, who continued wiping the rag over the gun.

“Shit. I’ll have Kellum double-check,” Hunter said, now silently second-guessing the evidence.

Theo might be good at giving out jobs and taking deposits, but he might have missed something. Kellum wouldn’t. The Pegasus techie was at a whole other level. Too bad they couldn’t get Jordan down here from Phoenix; that guy put Jacob and Kellum to shame in the technical department, but then Jordan had been trained by Reboot Hell.

The microwave beeped and Hunter brought his coffee back to the table.

“I think having Kellum check is an excellent idea.”

“All right, I’ll text him.” He returned Seven’s smile. “You know, we really are on the same page.”

“Making our own story.” Seven nodded and Hunter laughed.

“Corny.”

Seven’s smile grew. “You like it, though.”

“Maybe.”



An hour later, most of them sat watching Kellum work his magic on the keyboard. Theo had marched from the room in a huff and Kellum looked concerned.

“Don’t worry. Just do what you do best,” Creed told the techie.

Kellum smiled at Creed like he was the sun shining and Creed turned away, but Hunter saw the flush on the man’s cheeks—a flush that mirrored Kellum’s own.

“You know,” Kellum said, looking up from his laptop. “I don’t work well with you all watching me.”

Creed turned and scowled at the men in the room. “Find somewhere else to be. We will let you know if or when anything is found.”

Surprisingly, nobody argued and everyone filed out of the room. Standing in the foyer with Seven, Hunter noticed that most of the guys had converged into one of the units and the television was blaring.

“What now?”

“Come with me.” Hunter smiled and walked to a built-in wall unit in the foyer. He pulled a book in the middle and hit a button hidden behind. The bookcase folded in and opened, and automatic lights switched on, showing a staircase going down. Once they were both inside, Hunter hit the switch on the wall and the bookcase slid closed.

“Fancy,” Seven murmured.

“A lot of money went into this,” Hunter agreed. Mostly funded by Dave after the explosion that took out the original bunker, but they had all pitched in with the expenses.

Reaching the bottom of the wide staircase, he placed his eye to the scanner and punched in a code. The door snapped open, showing the underground swimming pool with steam rising from its surface.

“Holy shit.” Seven gaped.

Hunter laughed. “Yeah, and over there is the terrarium with access to the back of the building.” He pointed to the glass doors that led to the indoor garden, and above were skylights protected by an impenetrable, military-grade material.

“Back of the building? Like a door?”

“Sort of. It’s not visible from the outside.”

“Wow.” Seven sounded impressed at the amount of thought that had gone into the safe house.

“This is the best part, though,” Hunter said, walking along the swimming pool toward the far end. He opened the door and stepped inside, leaving Seven to follow.

“Holy shit.” Seven gazed around the state-of-the-art gun range facility.

“Yep, and it’s soundproofed.” Hunter went to the glass case and selected a pair of ear protectors and handed Seven one as well before he pulled his gun and stepped up to one of the five booths. Seven snatched up the paper and clipped it to the line and Hunter hit the button that zipped the ink-drawn figure to the end.

“That’s pretty far,” Seven cautioned.

“Don’t think I can hit it?” Hunter tossed Seven a challenging glance.

“With that?” Seven pointed to the Glock 34 in his hand, now without the suppressor. “Maybe. You might be able to hit somewhere on the torso.”

“Hmm.” Hunter studied the target, lifted his gun, and fired five rounds before slapping the button. He tugged off his ear protectors as the paper target zoomed toward them.

“Well, fuck me,” Seven said, pulling off his headphones, and Hunter laughed.

“Now there’s an idea.”

“Yeah?” Seven quirked an eyebrow.

“Have you ever had water sex?”

“Is that a trick question? I remember us in the shower as much as the bed.” Seven smirked and the man’s mouth was so fucking tempting.

“I have a better idea.”



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Seven

Sex in the pool?

Seven had to admit that would be a first for him, and he almost swallowed his tongue when Hunter stripped down naked right there in the firing range. Then, the sexy man sauntered out the door and dove into the heated swimming pool.

Slower to follow, Seven locked his eyes on Hunter's body as it cleaved through the water while he stripped and laid his clothes carefully on one of the poolside chairs. Stepping into the pool, he sank deep, finding the water warm and caressing as he floated.

It kind of felt like nirvana being there with Hunter. As if all his cares and worries had been tossed aside when they were together. How the fuck had he ever thought anything between him and that man would be casual?

He moved his arms out to keep himself afloat, wearing nothing, and his cock hardened—not from the possibility of being caught naked, but more from the naked man floating not far from him.

Swimming closer, he noticed that Hunter kept moving, creating distance between them. When the man tossed him a cocky grin, the chase was on, and Seven lunged through the water, swiping out a hand.

Hunter was too fast for him and dodged his every attempt. When they grew breathless, Hunter stopped swimming and floated on his back near the shallow end—the man’s chest lifting with each quick breath.

Were they done with the cat and mouse? Testing that theory, Seven eased near and closed a hand around Hunter’s throat to bring him closer.

Hunter’s blue eyes darted to him, and his tongue slipped out, licking at the water on his lips. A sound left Seven’s throat, but he didn’t give a fuck. He tugged until Hunter was flush against him in the warm water. When Hunter’s legs lifted to wrap around his waist, Seven slipped his hands down the man’s back to cup his ass. He ground his cock against Hunter’s thick dick and kissed where his shoulder met his neck before urging Hunter’s head back with the press of his mouth beneath his chin.

Hunter groaned, grinding against him.

“Lube?”

“No, we’ll have to wing it.” Hunter lifted his head and smirked.

“I can do that.” Seven backed up until his ass was on the step and Hunter was straddling his lap. The warm water lapped against his skin as he kept them partially submerged in the water. Hunter’s hands fisted in his wet hair and pulled his head up; their mouths fused together, lips lazily parted, and tongues collided. Hunter wasn’t still for long, though. With his hips rocking and gyrating in Seven’s lap, the man pulled his mouth away and feasted on his neck and jawline before returning to his lips over and over. Seven moaned, reaching between them to grip their cocks together. Because of Hunter’s thickness, he had to use both hands.

“Yeah, just like that,” Hunter said on a husky note and gripped the back of his neck, and Seven took another kiss from Hunter’s swollen lips. He brushed his thumb over the head of Hunter’s dick and that combined with the warm water had the man’s pupils blown wide.

Jerking their dicks together, Seven continued his two-handed twisting, picking up the pace. Hunter humped into him, grinding, breath gasping just as harshly as his own.

Seven wasn't sure he could last much longer when Hunter suddenly stiffened. With his hand wrapped around the man's cock, he felt the swelling pulse of Hunter's release and he followed with a crash and shudder. Fucking hell, he'd come hard. The only time he'd come harder was when he was buried deep inside Hunter. Something tight squeezed his chest and when Hunter slipped forward, Seven ran his hands possessively over the man's back, locking him close.

In silence, they dried with towels Hunter pulled from a side cupboard and collected their weapons from the shooting range. Seven fingered the edge of the paper with the figure outline. The five bullets Hunter had fired had created a perfect two-inch circle in the figure's head. Seven might have hit the head himself, but there was no way in hell he would have been able to group the shots so closely.

Hunter smirked and shrugged as if it was no big deal, but Seven was impressed. He snatched the paper and rolled it tightly, bringing it along.

"Hanging that on your wall?"

He smiled at the teasing note in Hunter's voice as they took the stairs upward.

"I thought I'd use it for wrapping fish."

Hunter's laugh was loud when they stepped into the foyer.

Seven felt his phone go off and frowned when he saw it was a call from his dad.

"I have to take this."

"Go ahead. I'll see about scrounging up some food." Hunter gave him a reassuring nod and headed toward the comms room.

"Hello?" he said, striding back into the room he'd shared with Hunter and closed the door.

"Is Josh with you?" his dad snapped.

"No, why?"

"He didn't come home from school."

Fuck. Seven's stomach dropped. "And you're just calling me now?" He glanced at his watch; it was almost dark.

“Yeah, well, I thought maybe he was with you,” his dad sneered the words.

“Did you call him?”

“Of course, I fucking called him. The little jackass never picks up.”

“And I wonder fucking why!” Seven growled. “I’ll find him.” He hung up without saying another word.

It was the wrong time for Josh to be pulling this shit. He knew his brother was hurting and lashing out, but for fuck’s sake! He punched in Josh’s number and his brother picked up on the first ring.

“Where are you?”

“Um...I stopped at someone’s house on the way home,” Joshua said vaguely, and Seven wondered if his brother had a girlfriend.

“You didn’t tell Dad.”

“So?”

“He called me.”

“Sorry.” Joshua sounded contrite. “I didn’t mean to disappear.”

“You need a ride?”

“Um...yeah?”

He should probably send an Uber to pick up Josh, but the last time he’d done that, Joshua had ended up in a nightclub in the city.

“Will you wait there if I send someone to get you?” Seven had an idea of whom he could call.

“Who are you sending?” Joshua sounded suspicious.

“Ice.”

“Yeah, I’ll wait.”

After telling Joshua to text his location, Seven ended the call and dialed Ice.

“What’s up?”

“Can you pick up Josh and take him home?”

“Why, what’s wrong? Is he hurt?” The concern in Ice’s voice made him smile.

“No, he just stopped at a friend’s house.” At least, he thought it was a friend. Joshua hadn’t exactly said.

“Is he stranded?” Ice said.

“Yeah, and needs a ride. You remember what happened last time,” Seven said.

“He landed in that fucking nightclub at the age of sixteen. That place needs to be shut the fuck down.”

Seven silently agreed. Perhaps he’d put a bug in Ace’s ear the next time they spoke. Which he thought might be sooner rather than later, since he and Hunter were...what? Together. He tasted the word on his tongue.

“What?” Ice said.

“Nothing. So?”

“Yeah, give me about half an hour and I’ll have him.”

“I owe you one.” He sent Joshua’s location to Ice’s phone.

“You owe me more than one,” Ice huffed and hung up.

Hanging up the phone, he smirked. Ice was right, Seven did owe him, but he’d saved his friend’s ass a time or two so it really evened out.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Hunter

He sat on the edge of the bed, shaking the sleep from his brain, wishing that coffee would magically appear in his hand. The bed shifted when Seven rolled over and then scooted up behind him.

He smiled when Seven nuzzled his hair. They hadn't talked last night when Seven had returned to their unit and call him nosy, but he was curious about Seven's phone call last night.

"So, that phone call you got last night. All okay?" He tossed a light glance at Seven over his shoulder.

"Yeah."

That was Seven's standard response. The guy carried the persona of *never let anyone get too close*.

But then Seven took a deep breath. "My brother didn't come home last night," he said, keeping his voice low.

Talk about a punch in the gut. Hunter had no idea that Seven had a brother; he only knew about Lisa. Did Seven have more siblings, a mother, a father? He was burning with questions but suddenly realized how big of a step this was for Seven and how it showed just how much their relationship had evolved over the past several days.

Swiveling around so he could see Seven's face, he cupped the side of the man's neck and gave it a squeeze.

“How old is he?”

“Seventeen.”

“Is he okay?”

Looking a bit surprised at his two simple questions without judgement, Seven stared at him for a moment.

“Yeah, I had a friend pick him up and take him home. He sent me a text during the night. Josh is safe in his bed at my house, and I’m to call when I wake up.”

“You’re a good brother.” Hunter smiled and closed his hand over Seven’s. He wanted Seven to share with him. Seven turned his palm up and linked their fingers.

It was nice to have someone to shoot the shit with about whatever came to mind, Hunter thought as they showered together and dressed in Pegasus fatigues.

Tying his boots, Seven stood and pulled out his phone with a frown.

“What is it?”

“A text. I need to call Ice.”

Hunter nodded and when he went to leave the room, Seven caught his hand and pulled him to a stop.

He stayed still while Seven made the call. Surprise held Hunter mute when Seven put the call on speaker.

“Where’s Josh?”

“Still sleeping,” Ice said.

“Wake him up.”

“He’s tired.”

Seven frowned. “What’s wrong?”

“He’s scared. I’ll wake him later, feed him, and get him to call you,” Ice said.

Seven gnashed his teeth, but agreed. “Don’t leave him.”

“I’m not an idiot,” Ice growled.

Seven huffed and Ice hung up.

When Seven gave him a rueful smile, Hunter grinned. “Teenagers.”

“Got that right,” Seven chuckled.

“Shooting range again?” Hunter suggested. “Even though you didn’t shoot yesterday?”

“Maybe I let you win by watching.”

“Ha!” Hunter gave a bark of laughter at the humor gleaming in Seven’s eyes. “Keep dreaming.”

They spent the day either shooting, swimming, or getting to know one another, and Seven got to know some of the Pegasus operatives better.

As late afternoon approached, Seven grew antsy from repeated text messages from Ice that Josh wasn’t ready to talk yet.

All Hunter could do was keep Seven’s mind occupied and since Kellum was still compiling information, it was a consensus between them all to take some downtime to recharge.



“Early dinner!” Theo announced when they appeared in the doorway later that afternoon.

“Good. I’m fucking starving,” Seven whispered, and Hunter laughed, bringing more than a few pairs of eyes shooting in their direction. He didn’t give a shit what they thought.

He squeezed Seven’s hand before he pulled him to the counter—they both snagged plates. Piling casserole, garlic bread, and salad on his plate, Hunter snagged a cup of already poured coffee and returned to the table.

Seven joined him a moment later and dug into the food.

Laughter between Kellum and Theo broke out and Hunter smiled. The kitchen was filled with the rich aroma of garlic bread and baked pasta. Conversations between some of the men sent a low rumble through the room.

Hunter dug into his food before he called out to Kellum. “What did you find out about the money?”

“Oh, yeah! I was going to show you some of this last night, but you two found the pool,” Kellum said.

Seven froze with a piece of garlic bread at his lips and Hunter calmly took a sip of coffee. Kellum snickered and that sound had the men in the room chuckling.

Hunter gave them the finger and the laughing increased. “You all suck.”

Kellum turned the computer to show the money transaction history.

“I found more today so it’s all good. The deposits do coincide with the hits, but the name on the account isn’t linked to Malcolm.”

“But that’s the name on the account,” Theo said bewilderedly.

“Yes, on the surface,” Kellum replied with a nod. “But not really. I dug deeper and found that the deposits came from Erebus but were transferred into a bogus account. Someone switched out Malcolm’s real account and he personally never saw a dime of it. That money was then transferred into an offshore account.”

“What?” Theo gasped. “Why didn’t I see those transfers?”

“Because whoever is doing this is very good at removing information the second it’s entered,” Kellum said.

“Then how did you find it?”

“I called someone better at this than even me,” Kellum told Theo.

“Who?”

“Jordan.”

“How much money?”

“Three million, five hundred thousand and some change,” Kellum said.

“Fuck,” Jaxon growled.

“And there’s something else,” Kellum responded after sending a wide-eyed look at Jaxon. “The hit dates have been

altered to reflect Malcolm's travels, and it took Jordan and me a few once-overs to catch it."

"So, you're saying there were no hits?" Jaxon said.

"No, not on the three hits and dates in question. They were fabricated. Those people are still alive and well."

"Oh, my God. I should have caught that," Theo whispered.

"Why?" Hunter frowned at his friend. "You weren't hired to be a techie, you got thrown into the job."

Theo covered his face with his hands, his dark, curly hair flopping forward.

"Don't worry, they won't hide from us for long," Kellum beamed.

"So, who did it?" Jaxon asked.

"That we don't know, but Jordan is searching for the IP address and will get back to you."

"How long will that take?" Jaxon asked.

"Another day, maybe less," Kellum said.

"So, this brings up another problem," Seven said, and everyone turned their eyes to them. "Who would set Malcolm up and why?"

Hunter turned to Theo. "Who was it that you overheard talking about Malcolm taking those jobs?"

"I couldn't see his face. He was at the Redding Room."

"The Redding Room?" Seven asked.

"It's a place where people can eat or take meetings without being seen. It has secluded booths where a lot of talk about shit goes down," Hunter murmured. It was also a place that Erebus and others could go to relax and try to be normal. Anyone associated with Erebus and also those taking hits from the dark net sought refuge there.

"Sounds like cloak and dagger bullshit," Link said around a bite of bread, and nobody argued.

"You handle Erebus's money and assignments?" Seven said to Theo, and the man nodded.

“And those fuckers came all the way from where to kill you?” Seven said.

“Chicago.” Theo blinked.

“It seems like a lot of trouble.” Seven shot a quick glance at Hunter, and Hunter shook his head.

“It’s not really when you realize that hits are done all over the world. To come to California from Chicago wouldn’t be a hardship.”

“Where was Malcolm’s last location?” Seven asked, turning his attention back to Theo.

“Quincy, it’s a city on the border of Illinois and Missouri.”

Hunter wasn’t sure where Seven was headed with his questions. “What are you getting at?”

“I’m just curious as to why Solomon would go to all the trouble of sending his men across the continent to kill Theo.”

All eyes, including Hunter’s, turned to Theo. His friend’s shoulders were curled forward and his mouth pulled down. He wished he could ease the fear and pain in their depths, but until this was sorted out and resolved, that would stay a distant wish.

“I told you, Solomon thinks I’m in with Malcolm,” Theo told Hunter, and then recounted the events at the motel for the rest of the team.

“Why would he think that?” Hunter squinted.

“Well, I may have screwed up,” Theo whispered.

“How the fuck did you screw up?” Jaxon growled, hands clenched on the tabletop, and Theo gulped.

“Not helping.” Hunter glared at Jaxon before turning to Theo. “Theo...you can trust us. We want to keep you safe. You don’t need to leave out parts. Tell us everything.”

“I made a call after I ran from the motel,” Theo whispered.

“Did you make contact with anyone?” Hunter asked patiently when Theo hesitated. Jaxon, however, wasn’t very patient and slammed out of his chair.

“You tell us every fucking detail right the fuck now!”

Theo fell back in his chair with a hand to his chest at Jaxon's display of rage. Hunter did not intervene this time. Theo needed to tell it all.

"I called the office."

"And who picked up?" Jaxon asked from between his clenched teeth.

"Solomon."

"What did you tell him?"

"That I had talked to Malcolm and that Malcolm told me he hadn't done what he was accused of," Theo whispered with unshed tears in his eyes.

"If you really thought Malcolm was innocent, didn't it fucking occur to you to double-check and verify every fucking thing?" Jaxon snapped.

"I..." Theo gulped.

Hunter held up a hand to Jaxon, who snapped his teeth together.

"Theo, you didn't actually ask Malcolm if he was innocent, did you?" Hunter cut in.

"No, but..." Theo waved a hand at Kellum's laptop. "But now we know he is!"

"We don't know that though, do we?" Jaxon growled. "For all we know, Malcolm could be the one behind the transfers."

"Then why use his own fucking name?" Theo shouted.

The room dropped into silence and Hunter agreed, if Malcolm had done what he was accused of, he wouldn't have used his own name on the account. At least, he hoped not.

"Why would Solomon want Theo dead for talking to Malcolm? Unless Solomon is in on it," Seven said into the sudden silence.

"It could be as simple as Solomon doesn't know that Malcolm is really innocent and thinks Theo is in on it by arranging the hits," Kellum said. "We could send the data to Solomon."

“And then what?” Jaxon said. “Wait and see? These aren’t people you wait around for. Besides, I doubt Solomon would believe it. And if Solomon is in on this and he thinks Theo knows the truth, he’ll be out for blood.”

“And if Solomon isn’t in on it but thinks Theo is, he’ll be out for blood,” Seven said.

“Then what about telling Dave?” Hunter said about the no-win situation.

“I’ll call him. Get me that IP address from Jordan as soon as fucking possible,” Jaxon snapped at Kellum and abruptly left the room.

Hunter exchanged a look with Seven, but honestly, he didn’t know what the hell was going on.



CHAPTER NINETEEN

Hunter

“Hunter?” Owen said from the kitchen doorway after Jaxon’s abrupt exit.

“Yeah?”

“Someone is approaching the safe house.”

Every single chair in the room scraped back along with Hunter’s and when he crossed the foyer to the comms room, everyone followed.

Creed and Jaxon took a look at the monitor and Jaxon pulled on a light windbreaker.

“It’s Stone. I’ll go get him,” Creed said, and when the man left, Jaxon followed.

Hunter nodded and sank into the chair to zoom in on the man casually walking from his parked vehicle toward the safe house door without a care in the world.

“Whoa...” Owen said.

Seven peered at the screen on the wall. “He’s the spitting image of Creed.”

“Yeah, I heard they get mistaken for twins,” Link murmured from nearby.

“Where’d you hear that?” Eagle grumbled.

“At Rossi and Stefano’s house. You were with me. You met Stone then,” Link said, throwing Eagle a frown.

“Yeah, and I didn’t like him,” Eagle barked and walked out into the foyer.

When Eagle disappeared from the room, Hunter turned to Link.

“Are you two going to be okay on this job? Because I can send Eagle back to headquarters,” Hunter told Link with a flat look.

Link blinked as if surprised and then quickly nodded. “Don’t send him back. As much as we fucking argue, there’s no other person on earth I’d want watching my back.”

Enough said. Hunter nodded and stood from his seat to leave the room. He waited for Seven and then entered the foyer along with some of the men.

His mind kept going over the question of the money and altered hits. Who had done it? And for that matter...where the fuck were Malcolm and Solomon?

All Hunter had was more fucking questions and by the time Stone entered, Hunter hoped the man had answers.

Hunter had been surprised that Dave had called Stone in the first place after the history between the pair. That was one situation that Hunter didn’t want anything to do with.

Creed came through the door, yanking off his coat. A few moments later, Stone stepped inside and closed the door before throwing the locks in place.

“Jesus, it’s true. They could have been twins,” Owen whispered.

“They get mistaken often,” Jaxon agreed quietly, coming up from behind them, obviously done with his call to Dave.

Hunter swept his eyes over Stone and Creed. The only differences between the cousins were that Creed appeared the younger of the pair and Stone had more crinkles at the edges of his eyes and a few gray hairs in his beard. Hunter didn’t know if the men were in their late thirties or early forties, but they both wore their age well. Stone wore ripped blue jeans and a leather

jacket, and tattoos covered his forearms when he pulled off the jacket. Dark hair kept relatively short was swept away from a wide forehead. With a square jaw and unshaven face, Stone looked every bit of the badass his reputation spoke of.

With a *don't fuck with me* squint, Stone's hard gaze swept around the room before landing on Hunter.

"Hunter."

"Stone."

Yeah, they'd met before, and Hunter liked the fact that they hadn't come into contact since. Stone had a sketchy past. Most of the men in Dave's *created units*, even Phoenix and Pegasus, had some shit in their backgrounds, but Hunter had a feeling that Stone's past went to a whole other level.

Link stepped up. "Hey, Stone."

"Well, hello, Link." Stone's low, rumbling voice held a suggestive silky tone.

Eagle heard the way Stone greeted Link and straightened to his full height—aiming a murderous stare at Stone.

One side of Stone's mouth quirked at Eagle. Before anyone could blink or fucking stop it, Eagle stepped forward and punched Stone in the mouth.

"What the fuck?" Link lunged at Eagle to hold him back, but the big man easily shook Link off and squared off against Stone.

Other than taking a few steps back at the punch, Stone didn't respond. He lifted a hand and tested his jaw, mouth partially open, eyes amused.

"I'll give you that one, Declan. But that's all you're going to get."

Eagle sneered and stalked back into the unit he'd slept in, leaving silence in his wake.

Stone's eyes traveled over Link again for far too long, causing Link to gnash his teeth.

"Dream on," Link told Stone, but there was no real anger in the words. "Why do you goad him like that?"

"Because he's too easy," Stone smirked.

“Who’s Declan?” Theo asked, confused, from the open doorway.

“It’s Eagle’s real name,” Hunter said. “And now that the fucking drama is out of the way, do you have any info for us?”

Stone gave an abrupt nod and when Hunter gestured to the open door where they’d eaten dinner, the assassin headed that way.

Seven pulled Hunter to a stop.

“You know this guy?” Seven murmured.

“Yeah. We used to work together.”



CHAPTER TWENTY

Seven

“Oh my.” Kellum sat with a hand to his chest, eyes wide, mouth gaping at Stone.

Seven was still trying to wrap his head around Hunter and Stone working together, but at the shocked words, he shot a glance toward the end of the table.

Jesus Christ, Hunter was right, there was a lot of drama around here. Granted, the men in the room, minus Kellum and Theo, were killers, but still. If the situation hadn't been so dire, Seven would have laughed. In fact, if he were being honest, he was having a good time. The camaraderie he shared with Hunter had him coming back time after time. Seven came off as a loner, but he really wasn't. This beat sitting at a lonely job any fucking day.

His phone buzzed and he pulled it out and turned back toward the door. Stepping out into the foyer, he answered it.

“I got Josh to talk a bit,” Ice said. “He wasn't at a friend's house.”

“What?” Seven shouldn't have been surprised that Joshua had lied to him, but he was. “Where was he?”

“With someone he called Uncle Lark.”

“Who the fuck is Uncle Lark?”

“I don’t know yet. Josh clammed up after saying they’d both gone to this guy’s house before,” Ice muttered.

Seven’s heart stopped. “Both?” he rasped.

“Yeah,” Ice murmured.

Both meant both Josh and Lisa...

“Who is he?” And why the fuck had he never heard of this fucking guy?

“I don’t know who he is, but he couldn’t be found when I got there. Josh came out of the house and stood on the porch.”

“And you left?”

“No, I didn’t fucking leave. I went inside and searched the place, but he wasn’t there. I took Josh and left. I wanted to drop him off and go back, but Josh didn’t want to be alone or with his parents like I told you last night, so we went to your place and I let him sleep.”

“Was this fucker keeping Josh there under duress?”

“Well, from what little Josh has said, Lark started acting weird and freaking out when Josh called you. Josh said he lied to you to calm Lark down.”

“That fucker,” Seven growled. he could imagine how terrified Joshua had been. And it sounded like Josh had shared with Ice. Seven needed answers from his little brother that needed to be asked in person.

“So, what do we do, kill him?” Ice suggested.

Seven was prevented from answering by the hard nudge of a gun at the back of his head.

“Hang up that fucking phone.” It was the voice of the new guy, Stone.

Well, fuck. They’d invited an enemy inside their safe house.

“Seven?” Ice’s voice rang out from the phone. “Seven, answer me!”

“You have a death wish,” Seven said and dropped down low.

Maybe it was the comfort of the safe house or Stone had no idea what Seven was capable of. Regardless, Seven had the

advantage of surprise, yet, he had to hand it to the guy. Stone's reflexes were quick, but Seven was fucking faster. As he dropped and swiped his legs out, Stone leaped to avoid them. Seven sent his foot with a stiffened leg into the man's groin. Stone's breath gasped out, the gun dropped to the foyer, and Stone slammed to the floor.

Seven stood ready to cream the man when his arm was caught and held. It took every ounce of himself not to put Link down. When Stone rolled to his feet, he came up with the gun, wobbling but determined.

"You do have a death wish," Hunter's voice hissed from behind Stone.

The man Seven was falling for had slipped up behind Stone and had a gun aimed at the back of the guy's head. Stone was looking kind of green, but valiantly kept the gun aimed at Seven.

"What the fuck?" Coming out of the communications doorway behind their room, Jaxon skirted the standoff. Pulling twin guns, Jaxon pointed one barrel at Hunter and the other at Stone.

Stone realized the predicament he was in and lowered the Glock aimed at Seven. Hunter slipped his gun away and stepped back. Link released the grip he had on Seven's arm, but stayed at his side. Kind of like backup, and it made Seven feel like he really was one of them.

Yet, the air remained thick with tension.

"What the hell is going on?" Jaxon snapped.

"Hunter's boy here was making a call," Stone said.

"First," Seven said very softly, "I'm nobody's boy, and second, they called me."

"Who called you?" Hunter frowned.

Jaxon had yet to lower his guns even when the others filed into the foyer to see what the hell was going on. This meeting was going all to shit.

Seven lifted his phone and punched the speaker button.

"You're on speaker, Ice."

“Why am I on fucking speaker?” Ice shouted. “What the fuck is going on?”

“I have some people here with me. Can you repeat what you just told me?” Seven asked and held Hunter’s concerned blue eyes as Ice recounted what happened with Joshua, including info about the man who called himself Uncle Lark.

“Uncle “fucking” Lark?” Stone said.

“Yeah, I didn’t stutter,” Ice snapped.

After a moment’s hesitation, Jaxon finally lowered his twin guns.

“You’ve got family problems, dude,” Stone told Seven.

Hunter stepped toward Seven. “You need to go?”

“Ice,” he said instead of answering Hunter. “I need you to do some research on this Lark guy.”

“I’m on it. Get here as fast as you can.” Ice ended the call and Seven swung his gaze to hold Hunter’s.

“We need to talk,” Seven said.

Hunter jerked his head toward the unit they’d shared and they entered together, Seven shutting the door behind them.

“What the fuck? Who is this ass clown and why didn’t the police know about this guy?” Hunter raged with his fists clenched.

Seven stepped forward and pulled Hunter into his arms. A warmth and overwhelming care for this man filled his chest and he returned Hunter’s tight squeeze. When he loosened his grip, Hunter eased back and looked into his eyes.

“Do you think he’s Lisa’s killer?”

Seven nodded. “I can’t imagine why he would freak out after I called Josh. Can you?”

“No. You have to go.”

Seven clenched his teeth. Uncle Lark would be dealt with, but leaving Hunter in the middle of a fucking hitman squabble didn’t feel right.

“Come with me.”

“Okay.”

Just like that, Hunter was willing to help him track down Lisa’s murderer. It really didn’t surprise him; Hunter was that kind of person, a man Seven wanted fiercely to call his own. Seven moved in and took Hunter’s lips in a rough and loving kiss.

A knock at the door broke them apart.

“Yes?” Hunter said huskily.

“Hunter? Malcolm contacted Theo. He said he’d only deal with you,” Jaxon called through the door.

Hunter’s eyes widened and Seven smirked, giving the man a nudge toward the door. Maybe they could wrap this up before heading out.

This was working out better than he’d hoped.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Hunter

Hunter walked to the desk inside the comms room, Stone and Jaxon, plus Seven, following him.

“Why’s he here?” Stone scowled at Seven, who looked unfazed and strode over to sit in the chair behind the desk.

“Because I say so,” Hunter snapped.

“What? You two partners now?” Stone looked between them.

When Seven winked, Hunter smiled. “Yeah, we’re partners.”

“All right.” Stone gave Seven a nod. “Sorry about earlier, but we can’t be too careful when dealing with...” Stone waved his hands about.

“Hitmen?” Seven supplied the term a bit sarcastically, but Stone only smirked.

“You can take Pegasus and go, you know,” Jaxon cut into the exchange, speaking directly to Hunter.

“Sure, I can do that.” Hunter turned on Jaxon. “And leave you here to deal with Malcolm and Theo, and possibly Solomon?”

Jaxon thought about that for a moment and then shook his head. “Yeah, no. Stay.”

Theo cleared his throat from the doorway and Jaxon had the grace to look a little guilty.

“Here’s the text.” Theo handed over his phone to Hunter.

Malcolm: Tell Hunter to meet me at Sal’s Liquor store on Fifth—four hours from now.

Theo: Where are you?

There was no response to Theo’s inquiry.

Hunter frowned. “Sal’s Liquor Store?”

“Yeah, I looked it up. It’s about forty minutes north.”

Fuck. Seven lived south of here.

Why four fucking hours?

It would be dark by then. Hunter flipped the phone to Seven and they stared at each other.

“You have to meet him,” Seven said.

“I can go with you and be back by then,” he argued, but Seven shook his head.

“Not enough time.”

Seven was correct—including the drive time both ways, traffic, plus finding Uncle Lark and figuring out the truth—it wasn’t humanly possible. Seven could get to his house in under an hour and have this Lark fucker handled by the time Hunter met with Malcolm.

“Fuck,” he hissed and typed a message on Theo’s phone.

Theo: It’s me, Hunter. I can’t do four hours, what about now?

Malcolm: I can’t, my plane doesn’t get in until then.

Hunter: Then get someone else!

Malcolm: It’s you or nobody.

“Fuck!” Hunter yelled and tossed the phone on the table.

Seven lunged from his seat, caught his wrist, and pulled him from the room.

“Look, you handle Malcolm, I’ll hand this fucker, and we’ll meet up afterward. If I get done first, I’ll come to you, and if you get done first, then you come to me.”

Hunter's lungs felt like they were bursting. For some reason, he didn't want to let Seven out of his sight. For days, they'd been together, and he fucking liked it and wanted more of it...but Seven was right. They had two separate jobs to do.

Hunter closed his eyes and when Seven pulled him close, he sucked in a deep breath of the man's faint cologne.

"I can go with Seven," a voice said quietly from behind them.

Hunter pulled from Seven's arms and turned to Fisher. It wasn't often that the man came inside, so he was really surprised.

"You will?"

"Yep."

At Fisher's response, Hunter flipped his eyes to hold Seven's gaze. "Will you let him help?"

"Yes," Seven answered.

Hunter walked with Seven and Fisher down the stairs and to the backdoor of the safe house and Fisher ducked outside.

Seven fisted his shirt and yanked him closer. Hunter's pulse thundered and a lump grew in his throat. Seven brushed his lips against his. Hunter returned the kiss, not giving a fuck if someone saw them. He was staking his claim.

"Be careful," Seven said.

"Careful's my middle name," Hunter smirked.

"Why don't I believe that?"

Hunter huffed and then cupped Seven's face. "Go. Find out if this guy did it." And kill him, Hunter wanted to say, but he didn't need to, he saw the banked rage in Seven's ocean-colored eyes.

"I will." Seven backed away from him slowly.

"And don't get dead."

"I won't." Seven bumped the door, held his gaze for one more moment, and then stepped outside and closed it behind him.

The feeling of loss hit Hunter hard. Placing his hands flat on the closed door, he placed the top of his head against the steel. After a moment, he shook himself and set the alarm on the side panel and made his way back upstairs.

“Hunter?” Jaxon called from the comms room doorway as Hunter stepped into the foyer.

“Yeah,” he replied, clearing his throat roughly and hurrying into the comms room.

Every man remaining was seated around the large conference table. All of the unit had come into the room, along with Theo, and seemed to be waiting for him. After all, he was the one Malcolm had requested.

“You’re not going to meet Malcolm alone,” Jaxon said.

“Obviously,” Hunter murmured to Jaxon. “Did you get ahold of Dave?”

Jaxon let out a heavy sigh and seemed to come to some decision in his head before he spoke. “It’s complicated.”

“What about Dave?” Stone growled, his hackles rising.

“Calm down. I don’t think Jaxon means it romantically,” Hunter told Stone.

“I don’t either!” Stone growled, glaring daggers at him.

Hunter stopped himself from rolling his eyes and left the guy alone. Whatever was between Stone and Dave was not his problem and he turned his attention back to Jaxon.

“What do you mean by complicated?”

“Dave is pissed that the information was altered, but either way, he’s going to replace Solomon and Malcolm,” Jaxon said.

“Wait. What the fuck? What information? And why would Dave can Solomon or Malcolm?” Stone snarled with a frown. “Someone better tell me what the fuck is going on!”

“Didn’t Dave tell you when he called?” Hunter asked.

Stone shook his head. “He just sent a text to meet up with you and Jaxon and gave me this address.”

“Well, shit, sorry,” Hunter murmured and swung his attention to Jaxon.

“There was money removed from Erebus and put into a bogus account with Malcolm’s name on it. It’s a frame job.”

Stone's eyes moved around the room. "Everyone here knows about Erebus?" Stone's voice grated and Hunter watched as Kellum inched closer to Creed as if to hide behind the bigger man.

"Knock it off," Creed snapped at his cousin.

"I'm just surprised, is all." Stone shrugged. "Go ahead, Jaxon, continue."

Jaxon paced and filled Stone in on what had transpired in the earlier meeting Stone hadn't been a part of.

"Well, fuck that," Stone spat. "Cleaning house isn't the way. If you ask me, Dave should take the hit on this one."

"Wow," Creed jumped in. "You really hate Dave, don't you?"

"I do not," Stone rasped.

"Even if it's not something Dave is guilty of, do you know what taking the fall would do to his reputation?" Creed growled.

Stone turned away and stalked to the window. The glass was bulletproof, but Hunter thought it best to walk over and start lowering the blinds, causing Stone to look at him like he'd lost his mind.

"Just in case," Hunter said as the blinds dropped into place. "It's been days of silence from Solomon and I don't like it."

Stone looked annoyed and crossed his arms. He looked so much like Creed at that moment, Hunter could only gape.

"Did you pick a room to stay in?" Hunter asked.

"I did. I'll sleep on Theo's couch if we're here that long, but I hope we are not."

"True."

Hunter agreed, the sooner they wrapped this up the better. He had somewhere to be.



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Seven

He closed the door to his home once he and Fisher were inside, tossing his keys to the side table before shrugging off his coat and hanging it on one of the hooks near the door.

“This is nice,” Fisher said, glancing around curiously.

“Who are you?” Ice stood frozen in the hallway when Fisher stepped up beside Seven looking like a fucking jungle cat by the way he moved.

The two men sized each other up.

“This is Fisher, he’s one of the good guys. Fisher, this is Ice.” Seven tried to smooth over the distrust and hesitation he saw in Ice’s eyes. Fisher, though, was openly looking over Ice’s blond good looks.

“Fish,” Fisher corrected, and Seven nodded.

“Where’s Josh?” Seven asked.

“In his room.”

“I’ll be right back,” Seven told Fisher and pulled his Glock from his shoulder holster and set it on the kitchen table before heading down the hall to the spare room.

“There’s coffee,” Ice said.

“Sounds good,” Fish returned.

At least they weren't trying to kill each other.

Seven pushed open the door to find Joshua tucked beneath the covers, watching a movie on a Kindle Fire. The boy's eyes brightened and he paused the movie and sat up. Seven approached, sat on the edge of the bed, and brushed the damp hair from Joshua's forehead.

"You take a shower?" Seven asked.

"Yeah."

The boy wore a pair of pajamas that were miles too big.

"Where'd you get these?" He fingered the material on the sleeve.

"Ice got them." Joshua let out a breath like he'd been holding it. Had his brother thought he'd be mad at the situation? Hurt squeezed Seven's chest; fuck, he wanted so many things for Joshua and fear wasn't one of them.

"Can you talk to me about this guy?"

"Yeah, of course." Joshua sat up and swallowed hard. "I met Lark at Dad's job once. It was when I went with Mom to pick Dad up."

"Was Lisa with you?"

Joshua closed his eyes and nodded. His lids slowly lifted. When the tears trailed down Joshua's cheeks, Seven tugged his brother into a hug. After a few moments, Joshua pulled back, sniffled, and wiped his nose on his sleeve.

"You told Ice that you and Lisa hung out there. How'd that happen?"

"No, we didn't hang. It was only one time when we were walking home from school in the rain and he'd offered us a ride. I remembered him from Dad's job." Joshua's voice wobbled and Seven gripped his brother's shoulder with a gentle hand.

"It's okay, take a deep breath and continue when you're ready," Seven murmured, and Joshua nodded his head, took another breath, and continued.

"We'd stopped at his place, but it was only for a few minutes. I didn't even think to tell the cops because I'd only seen him

those two times!”

It only took a pervert once to scope out their next target. Once the fucker got a look at Lisa, he had probably planned it from there.

“Breathe,” Seven said, taking a hold of both of Joshua’s shoulders.

“Why did you go there?”

“I didn’t. He saw me waiting outside of school and offered me a ride again. We stopped at his place. I’m so stupid. I wondered why he kept asking me if there were any leads on Lisa’s killer. This is my fault!”

“No, it’s not.”

This was their deadbeat fucking father’s fault and Carla’s fault. If Carla had been any kind of parent, she would have had her fucking ass in the car—one Seven paid for—and would have picked both Lisa and Joshua up from school. But she would rather watch her soaps and drink her dinner than take care of her kids.

Ultimately, it was the fault of a fucking perverted murderer.

“It is,” Joshua choked out through tears.

“No.” Seven pulled Joshua into his arms and squeezed his brother tight at the thought of Joshua in the house of a possible killer. “This is not your fault. Don’t ever think that again.”

“Then whose is it!” His brother pulled sharply away. Seven wanted to shout that it was the fault of the sick fuck who did it and even their parents’ fault for not watching Lisa, but he said none of that. Joshua didn’t need that worry on his plate.

“Not yours.”

Seven wanted to crush Uncle Lark with his bare hands, but he had to be sure. What if the murderer was someone Lark knew, or even a family member and the guy was just paranoid?

Killing Lark without all the facts could be a mistake.

“What are you going to do?” Joshua’s voice wobbled.

“I’m going to investigate this guy. Where did you sit in the man’s house and what did you touch?”

“I sat on the couch and he handed me a glass of water, but I didn’t touch anything.”

“Nothing? Not even to use the bathroom?”

“No, just the couch and the water glass. I didn’t even touch the door coming inside,” Joshua responded.

“Did you drink the water?”

“No, that’s when you called, so I put the glass on the coffee table.” His brother’s eyes were filled with curiosity, but Seven only nodded encouragingly.

“Do you know his last name?” he asked.

“No, I didn’t think to ask.” Joshua’s mouth pulled down and Seven hated the sadness in his brother’s eyes.

“It’s okay, I’ll find out. And you are going to need to stay here with the alarm set.”

Joshua looked affronted. “I am seventeen, you know. I can stay alone.”

Seven smiled and ruffled the boy’s hair. “I know. Sorry. Now watch your movie while Ice and I look into this guy.”

It shouldn’t be hard to find him. After all, the fucker worked at the same company as their dad.

Leaving his brother’s door slightly ajar, Seven made his way down the hallway and into his wide kitchen.

Fisher and Ice were sitting at the counter, and both were looking at Ice’s laptop screen. Fish glanced up when he entered.

“What did you find out?” Seven asked.

“Former oil worker, divorced, lives alone, has a sister who lives about a mile away.” Ice tapped a key and slanted a look at Fisher.

Fisher picked up from there. “William Lark was arrested ten years ago for lewd behavior in front of a child—did seven months upstate and got out. In 2010, he was suspected of rape, but with no physical evidence. The child couldn’t describe her attacker and the charges were dismissed. I suspect he kept going with rape but started killing to save himself some grief. He

dropped off the radar about two years ago and resurfaced at the oil rigs, where he worked until six months ago.”

“Does he have a job?” Seven said.

“Nope, he collects disability,” Fisher said.

“Who are you getting the information from?”

“Jordan.”

Okay, that made sense. Jordan was trustworthy.

“Make sure he wipes it clean,” Seven said.

Fisher pulled out his phone and sent a text.

Seven lifted his Glock from the table and checked the clip before shoving it into his holster.

He found both Ice and Fisher watching him.

“Coming?” Seven didn’t wait for a response, spinning toward the door.

“Fuck yes, I’m coming,” Ice snapped.

“Wouldn’t miss it,” Fisher followed up.

Seven set the alarm and they headed down the walk. In the driver’s seat, he squeezed the steering wheel.

“Going to inform the detectives on the case?” Ice asked.

Seven sliced a burning gaze at Ice before starting the SUV.

“I think that’s a no,” Fisher murmured from the back seat.

Goddamned right that was a fucking no.

He wanted the truth and if the cops were involved, the guy would lawyer up.

He had no time for that shit. He had to get back to Hunter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Hunter

Two hours dragged by and Hunter was getting antsy. With another two to go, Hunter stepped into the weapons room to gear up.

He couldn't wait for this to be fucking over with and get to Seven. He'd never worried about another person like he did with Seven. Sure, he worried about his brother, and Pegasus, but with Seven it was different. If anything happened to Seven, it would punch a hole into his universe and leave a gap he'd never recover from.

Darkness had dropped over the town as it grew later, but due to their control of the lighting, they could keep it as light or dark as needed in their immediate surroundings. However, he still had a few hours until the meeting.

His plan was to head out early and get a good vantage point. It only made sense to move in the dark. He became a better killer in the shadows.

Laughter from the other room filtered through, and it wasn't hard for him to overhear the various conversations going on.

Kellum was teaching Creed about a tracking app that he could install on his phone and Creed talked Kellum into putting it on his own phone.

“That way if anything happens, I...” Creed cleared his throat. “We can find you.”

“Okay,” Kellum said softly, and Hunter smiled.

Those two were a mystery. Sometimes, Hunter thought they liked each other and other times, they couldn't stand one another. It was a crapshoot depending on the day. All he knew was that Kellum kept his distance. That man had a story to tell.

All of the men at the safe house seemed to come and go, but mostly they hung out in the comms room—kind of like making it their own.

He selected the same Glock 34 he'd used before and placed it on the metal table. Would he use it to kill Malcolm? The answer depended on if Malcolm really wanted to talk or if this was a setup.

Honestly, he wasn't sure any longer. While Malcolm's name had been used on the bogus account, the man could actually be using that to make himself look innocent. But then why not disappear with the money already?

“Kind of early, isn't it?” Jaxon said from the doorway, interrupting his thoughts.

With his shoulder-length hair loose, Jaxon took up a shoulder lean against the doorjamb and crossed his arms, looking all badass in a tight black t-shirt.

“Did you get highlights?” Hunter studied the light strands threading through the brown of Jaxon's hair.

“Fuck no, why?” Jaxon looked at him like he was crazy.

“It's lighter than the last time I saw you.”

“It's the sun. I took some time off in Florida a few months ago.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, oh. It's really too early to gear up,” Jaxon said, reminding him that there was still over an hour to go.

“You're right.” Hunter sighed and stepped away from the table.

“Theo made fresh coffee,” Jaxon said before heading out the door, and Hunter followed.

Entering the comms room, Link and Eagle sat at the end of the large table nearest the kitchen area. Link wiggled a deck of cards, and Hunter shook his head. The guy shrugged and dealt a hand of what looked to be five-card stud to Eagle.

At the counter, Hunter grabbed an empty mug and filled it with coffee.

“You know, I’ve been thinking,” Jaxon said, and Hunter slanted him a humorous look. “And before you say, *“Don’t strain yourself,”* ya smartass, hear me out.”

“Go for it.” Hunter smirked and took a sip from his mug.

Jaxon sighed. “I agree with Stone.”

“About Dave taking responsibility on this one?” Hunter asked just to be sure.

“Yes.”

“So, you really don’t think either Solomon or Malcolm is in on it?”

“I don’t know, but I trust Stone’s judgement like I trust Hayden’s,” Jaxon said.

Okay, that was saying something. Having known Jaxon for years, Hunter knew there were only a few men outside of Jaxon’s bodyguard family that the guy truly trusted.

Hunter smiled thinking of Hayden Thorne. Hunter had met the man several times while passing through Colorado. During the few years before he joined Pegasus, Hunter had stayed at Jaxon’s place on numerous occasions, sleeping in the spare room because Hayden had taken over Jaxon’s basement for the past several years.

“How is Hayden? Is he still working with you at Cobalt Security?” Hunter asked.

The change of subject seemed to throw Jaxon and it took a moment for him to respond.

“He’s doing good and yes, why?” Jaxon said suspiciously.

“No reason.” Hunter huffed and shook his head. “You brought him up.”

Jaxon looked contrite but only grunted.

“Who’s Hayden?” Kellum said, jumping into the conversation.

“Hayden is Jaxon’s best friend. A really good guy,” Hunter said.

“He’s my roommate,” Jaxon amended, causing Hunter to lift his brows in surprise.

“So, you trust Hayden implicitly...but he’s not your friend anymore?” Hunter returned sarcastically.

Called out, Jaxon gnashed his teeth, shifted his shoulders, and rubbed at the back of his neck. “I didn’t say that,” the guy mumbled and tucked his face down to sip from the mug cradled in his free hand.

“You’ve got to meet Hayden.” Hunter turned suddenly to Link and then Kellum. “He is a hoot and a hottie.”

“No, he’s not.” Jaxon scowled and Hunter wanted to laugh, but he held it back.

“He is,” Hunter goaded.

“Don’t be introducing Hayden to—” Jaxon waved his hand at Link, Kellum, and the table. “—single men.”

Hunter laughed when Link chuckled.

“I’ve met Hayden before,” Link told Hunter. “He was at that Cobalt party several years ago, and yeah, he is a hottie.”

Eagle scowled at Link before shooting Hunter a death glare, but he ignored that. Getting in between couples and making them jealous was his specialty and since he was no longer available—because he had Seven—he had to find some other way.

He sent a smirk toward Jaxon, who gave him a flat look.

“If you’re trying to stir me up about Hayden, you’re wasting your time,” Jaxon rasped, and Hunter smiled.

“Well...” Hunter tipped his head like he was going to spill something juicy—just to fuck with Jaxon—but then he only shrugged. “Never mind.”

“Never mind what?” Jaxon hissed.

“Hey,” Stone said from the window.

“You stay out of this!” Jaxon growled at Stone.

“Hey!” Stone snapped.

“What?” Jaxon snapped back.

“Somebody’s out there.”

That got all of their attention and Hunter stopped fucking with Jaxon to make his way over to the window next to Stone. Jaxon and Link crowded up behind to gaze out the blind Stone had pulled slightly down.

“I don’t see anyone,” Hunter said.

“Trust me,” Stone murmured. “Someone’s out there.”



Selecting the same Tactical Taran rifle he’d used the other day, Hunter lifted the Glock 34 from the table and tucked it into one of the deep pockets inside of his overcoat. Slipping in extra ammo clips, he strapped on the sheath that carried the OTF knife.

Jaxon eyed the rifle. “You might want something a little stealthier.”

“Nope, I don’t plan on getting up close and personal to whoever is out there,” Hunter said. “I’ll leave that to you and Stone.”

Stone grunted and tucked away a pair of twin STI 2011 Combat Master 9-millimeters. Several clips were added to his pockets before Stone slipped a Remington Tac-14 rifle inside of a specially designed back holster. The fourteen inches of death was hidden when Stone pulled on one of the large black overcoats hanging on the weapons room wall.

“What?” Stone said, glancing up to find both him and Jaxon staring at him.

“Overkill?” Hunter smirked.

“It’s either Malcolm or Solomon out there. I’m not taking any chances.”

“Good idea,” Jaxon said and lifted up a Mossberg 590 Shockwave 12-gauge firearm. The man ignored them both and slung the strap of the multi-shot pump-action weapon over his head and shoulder before putting extra ammo into his coat.

“That fucker’s loud,” Hunter said, nodding at Jaxon’s choice of weapon.

“I have quiet.” Jaxon shrugged, holding up his Glock with an attached suppressor. “Sometimes I want to make a little noise.”

Stone snorted.

“You three are loaded for bear,” Link said, coming into the room wearing black Pegasus tactical gear. Strapped to his thigh was a dark sheath with a wicked and deadly blade. The operative probably had three weapons tucked away; he looked like a modern-day ninja bandit.

“Where’s Eagle?” Hunter asked, selecting a pair of the night vision goggles on the rack near the guns.

“He’s coming,” Link said.

“You’re going to wear that?” Stone eyed the goggles.

“Yeah. I really am. I told you, I’m not going to get up close and personal. Pick a pair if you want,” Hunter said and smirked when both Stone and Jaxon shook their heads.

“It’s too confining. I’m always afraid I’ll miss someone coming from a blind spot,” Stone said, and Jaxon nodded in agreement.

“Suit yourselves.” Hunter tucked them into his coat.

Eagle stepped into the doorway looking dangerous in black tactical gear wearing identical weapons to Link’s. To Hunter, out of all the Pegasus men, Eagle rivaled Seven in the big, good-looking guy department. With an unshaven face, steely gaze, muscles galore, and a sharp jaw, Eagle was fucking hot. Not like Seven, but close. Although, Link stole the show with his lean build, messy hair, and hooded gaze—Link’s sexy look did complement Eagle’s badassery perfectly.

After a quick nod, Link kept his eyes turned away from Eagle, and Hunter had to wonder why those two hadn’t had sex yet. The tension was thick between them. From what Hunter had

heard, they had known each other for years. Hell, before Link moved abruptly into the bunker a while ago, both Eagle and Link had lived at Eagle's aunt's house. Maybe they had had sex and it ended badly.

"Ready?" Eagle said, breaking into his nosy thoughts. The words were spoken to the room, but the man's attention was all on Link.

"Yeah, let's do this." Hunter stepped out of the weapons room and into the comms room where Owen, Creed, Kellum, and Theo waited.

"If we don't come back, call Ace. He will get in touch with Dave," Hunter told Owen.

"I would still feel better coming along," Owen grumbled.

"Like I said, they're more than likely assassins," Hunter said simply. "It's no offense to your skills, it's just a fact."

"I know, I know. Like you said, they move to a different beat." Owen ran a hand down his beard. "But I still don't like it."

Owen didn't argue the fact that Link and Eagle had no previous experience with Erebus, but both had been on a highly skilled three-man kill team in Special Forces. Fury hadn't been known for their fun, easy-going nature.

"Don't open that door no matter what," Stone said to his cousin, and Creed scowled but didn't answer.

"We won't!" Kellum piped up and then tipped his chin when Creed aimed a squinty-eyed look his way.

"Going out the front?" Theo looked worried.

Hunter shook his head. "We're taking the back exit."

"All right, let's move," Jaxon said, heading out of the comms room and into the foyer.

Before Hunter could follow, Theo stepped up and hugged him. Surprised, Hunter patted Theo on the back. When the slighter man pulled back, Theo held his eyes.

"Try not to get killed."

"I will."

“And try not to kill Malcolm.” Theo mouthed the last part so only he could see.

Hunter patted Theo on the back again and headed toward the hallway that would take him down the stairs.

He couldn't make that promise to Theo.

If Malcolm was out there and he was gunning for them, then the guy he'd once respected needed to be neutralized.

Either way, he had a feeling that someone was going to die tonight.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Seven

They came in the dark.

The three of them were dressed in all black gear, masks, and gloves. They surrounded the house, looking for any weakness in the structure. Ice shot out every bit of light that filtered into the general area and Fisher found a way inside through a loose screen on a back bedroom window.

Going in first, Seven stood still, his eyes trained on the open bedroom door while he waited for the other two to join him. He kept his gaze forward after sweeping the room. Thoughts of what his baby sister had gone through before she was killed kept him from looking toward the bed after that first once-over.

Fisher was last inside, and rather than slip the window closed, he left it open to avoid any additional noise.

Seven stepped silently into the hallway and moved toward the main area of the house, constantly searching, eyes moving, gun aimed. Fish checked the two other rooms behind them.

Ice stayed on Seven's six.

A floorboard creaked under Seven's foot and he stilled. Balancing on his other foot, he stepped closer to the wall. Each step took him closer to the room where a flicker from a low murmuring television set could be seen.

When they reached the living room, a man sprang out of a recliner and ran from the room.

Lunging after whom he assumed to be Lark, Seven entered a narrow, filthy kitchen just as a door off to one side slammed shut.

“Must be the basement,” Ice said.

Was that where he’d killed Lisa? Bile rose in Seven’s throat and he stalked to the door. He kicked it in. Wood chips blasted the air and the knob fell to the floor with a crack.

Seven aimed the gun at an empty staircase.

Snick.

Ice shot out the glowing bulb in the basement stairwell, leaving only the kitchen lights for visibility —Seven shot his friend a look that said *you’re being absurd.*

Ice shrugged, aiming his Glock at the darkened set of stairs.

Seven jerked his head, indicating Ice to shoot out the kitchen one then.

Ice rolled his eyes and reached over and flipped the switch on the wall, sending the room into darkness.

Because the stairs were built into the house and not freestanding, they afforded some protection in case the fucker had a gun, but searching the basement became a harder task. They had no way of knowing if the fucker had an escape route or hiding place.

No matter, he’d find him, it was only a matter of time. Gesturing with a jerk of his head, Seven sent Ice left while he went right.

Even in the dark, it was easy to see the messy room that stretched the length of the house above. Old, rickety metal shelves held boxes filled with junk and what couldn’t fit in the boxes spilled out onto the shelves and floor. The air was filled with the smell of rot and mold, but his hooded mask somewhat muffled the stench.

The noise coming from straight ahead was so slight that if he’d been making noise himself, he would have missed it. A shoe shuffle; either someone was sitting with their knees pulled closer

or the guy was edged up against something he blended in with, but that had been a shoe shuffle.

Ice was quiet, so quiet that Seven couldn't even hear the guy. And upstairs, Fisher was equally silent with whatever he was doing. Maybe Fisher was down here with them.

Seven stilled and sank into the darkest shadows nearby, shadows that surrounded him—and he waited with a razor-sharp focus for the predator to move.

Come on, you motherfucker, just move one more time and I'll have you.

Death wasn't coming, death was here.

Thoughts of what he'd do ran through his mind over and over.

He could keep still for far longer periods than this; in fact, doing this was his specialty. He could wait for hours, sometimes days, in the dark to get his quarry. And there it was, a slight shift of a shoulder and Seven was able to make out the man's whole form.

Without hesitation, Seven launched across the distance and delivered a punch to the man's head.

"Ah," the guy cried out and crashed back into the shelf he'd been hiding by. Seven grabbed the back of the guy's neck and fisted his shirt before powerlifting him up and away from the shelf. Once free from his hiding spot, Seven slammed the man to the floor. Boxes broke apart when the blubbering fucker landed and rolled with a thud.

"What do you want?" the guy cried out. "I don't have money!"

Breathing hard, rage clouded Seven's vision.

Ice was at his side but didn't interfere.

Clenching and unclenching his hands, Seven thought about his next move.

They had to find proof.

Without a word, Seven yanked the fucker to his feet and shoved him toward the stairs.

Ice stepped in then and pulled the man's arm halfway up his back. The guy moved to his toes, trying to relieve the pressure. Ice marched the guy up the stairs, through the kitchen, and into the living room where Fisher stood.

Ice slammed the guy down on the couch and stood over his huddled form.

Fisher nodded to an open laptop.

With his heart in his throat, Seven moved to the screen. Several shots of naked children were displayed, and three of them were of Lisa.

He looked away, sickened, and closed his eyes before snapping them open.

"You want me to delete them?" Fisher said quietly.

"Just Lisa," Seven said. No traces of Lisa could be found on that laptop, as it would lead back to him or even Joshua.

"Wipe the place down," Seven nodded to the sofa.

While Fisher removed all evidence of Lisa, Ice proceeded to wipe the place of any fingerprints where Joshua told them he'd sat or touched. Ice took the water glass that Josh had used into the kitchen.

Seven reached down and yanked the man to his feet and shoved him into the recliner.

Ice sprayed and wiped the couch and coffee table completely.

"What's your name?" Seven said, twisting the silencer on his Glock.

The man stayed silent and Seven pointed the gun at the guy's head.

"Bill Lark!"

Fisher came back into the room and went over to Lark's chair.

"Uncle Lark?" Fisher placed a gun beneath the man's chin, forcing his head up.

"Yes!"

"Why was my sister's naked picture on your laptop?" Seven choked out.

“It’s not my laptop!”

“Then whose is it?” Seven growled, and Fisher eased the gun away from Lark’s neck.

Lark clammed up, gripping the arms of the recliner. Fisher made a sound of annoyance, tucked his gun away, and clamped a hand over Lark’s mouth. The blade at Fisher’s side was out and in seconds, he cut off the guy’s finger. Lark’s scream echoed through the room. Blood spurted from the nub of what was left of his finger over the armrest and trickled down the cracked faux leather.

Fisher released the guy’s mouth and Lark cradled the injured hand to his chest, eyes wide with fear as he watched Fisher toy with the knife in his hands. Sweat trickled down Lark’s face and then the child molester pissed himself.

Seven saw the exact moment the guy realized the predicament he was in.

“I don’t know why I do the things I do,” Lark babbled, blubbering. “I’m sick, man. I try to stop, but I’m sick.”

“So, you rape them and then kill them to keep them quiet,” Seven said, his voice flat and deadly.

Lisa’s bruised and battered body flashed through his mind, and Seven knew that all the children on that man’s computer had either suffered and were still alive or Lark had murdered them.

Lark hesitated, but then nodded. “I need to be locked up, man.”

“You two need to leave,” Seven told Ice and Fisher, with his eyes on Lark.

“Want me to do it?” Fisher offered, walking to the laptop to tap the keys with gloved hands. When they left this place, they’d leave no trace they were ever there.

Seven shook his head. “No.”

“Don’t leave me with him!” Lark screamed, locked with terror in the chair.

That’s right, you sick fuck, squirm, Seven thought as he waited for Fisher to finish at the laptop.

Fisher flipped the laptop so Lark had a good view of the flashing pictures of children. When the cops found Lark's body, they'd find the evidence.

Without a word, both men headed back down the hallway to exit the way they'd come in.

Ending Lark's reign of terror on children wouldn't bring Lisa back, but it sure the fuck made him feel like he was doing the world a favor.

Snick, snick.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Hunter

The storm overhead grew closer as they combed through the dark for an hour, and while it had dampened the earth, it hadn't dumped rain yet.

He had forty fucking minutes before he needed to leave for the meeting with Malcolm and he'd come quite a ways from the safe house.

After a few more moments of searching this far out, Hunter decided that whoever Stone had seen outside was long gone or very fucking good at hiding.

And then Hunter felt him and smiled.

Granted, the ground was damp, but Seven had done it again—creeping up close with a stealthiness that normal humans didn't possess. Was it any wonder Dave had offered Seven a job? Oh, Hunter knew he had lost his own edge from being out of the hitman business for a while, but Seven was fucking good and took it to a level that rivaled the best.

“Well, there you are.” Hunter barely breathed the words as he felt Seven's forehead press against the back of his head before lips brushed into his hair.

Hunter turned and placed a finger to his own lips, indicating total silence, and Seven nodded his head. Hunter searched Seven's eyes in the dim light but couldn't make out anything

because it was too dark. He wondered if Seven had taken care of the killer or found different news, but they'd have time later to discuss—

A figure melted out of the darkness behind Seven. Too late, Hunter couldn't push Seven aside and a gun cracked down on the back of Seven's head. Seven went down, his body thumping on the ground, and Hunter snapped his gun up but then lowered it when Malcolm pulled off his hooded mask.

“You fucker! He's with me!” he raged at his former mentor and crouched down to run his fingers over Seven's head, checking for the lump.

“He'll live,” Malcolm rumbled.

“I should shoot you where you stand,” Hunter snarled.

Quicker than Hunter thought possible, Malcolm kicked the gun in his hand and sent it flying. Hunter jerked his burning fingers up and away and brought the stinging digits to his chest.

“Hunter! Run!” Solomon shouted.

Hunter spun toward the sound of Solomon's voice but never got a chance to answer when Link and Eagle converged on Solomon. Both Pegasus operatives easily removed Solomon's weapon and took hold of his arms.

“Wait!” Solomon said.

Hunter took several steps away from Seven's prone frame and walked more into the dim light from the nearby street. Anything to get Seven out of the line of fire. As he hoped, Malcolm followed him. If there was a shoot-out, he didn't want his man hit by accident.

“What's going on?” He tossed a glance to Malcolm.

“Sorry, Hunter,” Malcolm said and shot Solomon.

Stunned, Hunter watched opened-mouthed as Solomon sagged between Link and Eagle.

Malcolm waved his gun at Hunter to move and then positioned himself in such a way that he could point his gun at all three of them.

“So, it is you.” Hunter struggled with the fact that all this time, it had been Malcolm.

His former mentor tossed a quick glance at Seven’s body before his attention was refocused on him. Hunter steeled himself to keep from running back to Seven. Surely, he should have woken up by now?

“Yeah, it’s me. I just need to tie up loose ends and I’ll be gone.”

“Loose ends?” Hunter stared at Malcolm through burning eyes.

“Theo.”

“Why’d you let him go then?”

“I had a moment of weakness and I sent him to you because I knew he’d be upset.” Sadness pulled at Malcolm’s mouth for a moment but then disappeared.

“So, what changed?” Hunter spat.

“He dug into the financials and found out about that bogus account,” Malcolm said flatly. “I can’t have Theo doing that.”

“It might have been Theo that first time, but it wasn’t him who found out it was bogus. Theo thought you were innocent, you fuck! Oh, and the money? It’s frozen. You’ll never see a fucking penny,” Hunter snarled, and the drizzle from the storm increased to a steady rain.

Stunned, Malcolm hesitated and then backed toward the trees. The man ignored the rain dripping from his hair and kept his weapon pointed at Link, Eagle, and Hunter. The dark tree line was only steps away and Hunter knew that if Malcolm reached them, he’d be gone.

Hunter had to keep Malcolm talking.

“Why kill Solomon?”

“He came after me in that motel room.” Malcolm lifted a finger to his cheek and that was when Hunter noticed two things—one, the deep knife wound in Malcolm’s face partially hidden by his thick beard, and two, that Seven was no longer on the ground. His heart thundered along with the rumble in the sky.

“When Solomon went dark, I had to use you and Theo to get him to come out in the open.” Malcolm shrugged. “I knew Solomon would be monitoring my phone. I turned on the GPS locator before coming here. I figured I’d take care of you three all at once.”

“Solomon would know it was a trap.”

“Yeah, but he still showed up.”

“That’s what men of integrity do!” Hunter ground out from between his teeth. “What I want to know is, why kill me? I didn’t have anything to do with this shit,” he said, trying to find a reason Malcolm would kill like this.

“I’m sorry.” Malcolm sounded sad, but Hunter didn’t believe it.

“You used to be an honorable man.”

“In all honesty, when I got here, I didn’t realize you had this much company until you left the building with Jaxon and Stone. I was going to tell you to disappear and I’d take care of Theo and Solomon.”

“So, what are you going to do, kill us all?” Sarcasm dripped from the words.

“Regrettable, but yes,” Malcolm simply said. “I was surprised to see Stone here, though. I’m sure Dave is going to miss his golden boy.”

Hunter’s chest tightened. Had Malcolm already killed Stone? And what about Jaxon? Or was this some kind of sick bluff?

Gunfire broke out in the distance, but it wasn’t coming from the direction of the safe house and Malcolm gave a slight smirk. Relief swept through Hunter. Malcolm hadn’t killed both Jaxon and Stone—one of them was still out there, that was for fucking sure.

“Why didn’t you just shoot me when I came out the door?” Hunter waved his hand in the direction of the safe house. “You’ve had a fucking hour to do it.”

“I had to get you alone to flush out Solomon.”

When Link edged away from Solomon’s body, Malcolm shook his head and pointed his weapon. Eagle snarled and

stepped in front of Link, but Link was having none of that and moved around to Eagle's side.

"Of course, there's more of you than I'd bargained for." Malcolm frowned at Link and Eagle.

"I'll bet, you asshole," Hunter sneered.

"Good thing I brought my own men."

"What's with the fucking men? Since when do assassins have men at their disposal?"

"When you have the cash, you can buy anything or anyone."

That meant Malcolm and his hired hitmen could potentially kill all of them in one fell swoop. *Over my dead body.* Malcolm was as good as dead if he touched Seven again.

"Big fucking plans," Hunter taunted, curling his lip at Malcolm. "How did you find the safe house?"

"I have my ways."

"How?" he asked tightly.

"The tracker is in Theo's watch. It was a Christmas gift from me. It took me four days to come back and make my way here."

"Sorry to fuck up your vacation."

"Stop talking and walk," Malcolm said, gesturing toward Link and Eagle.

"You sent five men to kill me and Theo, you son of a bitch." Hunter didn't budge.

Malcolm sighed.

"And you set me up," Hunter said.

"Yeah, I had to get you outside. Now, enough talking, get over with the other three."

"Fuck you!" Hunter spat and stood his ground through the driving rain.

Malcolm's mouth pulled flat. The guy seemed to be weighing his options and then came to a decision.

"Where's Theo?" Malcolm said.

Those were the last words his former mentor ever spoke.

Both Seven and Fisher melted out from the trees and converged on Malcolm. With a flash of steel, Fisher had a knife against Malcolm's throat from behind and Seven snatched the gun from the assassin's slack grip.

"Theo's not coming, motherfucker," Fisher hissed against Malcolm's ear and sliced the knife—opening Malcolm's throat.

"Wait! Don't kill him yet—" The words spilled out, but it was too late.

"Why not?" Seven frowned.

"I don't know where Stone and Jaxon are!"

Behind them, someone groaned, and they turned toward the noise to find Solomon struggling to sit up. Eagle pulled Solomon to his feet and looped one of the man's arms around his neck. "I'll move him down the block. Call an ambulance."

Link pulled his cell phone out to make the call, following after Eagle and Solomon.

Shaking rain from his hair, Hunter looked at Fisher.

"I'll clean up," Fisher said and grabbed Malcolm's feet to pull him into the trees.

Hunter turned to Seven and lifted a hand to brush the wet hair from the man's forehead.

Seven smirked. "I'm good, I have a hard head."

"But you were knocked out."

"No, I wasn't."

Hunter sniffed, but then grinned.

"Now, let's go." With that said, Seven snagged his hand and they both took off running in the dark, wet night back toward the safe house.

Boom, boom.

Hell yeah! Hunter silently cheered at the sound of the 12-gauge Jaxon had chosen discharging. Shortly after that came two more booms. The bodyguard sounded pissed.

The sky rumbled overhead as thunder rolled in the distance and the rain slackened to a drizzle.

With his heart pounding, he ran with Seven toward the gunfire—staying hidden within the edge of the tree line. When they grew closer, both slowed to quiet their approach. It was as if Seven had read his mind. They matched each other in every way. And Hunter couldn't imagine being in sync like that with another living soul.

He spotted Jaxon running down the side of a nearby building and pointed. When the man slipped into the foliage, Hunter sprinted that way with Seven at his side.

“Jaxon?” he hissed.

“Yeah, I'm here. They were Malcolm's men,” Jaxon said, out of breath. More from adrenaline than the run through the trees.

“I know.”

“Malcolm is the one.” With a wet hand, Jaxon shoved more shells into his weapon.

“I know.”

Jaxon seemed to understand what he was saying and pointed his shotgun at the safe house. “They're dead. At least, I think. Stone went after the last guy.”

“We better go find him.”

“What happened with Malcolm?” Jaxon asked.

Even though they had been speaking quietly, Hunter put a finger to his lips. They couldn't be sure there were no others until the last man was taken down. Jaxon grimaced as if he should have known that. Hunter wasn't one to judge; both of them had been out of the business for a while. At least, he thought Jaxon was out of Erebus, but then he couldn't be sure if Dave had called the bodyguard.

It took several more minutes before they worked their way along the row of buildings by way of the tree line.

Snick, snick.

The familiar sound was slight through the rain, but they all heard it.

“Fuck,” Hunter whispered.

“What?” Seven said, barely audible.

“That’s not Stone’s gun,” Jaxon hissed.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Seven

Bullets peppered the ground and a piece of tree splintered off and Hunter dodged to the left, but a piece of wood hit Hunter in the face. The man stumbled and a sound left his throat as he began hopping on one leg.

A savage roar welled up inside Seven and he sprang forward to pull Hunter to the ground and out of any further line of fire.

“I’m okay, it didn’t hit my eye,” Hunter assured him, but just the thought of Hunter getting shot had scared the fuck out of Seven. He cupped the man’s face and studied the slice across Hunter’s cheekbone. Yanking up his t-shirt, Seven tore a piece from the bottom of it and pressed the material to the wound to stop the bleeding.

Jaxon melted away in the direction of the safe house.

“There’s no way they’re getting in there. Stone and Jaxon will die before giving up the code,” Hunter whispered, leaning into his hand.

When realization dawned, Seven nodded. He’d heard the whole fucking thing laying in the dirt trying to figure out how the fuck to get him and Hunter out of this. His only recourse had been to play knocked out and then slip away. It was there in the dark he’d come across Fisher creeping up on them.

“His men don’t know Malcolm’s dead.”

“Yeah.” Hunter reached down and rubbed at his ankle.

With a frown, Seven pulled up Hunter’s pant leg, but of course, it was too dark to see anything.

“I tweaked it, help me up.”

Seven easily pulled Hunter to his feet and the man balanced on one foot before testing the other. Hunter grimaced and shot him a look, but Seven patiently waited. He wasn’t going to leave Hunter out there alone with God only knew how many assassins on the loose.

“Go, I’ll catch up.”

“No.”

“Go back up Jaxon,” Hunter said before pulling the Glock from his waist. Seven spotted the tactical rifle. It had been there all along while Hunter had been talking to Malcolm, but of course, Hunter had been too close to Malcolm to pull it up and shoot.

“I’ll be right back,” Seven growled, not liking it.

“I’ll be right behind you. Hurry.”



Seven crouched in the darkness alone, his eyes laser focused on whoever the fuck had shot at Hunter. Somewhere nearby, the trickle of water splashed from the rain runoff. The crickets stopped their steady chirping when he eased past but picked it up again when he was still.

The occasional hum of a vehicle’s tires crunched out on the main road, and somewhere in the distance, sirens blared.

To his left, he heard the very slight noise of shuffled leaves, and he flicked his eyes that way to find Fisher, Link, and Eagle moving through the darkness.

They reached him and settled in to see what he was looking at. He’d only just reached this spot, so he wasn’t looking at much.

“We ran across Hunter,” Link whispered.

“Is he good?” Seven growled, but he made damned sure it wasn’t audible to anyone who wasn’t close.

“Yup, he’s stubborn and insisted we come help you and Jaxon,” Fisher murmured.

Seven wanted to ask where Solomon was, but he didn’t want to continue talking, which might get them noticed.

The slight noises of the warehouse district continued, but from the men around him, crouched in the waiting darkness, there was only silence. He knew each and every single one of them were completely focused on the safe house.

With no sign of movement since he’d arrived in the stand of trees, he eased upright.

“Ready?” Link whispered.

“Fuck yeah,” Fisher answered.

Seven took off from the cover of trees, running through the rain across the damp leaves and toward the safe house building. Malcolm’s men had shot out the lights surrounding the place, so he didn’t worry about getting shot. Fisher was fast and quickly moved out in front of the rest of them.

Running to the side of the back corner where Fisher waited, Seven slipped behind the building with Fisher on his ass. Link and Eagle went the other way to cover the opposite side. They’d try and sandwich this son of a bitch between them and end this shit.

A crack sounded just before a bullet hit the stucco near his head, sending pieces flying. Seven turned his face away briefly to avoid chunks of debris. Dropping low, he and Fisher were gone from the spot in seconds, sinking into the darkness near an industrial-sized trash can.

The vehicle sirens grew closer and stopped several warehouses from where they were now. The sirens cut off and Seven hoped the EMTs could help Solomon.

Someone opened fire at something or someone ahead of them and Seven jerked his head. Fisher followed when he crept out and slipped along the face of the metal can to the other side.

From here, Seven could just barely make out Jaxon with his shoulder-length hair hanging loose—pinned down behind an SUV, firing a weapon into the trees.

“Jaxon,” Seven hissed. He let his voice carry across the short distance between them. He sure as hell didn’t want Jaxon shooting them.

Jaxon slid him a look and jerked his head to come over.

Seven eased up next to the bodyguard and crouched behind the same vehicle. Fisher took up a spot on the opposite side of Jaxon, all taking cover behind the SUV.

“Where’s Stone?” Seven murmured, checking the clip on his Glock.

“That fucker out there shot him.”

“Is he dead?”

“No, but he’s got a bullet in his leg.”

“Fuck, we are so dead,” Fisher said.

“I’m sorry, but I can handle whoever the fuck is out there,” Jaxon growled, and Seven heard the derision in the words.

“I wasn’t talking about that guy.” Fisher gestured to the trees on the other side of the SUV. “I mean Dave is going to kill us,” Fisher finished.

Jaxon grunted but didn’t disagree.

“Where is he?” If Stone was here, he was hiding well.

“I put him next to my truck.” Jaxon jerked his head toward the far end of the building where another parking lot sat. “Where’s Hunter?”

“He tweaked his ankle. Link and Eagle are coming around the other side of the warehouse,” Seven said.

When another round of bullets suddenly pinged the vehicle, Seven had had enough.

“Fuck this,” he said before lunging up and sending several rounds into the trees where the last shot had come from. After firing, Seven was gone. Sprinting around the side of the SUV, he flew across the few feet to the edge of the trees and vanished. Jaxon stood and fired two loud-ass shots from the compact

shotgun, and it sounded like Fisher emptied his clip. Both men were on his ass, but Seven didn't wait.

The trees closed in around him and while the rain had stopped to a drizzle, it made it nearly impossible to hear anything, but it wasn't impossible to see nor track. And tracking was something he was very fucking good at.

Seven waited and then eased forward. He stilled between two aspen and watched the darkest part of the shadows. Jaxon and Fisher fanned out on either side of him, but Seven still waited. He knew that if Fisher or Jaxon got close to the gunman, the guy would have no choice but to shoot and move. Right on cue, gunfire echoed and both Jaxon and Fisher dropped low.

Ah. There it was, that tiny bit of movement.

"Got you, motherfucker," Seven murmured and fired.

Snick, snick, snick.

The figure stumbled, stepped forward, and slumped to the ground.

"I'll check, he may have a vest," Fish said and crept closer while he and Jaxon provided cover.

"He's dead."

Seven let out the breath he hadn't realized he was holding and turned toward the safe house just in time to see Hunter limping along the far corner of the building and then disappear.

"Where's Stone again?" Seven stalked through the trees and out into the parking lot.

"The way Hunter just went," Jaxon said, following him.

Fisher stayed behind to clean up.

Rounding the corner, Seven saw Stone crawl out of the bed of Jaxon's truck. As soon as his feet were on the ground, someone opened fire. A bullet hit Stone in the chest and he went down hard.

"Stone!" Hunter cried.

Seven pulled his other gun and with both of his weapons, he fired into the trees. Jaxon stepped up beside him and instead of using the shotgun, the bodyguard fired with a Glock. The barrage

of bullets hit the trees and hit their mark. A body dropped to the ground and slowly rolled down the small incline to rest at the edge of the asphalt.

Jogging over, Seven checked the shooter's neck. The man was dead, but Seven suspected it was too late to save Stone and all he could think of was...

Thank God it hadn't been Hunter.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Hunter

The hotel room was super quiet compared to the storm raging outside, but Hunter welcomed it.

Fuck, he was bone weary and sank down to sit on the edge of the bed.

“You okay?” Seven asked, closing the door and flipping the locks before slowly approaching him. The man’s fingers combed gently through the hair on his bent head.

“Yeah, thank God Stone made it through surgery on his leg. Doc says he’ll make a full recovery.”

“Mhmm. Good thing he had a vest on,” Seven agreed. “I thought Dave was going to lose his shit there for a while, though.”

“Yeah, there’s history there.”

“What kind?”

“I don’t actually know the details, but every time those two are in the same room, it’s like lightning.”

Seven nodded but seemed antsy.

“Is your brother okay?”

“Yeah, Ice is at my house with him. He went straight there right before I came back to you.”

“He’s a good friend.” Hunter smiled.

“He is,” Seven agreed and then rubbed at his chin before doing a complete topic change. “Don’t you think it’s kind of weird that Solomon disappeared?”

When the ambulance had arrived, the EMTs never found Solomon. However, they had been on hand to help Stone.

Hunter sighed. “Well, Erebus has their own doctors. So, if he was able, he’d go to them rather than explain away a bullet wound to a local hospital.”

“Stone had a bullet wound,” Seven pointed out.

“Yeah, he also had the former SecDef breathing brimstone and fire,” Hunter smirked. “Besides, I overheard Dave say that Stone was his bodyguard.”

When Seven stayed silent, Hunter patted the spot on the mattress beside him.

“What’s on your mind? I can see the wheels spinning.”

Seven slowly sank down next to him, and Hunter turned to cup the man’s unshaven jaw, gazing into tired ocean-blue eyes.

“I think I’m better suited to Erebus,” Seven said.

In truth, the statement didn’t surprise him. He figured Seven wouldn’t want to be with him and work with him at the same time, but he needed to find out why Seven chose Erebus over Pegasus or even Phoenix. Either way, Hunter was determined to make this work, so whatever Seven wanted to do, Hunter would back him up.

“Why do you think you’re better suited?”

“Because I killed Lark without blinking.”

So, this wasn’t about working together, he thought silently.

“Do you think that Pegasus and Phoenix always follow the letter of the law?” Hunter asked.

Seven nodded doggedly.

Hunter huffed and then gave a dry smile, and Seven glanced away.

“Not hardly. None of Dave’s specialty teams are black or white. We operate in the gray, hovering on the fringes of society. I remember—and this was while I was still with Erebus—a story came out about this young boy who was kept in captivity.”

Hunter paused until Seven had turned toward him.

“What happened?” Seven asked.

“During a raid, a US Marshal saved him. That boy grew up, joined one of Dave’s units, and then killed the men responsible for murdering his mother.”

“Yeah?” Hope bloomed in Seven’s eyes and Hunter nodded as he delivered the brief story of Noah and Mac.

“Mhmm, and not long ago, a man I admire and respect emptied his gun—until the barrel clicked over and over—into the body of a man who had kidnapped the man he loved.”

Seven huffed. “I know that one, Rossi and Stefano. Fisher told me.”

“Yeah...and let’s not forget that one man crushed another man’s throat to save the one he loves,” Hunter said, reminding Seven that it had been him who had ended the life of the sex and drug trafficker who had dared to lay a hand on Seven.

Seven’s gaze softened. “You know, you try to come across as some easygoing flirt who wouldn’t harm a fly, but I see you.”

“You do?” Hunter let the humor and love shine from his eyes.

“Mhmm, and I love what I see.”

Fuck. It was true. Wishes did come true. Who would have thought talking about murder and mayhem would go hand in hand with admissions of love?

“I have a confession to make.”

“What’s that?” Hunter racked his brain over what Seven had to come clean about, but came up with nothing.

“I tapped your phone and put a tracker on it.” Seven ducked his head and stared at his hands.

Hunter’s smile grew, but Seven refused to look at him.

“I knew my phone was being tracked and I knew you were recording my conversations the moment you did it.”

Seven's head snapped up and he opened his mouth, but appeared at a loss for words.

"I was tempted to call a *1-800 do me* line and have phone sex just for you."

Oh, his warrior didn't like that and deep lines furrowed Seven's forehead. Hunter stifled his laughter, but Seven heard him and toppled him back on the bed.

Hunter's laugh turned into muffled groans when Seven swooped in for a kiss. They fought each other, yanking off clothes until they were wearing nothing but briefs, and that was only because Seven got busy by trailing his mouth over Hunter's neck and down his chest. When Seven sucked first one nub and then the other into his mouth and began toying with the sensitive nips with his teeth, Hunter groaned.

"Oh fuck." Hunter arched, and his hands took full advantage of Seven's distraction to wander over the man's heated skin. His cock pulsed as the teasing sent ripples of need straight to his groin. Appearing satisfied with reddening his nipples, Seven rubbed his closely cropped beard down Hunter's stomach.

Fingers caught and removed his briefs and then Seven was kicking out of his own until bare skin touched his.

Fisting Seven's hair, he pulled the man's head up, kissing his mouth. Seven slid one leg between his and pressed his thigh up against his balls.

Grinding, Seven rubbed his cock up and down against Hunter's dick until his hips undulated and Hunter gasped into the open-mouthed kiss. Seven sucked at his tongue before nipping at his lips and then trailing his mouth over his jaw and down his throat. Hunter's head fell back and he sucked in long, deep breaths—his fisted hands eased and he stroked softly through Seven's hair.

Seven's mouth moved down his chest, but Hunter had a better idea.

He rolled them over on the mattress.

Pushing up with his arms, he gazed down into Seven's face, then pushed Seven's arms up over his head. At the same time, he slipped his leg between Seven's and parted his thighs.

Seven growled when Hunter's knee pressed into his balls and he yanked his hands from over his head to run them down Hunter's sides, back, and then up over his shoulders before snaking down between them to close around his cock.

When Seven's rough grip closed around his cock, Hunter thought he'd blow. He pulled from Seven's grip, smiling at the man's frown.

Hunter didn't care, it was his turn. He roamed his mouth down over Seven's jaw, then licked at his neck before running his mouth over his shoulders, chest, and abdomen. Seven groaned beneath him and then gasped at the swipe of Hunter's tongue at the head of his cock. Swirling his tongue along the slit, he popped the head into his mouth.

"Fuck," Seven breathed.

Hunter took the man's length to the root—it was hot, slick, and oh so fucking slow. Seven bowed his back a bit, grinding his hips before the man's fingers tightly gripped his shoulders.

"Hunter," Seven warned.

"Don't come," Hunter pulled off enough to whisper and then tongued at the slit of his dick. Before he slipped his lips back over Seven's cock and took him all the way in, he moaned.

"Nhhh fuuuuck..."

Hunter knocked the head of Seven's cock in the back of his throat, and the man made a sound somewhere between a groan and a growl. Fuck, he loved that sound. He squeezed at the base of Seven's cock to stop any idea of releasing and pulled off with a pop.

"Get the lube," Seven said, breathing hard.

Hunter smiled.



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Seven

He roamed his eyes over Hunter's body when the man left the bed and collected the small bottle of lube. Thank God Hunter had had the foresight to stop at the hotel shop downstairs. Lube for sale at a hotel shop—imagine that. He wasn't going to question the odds, though.

Hunter flipped off the overhead light and the man's cerulean blue-colored eyes glittered in the dim light from the lamp on the desk. Hunter snapped open the bottle on his way back to the bed, but instead of putting it on his own dick, Hunter climbed up and dumped it onto Seven's cock. Either way was fine with him; they usually switched back and forth with each other. He liked that about them.

He hissed at the touch of those firm fingers twisting slick down his dick. Hunter straddled his legs and kept up that slow jerk that was driving him crazy.

Snatching up the lube where Hunter had tossed it to the bed, Seven slicked his fingers and slipped them down between Hunter's legs, past his sac, before ghosting over the sensitive skin between his cheeks. Slowly, he pushed one finger into Hunter's ass and watched the man's eyes widen.

"Seven," Hunter hissed, and it was the sexiest sound.

Hunter planted hands on his own thighs and sat upright to ride his finger, and Seven added another.

“Oh, fuck yeah,” Hunter groaned, sinking down on both fingers. His head sank back on his neck and dark, sweat-slickened hair fell over his forehead.

Seven paused for a beat and then placed the tip of his cock at Hunter’s ass and pushed—making his way inside. Hunter fell forward a bit, hands on his shoulders, and sank his ass down. Before long, the man was bending farther to press a kiss to his neck and then lips while grinding his hips.

“Just like that,” Seven said, his breath coming quickly, and he chased Hunter’s lips when the man drew back slightly.

Running his hands over Hunter’s damp skin, he gripped the man’s hips and sent his own thrusting up. Hunter gasped, sitting back, and used his thigh muscles to lift his ass up and down.

“Oh fuck, I’m going to come,” Hunter groaned, tossing his head back.

Seven agreed; he needed to come so fucking bad it was all he could do to hold it. He paused for a beat and then picked up a much slower grinding pace.

“No...” Hunter panted. “Don’t go slow.”

“I want to savor you,” he rasped, feeling Hunter shiver.

Slowly, oh so slowly, he slipped his cock in deep and pulled it out just as slowly.

Hunter had bitched before about him going slow, but Seven fucking craved it. And he suspected that Hunter did too. His hands slipped from the sweat on Hunter’s skin, and he moved one around to take hold of Hunter’s cock.

With his other hand, he brought Hunter’s head down and fused his mouth to Hunter’s, and then slipped his hand down the back of the man’s back, feeling as the muscles released and contracted.

Hunter had taken over the slow ride, lifting and rocking down, placing his arms on the mattress on either side of Seven’s head. The kiss broke apart and Seven rubbed his unshaven face along Hunter’s neck, jaw, and chin before taking Hunter’s lips in another bone-crushing kiss.

Seven twisted and slipped his hand up and down Hunter's throbbing length until he felt the man pulse. Running the pad of his thumb over the crown, he smeared the precome around and down as Hunter moaned.

Slow was good up to a point and Seven had reached that point. Sliding his free hand back to Hunter's hip, he gripped him there and sent his hips upward hard—going deep—and each piston upward drew more precome from Hunter's cock.

Hunter's head snapped up and their eyes met, gazes colliding, and everything he felt for Hunter was reflected back from the man above him. The power Hunter had over him was scary and fierce and Seven wouldn't change it for anything on this Earth. Emotions swirled in those bright blue eyes.

Seven pounded upward and Hunter slammed down one last time. Pleasure crashed through his gut and tightened his balls. Between them, Hunter's cock exploded in his grip and the man spiraled, sending ropes of come over Seven's stomach.

He lost it; with his eyes now locked with Hunter's, he sent several more jerking thrusts upward. His orgasm rolled over him, blurring Hunter's face and the room as he emptied his balls into the man he loved without a shadow of a doubt.

Above him, Hunter gyrated, taking everything he had to give. The man's cock was still semi-hard in his fist. Seven panted and sank his whole body back into the bed, but his dick wasn't finished.

“Ready for round two?” Hunter leaned over him, and Seven's cock slipped out of the man's ass.

With a slight thrust, Hunter slid his dick into his hand.

“Yeah” he breathed, pulling at Hunter's cock.

Hunter got the lube from the bed.



Light filtered through the crack in the hotel's blackout curtains and shot across the bed. It was the only thing that pulled Seven from a sound sleep.

Well, that and the fact when he patted the bed beside him, it was empty. He rolled and sat up. Hunter wasn't in the main room and the light in the bathroom was off.

"Hunter?" he called out, just in case he had missed him somewhere. "Well, shit," he grumbled and tossed back the sheets to sit on the edge of the bed.

The door key beeped and then the lock clicked, jerking Seven's head up, and he devoured Hunter's sexy frame. Carrying a tray of coffee and breakfast, Hunter approached the bed.

"Hey." Hunter smiled at him and Seven felt like he'd won the lottery.

"Hey." He returned the smile and then slid back on the bed, up against the headboard, and pulled the sheet over his waist. Hunter put the tray in his hands and kicked off his shoes and pants before climbing back into bed.

They sat like that sipping coffee and eating ham and cheese croissants.

They hadn't had that many of these moments in the past because Seven hadn't stuck around, but all that was going to change. He vowed to make moments like these all the time.

A perfect time.

A time he could spend with the man he loved more than anything on Earth. He really had no family to call his own except for Josh. And that was another thing he needed to figure out. He was going to get custody of Joshua, and maybe Dave would help without wanting too much in return. Either way, with Joshua in the picture, Seven needed a steady income and not the mercenary jobs he'd been taking here and there. After yesterday's events at Lark's house, Seven knew his choices.

"Your brain is spinning."

"What?"

Hunter smirked and plucked the empty tray from him and placed it on the nightstand before turning back to him.

"What are you thinking?"

"You first," Seven said, dodging the question.

“I want to take you home to meet my moms.”

Seven sat stunned, but Hunter patiently waited him out.

“What if...” He paused, struggling for the words, but Hunter didn’t have that problem.

“What if they don’t like you?”

“It’s a possibility...” he croaked.

“Babe. They are going to love you.”

“Yeah?”

“Oh yeah.” Hunter smiled. “Now, tell me about your family.”

Dread filled Seven, but with a hard swallow, he told Hunter about his deadbeat dad and alcoholic stepmother. Joshua and Lisa were his half-siblings. The living conditions were only as good as they were because Seven paid for everything since his dad retired early about a year ago.

“I can’t leave Josh there,” Seven murmured tightly.

“Oh, hell no, we are not leaving him there. I’ll talk to Dave.”

“You will?”

“Damn right, I will.”

Seven’s breath caught at the fierce love shining in Hunter’s eyes and he gave a silent thank-you to whatever power had brought this man into his life.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Hunter

He'd seen the fear in Seven's eyes and did everything possible to make it disappear.

He'd do whatever it took to let Seven know he and his love were in safe hands.

"So... about what you said last night," he began.

"What part?"

"If you want to join Erebus, I'll back you," he said softly. Even though he wanted Seven by his side, he also wanted Seven to be comfortable.

"What if I don't join either Pegasus or Erebus?" Seven murmured, cupping his neck and brushing a thumb along his jaw.

Hunter smiled and rubbed his face against Seven's hand. "I'm good with whatever makes you happy."

Seven smiled. "What about you? Will you go back to Erebus?"

"Um, that would be a big fat no," Hunter huffed. "I may be qualified for that job, but I don't want it. Too many hours spent alone."

"Yeah, and I don't want that, but I'll be honest, I'm not sure Pegasus or Phoenix is the right fit for me."

Hunter nodded, hesitated, and then blurted. “Is it because of me?”

“What?” Seven frowned with confusion.

“I work there, and you don’t want to work with me?”

“No. I love working with you. I just don’t like taking orders.”

Hunter smiled. “Except from me.”

“Except from you,” Seven agreed with a smirk.

“Well, now that’s settled.” Hunter smiled. “We’ll talk to Dave and see what we can do.”

“I do need a steady income.”

“I know.” Hunter cupped Seven’s face before he wriggled back into sitting at his side.

Sipping the rest of their coffee in companionable silence, Hunter went over the different scenarios of employment in his head. Jobs that hopefully didn’t include ones from Erebus.

When his phone buzzed on the nightstand, he lifted it up to check the text.

“It’s Jaxon. He’s back in Colorado and he got word that Solomon sought help from one of the Erebus doctors.”

“What will Dave do about Solomon?”

“I don’t know. I hope he’ll let him stay on.”

“Solomon did put himself at risk trying to save you and Theo.”

“And that’s why I’ll put in a good word for Solomon when I talk to Dave.”

“What will he do about Theo?”

“Jaxon convinced Dave that Theo is an asset and won’t be retired.”

Hunter tossed his phone on the bed.

“Move in with me.”

He froze at the softly spoken words and his gaze flew up, catching and holding Seven’s ocean-colored eyes. Fuck, he’d love nothing more than to live with this man.

“Are you sure?” He squinted. “It is awfully soon.”

“Soon? We’ve known each other for over a year.” Seven looked so affronted, Hunter had to laugh.

“You don’t think a year is too short?”

“A year? Nope, that’s a long ass time,” Seven argued with a slight pout.

“I have stuff in storage,” he warned.

“Bring it over. I need a new couch anyways. Ice refuses to sleep in the spare room and has broken down my cushions.”

Hunter snickered and combed his fingers up through the strands of Seven’s dark, rich hair.

“What if we’re not compatible?”

Seven huffed and gestured to their crotches hidden beneath the sheet. “We are.”

“I snore sometimes.”

“I’ll invest in earplugs.”

“I hog the covers.”

“I’ll buy two sets.”

“I like to sleep on the left side,” Hunter teased.

“Well, that’s a deal breaker.”

Hunter hooted with laughter and Seven tackled him onto the bed.

“You goof.”

“Yeah, but I’m your goof,” Seven said.

Truer words were never spoken.



They left the hotel much later, tossing things into Seven’s truck. Hunter punched in an address and Seven gave him a startled look when the GPS said to turn right and then left.

“Where are we going?”

“I’m taking you to meet my moms.”

“What! Right now?” Seven stared at him wide-eyed from behind the wheel and Hunter reached over to take the man’s right hand.

“Don’t worry.”

“Jesus, warn a guy,” Seven mumbled, and Hunter laughed, squeezed his hand, and released it.

“They live close. Come on, we’ll only stay a few minutes, and it’s on the way to your house.”

“How do you know where I live?” Seven pulled onto the road and took the ramp to the freeway.

“What? You can bug my phone but I can’t search for an address?”

“Then you must know my real name.”

“Duh.”

Seven laughed loudly. “No introductions needed?”

“Are you serious? We’ve been lovers for almost a year, and you thought I wouldn’t... what? Check into you?”

“You did?”

“I’m a cautious man,” Hunter teased. “I like to know who I’m screwing.”

“Hey!” Seven poked a lip out, checked the rearview mirror, and got over into the fast lane.

Hunter grinned. “Just kidding, you goof.”

Seven tossed him a smile. “I know, I just wanted you to take it back.”

Hunter laughed, and he was still smiling when they pulled up ten minutes later in front of the cream-colored, two-story house at the end of a cul-de-sac.

Momma and Mom rushed out onto the porch before Seven could turn the truck off. Hunter laughed and jumped out.

“There you are!” Mom said, holding out her arms, and Hunter rushed up the steps to hold her tightly before pulling Momma into their three-way hug.

Hearing the truck door quietly shut, Hunter pulled free and turned to a hesitant Seven.

“Mom, Momma, this is Seven. He’s mine.”

Hunter held out his hand, and Seven smirked, shaking his head, but there was no hesitation when the man took the steps upward and gripped his hand.

“Oh, Seven!” Mom cried. “It’s so nice to finally meet you.”

“I made pie,” Momma gushed, wrapping her arm around Seven’s and guiding him into the house.

His moms went into the kitchen, and he took Seven’s hand to pull him into the living room.

Hunter stepped inside and froze.

“Well, it’s about time you two showed up,” Parker said from his spot on the couch. A football game played on the television and Oliver was tucked up against Parker on the cushions with a bowl of popcorn on his lap.

“Hey, bro,” Hunter said with a casual wave.

His older brother squinted at him and then zoomed in on Seven. Tension in the room could be felt immediately and Oliver elbowed Parker in the ribs. His brother grunted.

“You hurt him in any way and I’ll—”

“Okay, okay.” Hunter cut his brother off with a shake of his head and said simply, “No, we are not doing this.”

He stared at Parker for another moment before his brother’s lips twitched. When Parker turned back to Seven, there was a softer, more open expression on the former police chief’s face.

“Welcome to the family, Seven,” Parker said.

“Ditto,” Oliver added.

“Thank you.”

“Now,” Hunter said, slapping his hands together. “Let’s go find some food.” He grabbed Seven’s hand and pulled him toward the kitchen.

“Don’t eat all the fixings before that chicken is done baking,” Parker bitched but Hunter only laughed.

When he and Seven stepped into the warm kitchen filled with smells of rich food and spices, his Mom and Momma rushed up to them.

“I’m so happy for you both.” Momma sniffled.

“Aw, Momma, come on.” Hunter patted her shoulder, and she dabbed at her eyes with the edge of her apron.

And Hunter watched, amazed when Seven drew both women into his arms and held them tight.

Their eyes met over their heads and Hunter thought his heart would burst.



EPILOGUE

Two months later-Undisclosed location.

Seven

Seven stood at the fringes of the large room filled with people. A party the size of a New York City ball was taking place and he'd agreed to come with Hunter.

Tugging at the collar of the tux, he searched around for his date.

“Bro!” Joshua’s voice tugged him from his search and he turned toward his brother. The seventeen-year-old wore a tux and shiny shoes and, for once, had his hair combed. Behind Joshua stood Travis.

“Can I go with Travis? He said Mason arranged for a gaming room.”

“Yeah, it’s got everything!” Travis said, his eyes alight with excitement.

Travis was the younger brother of Pegasus operative Gage Hillcrest. Mason Taylor was also an operative, and the two men lived together raising two kids plus Travis. Seven had to hand it to the pair, they did a great job. He, Hunter, and Joshua had been

over to their house numerous times over the past two months. Travis and Joshua had hit it off immediately.

“Bro?”

“Yes, go.” Seven waved a hand and Joshua and Travis took off like bats out of hell. He watched until his brother disappeared into a nearby room.

Two days after leaving that hotel room, Seven had Joshua in his home and the boy had never left. With the help of some powerful people, custody documents had been drawn up and Seven had signed them a few days after that. All within a week.

That same week, Hunter had moved into his house.

“I’ll give you a blow job for your thoughts,” Hunter whispered next to his ear.

Seven snorted and eased back into his lover’s arms when Hunter slipped his arms around his waist and nuzzled the side of his neck.

“What happened to pennies?”

“What pennies?”

“For your thoughts.”

Hunter snickered. “Pennies are overrated.”

“I don’t even want to know what you two are talking about.” Link’s amused voice came from right beside them, making Hunter jump and turn. Seven knew his love was hiding his hard-on—it had poked him in the butt.

“Nice to see you made it,” Seven said and shook the hand Link offered.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t miss the opportunity to see Eagle dance.”

“What’s wrong with my dancing?” Eagle asked, coming to stand next to Link.

“Did I say there was something wrong with it?”

Eagle frowned, thinking that over.

“Do you dance?” Seven asked Eagle.

“Not if I can help it,” Eagle grumbled, and Link gave an annoyed sigh.

“Well, I’m going to mingle,” Link said and then winked at Seven and Hunter. “Don’t get in trouble.”

“No promises,” Seven said and pulled Hunter closer again.

Eagle gave them both a nod and followed behind Link.

“Those two,” Hunter whispered and shook his head.

Yeah, Seven didn’t know what was going on with them, but he knew Link was hurting.

Turning his thoughts to the man in his arms, he brushed his rough cheek against Hunter’s cheek. This right here, in Hunter’s arms, was his safe place. He knew first-hand how fleeting life was, and he vowed to enjoy every single moment of it with Hunter.

Starting by dancing the night away in his man’s arms.

“Dance with me.”



Hunter

He slipped into Seven’s arms once they reached the dance floor and tucked in close to the man’s powerful body. Earlier, Hunter had lost his breath when Seven had emerged from their bedroom after dressing in a tux.

The party had been hosted by Dave as a thank-you for a job well done over the past few months and honestly, all of them needed it. Phoenix and Pegasus operatives had come but Erebus was nowhere to be seen. Dave told him that he had asked, but that they probably wouldn’t show.

However, the bodyguards from Cobalt Security had arrived and that, combined with the two specialty teams, had the room filled with tons of powerful attitudes.

He gazed into Seven’s smiling face. His love had not taken a job with any of the specialty teams. Instead, Seven did contract work. That meant Seven was called in on any given team when Dave, Rossi, Solomon, or Ace had a need. The surprising part

was that they always had a need for an extra body on a case. That was an indication that all teams were understaffed.

It hadn't been but a week after the safe house incident that Fisher had resigned from Pegasus, and Hunter heard from Jaxon that Fisher had taken up a job with Erebus.

"I wonder why..." Hunter murmured to Seven.

"It makes sense," Seven said. "Fisher was never happy at Pegasus."

Hunter had known that and when he thought about it, it did make sense. Out of all the Pegasus operatives, Fisher was the one who stayed on the fringes of them and worked primarily alone. Hell, the guy even moved like an assassin. Hunter wished nothing but the best for him. Fisher had backed up Seven at a time when Hunter hadn't been able to, and he'd forever be grateful to him for that.

Hunter had finally met Seven's friend Ice and liked him on the spot. Ice was currently mulling over a few offers from Dave. The SecDef knew a skilled man when he met one. In fact, Ice was somewhere in this crowd of people, as were a few other people who weren't members of a team, but it was a celebration, and family was a part of that. He smiled remembering Seven meeting his moms for the first time. His love had been so nervous until five minutes later and then Seven had melted in the face of his mothers' love. They were awesome parents and had made Hunter into the man he was today.

The music changed to a slower song.

Dave was a big fan of 90s music, so the DJ had been given strict orders.

Hunter moved in Seven's arms to the song "I'll Be" by Edwin McCain.

And he sang along with the lyrics, finding them fitting for their love, because he was definitely the greatest fan of Seven's life. Seven's throat moved with a hard swallow and Hunter leaned in to kiss his lover's lips.

Yeah, call him sappy, but life was so fucking good right now.

He was going to take advantage of every single moment.

The End

A note from Reese

If you're interested reading about Jaxon West and the bodyguards, check out my Cobalt Security series.

If you're curious about Eagle and Link—their history can be found in my Code of Honor series.

PEGASUS ROSTER

Ace (Cohen Gray) - Commander

Dalton Weber - Second in Command

Jacob Burns

Adam Campbell

Gage Hillcrest

Mason Taylor

Eagle - Declan Weller

Link - Lincoln Beckett

Holden Wreck

Beckett - Samuel Wreck

Maverick Cane

Hunter Johnson

Oliver Rains

Parker Johnson

Owen Gray

Creed

Fisher

Cooper Lancaster

[Click here to return to note](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my fans, as always, these stories are for you.

Sneak Peek of *Without Warning*

CHAPTER ONE



Harrison

“Who sent them?”

“I don’t know,” he lied, and he wasn’t sure why, but the thought of his uncle finding out how much he’d been duped didn’t sit well. And god, had he been duped.

“That’s it! I’m hiring you a bodyguard!” his uncle bellowed.

“Don’t, please. A bodyguard is the last thing I want or need.” His childhood from the age of ten had been filled with security, off and on.

Uncle Dean looked troubled. “Harrison, I must.”

“The last time I had a bodyguard, he was killed,” he said faintly.

“I know how hard this is for you.”

Really? He gazed down blindly at his hands and then lifted them, palms up, to his uncle as if the man could see how much blood had once covered them. Then he pressed his trembling fingers to his lips and the room blurred.

“I don’t think you do.”

Dean hadn’t been present when someone tried to kill him. Mitchell, his bodyguard, had been there, though, and had been killed.

In the end, Mitchell had killed the gunman but not until two people had been wounded and Mitchell had lost his own life.

“I gotta get to work.” He hurried from his uncle’s office.

“Harrison! I’m calling a trusted friend!”

Wiping at his face, he struggled to push the memories away. To his uncle, it seemed so cut and dry, but it wasn’t. Harrison longed to feel safe without putting others in harm’s way, was that too much to ask?

Reaching his office, he met Toby coming down the hallway.

“Everything okay?”

“No, shit can’t get any more complicated.”

He hurried into his office and shoved his fingers between his neck and tie to loosen the noose a bit and tossed his briefcase onto his desk. Fumbling with the top drawer, he took out several bottles of pills.

“Complicated how?” Toby asked, following him into his office. Seeing the bottles, Toby grabbed a water from the small personal fridge in the corner and handed it to him.

Harrison twisted the cap off the bottle and the pink, disc-sized pills spilled on the desk. He snatched up several and chewed them to ward off the nausea and then noisily twisted the cap off the ibuprofen to ward off his pounding headache. Swallowing a few in one gulp along with the water, he drew in several deep, noisy breaths.

He couldn’t get Mitchell’s dying smile out of his head. No matter how much he’d screamed at Mitchell to hang on, it hadn’t mattered in the end.

Shutting out Toby's concerned face, he turned abruptly to the row of windows that looked out over the city and took in a long, shaky breath.

The people of Denver, Colorado, looked like little ants from the twenty-sixth floor of his office building, but even a view he normally enjoyed disappeared.

"What's the matter?"

Closing his eyes for a brief moment, he turned. *What's the matter? Try everything.*

Could he let his overprotective loving uncle win this battle and potentially have another death on his hands?

He lowered slowly into his office chair and lifted his favorite pen. Carefully, he tapped it against his very full desk calendar. *Work, he needed to work.*

"Harrison?" Toby frowned.

"It's Uncle Dean." He gnawed at his lip. But it wasn't Dean's fault. He wasn't the one that messed up. *I brought this into my life.*

"Is he interfering again?" Concern etched the big guy's face.

"Of course he is, and he's throwing money at the problem like usual, thinking that will fix it."

He knew that was an unfair statement, Dean cared about his safety above everything else, but his uncle *was* throwing money at something that couldn't be fixed. Nothing was going to fix this, he was flawed, and there was no fixing that.

Toby's brow creased. "How?"

"What?" He frowned having lost his train of thought.

"How did he throw money at it?" Toby pressed.

"It's too long to go into." There was no sense in worrying Toby. Harrison spun the chair around to the window, not really seeing anything.

The first threat had been a small, typed note with the words “*you’ll pay*” written on it delivered to his office in a sealed envelope.

Harrison knew with certainty that Edward had sent it. *Bastard*. His back spasmed and he reached behind to rub at the soreness, willing the pain meds to kick in.

It wasn’t that he’d opened his heart to Edward, thank god. He’d done something much worse, he’d trusted him.

Embarrassment over bad choices had kept his mouth shut about the previous note, but the hatefulness behind what was delivered today left him feeling concerned. So much so that when the dead flowers and the same sick note arrived in his office this morning, he’d made the mistake of showing them to Marty.

His assistant, never any good at not interfering, had immediately taken the ominous items to his uncle.

Pressing his lips together, he swiveled back around to his desk and Toby. His friend had squeezed his large frame into one of the small office chairs in front of his desk and sat quietly, looking over a printed report. The man worked in his video feed department and had his face buried in a report more often than not.

What Harrison needed to do was come up with a plan to thwart his uncle, because he didn’t have it in him to deal with putting another life at risk. Call him a coward, but he just couldn’t do it. Mitchell’s life had ended over death threats from an unhappy employee. This time, the threat was a bitter ex-boyfriend playing a stupid and childish game with notes. Nobody was getting hurt or killed this time, not over a few stupid notes and dead flowers.

Get [*Without Warning*](#) here!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reese spends her time creating stories from the characters rattling around in her head. Her love of reading mystery, action and adventure, and fantasy books led to her love of writing. Reese works as a full-time writer. She loves to hear from her readers. Check out her website at www.reeseknightley.com. You can reach her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#). Her email address is Reeseknightleyauthor@gmail.com