

## Chapter 9: Scalpel

Nick paced back and forth in the alleyway, anxiety spread across his mind and face as he considered the thought of meeting a Collective operative. His breath hitched with every drop of rain, every rat's skitter and every cat's hiss.

He forced himself to straighten his back, to feign stalwartness. He could not buckle in the face of anticipation if he were to take this job, after all. His mind raced at the question of what he could be signing up for.

Was it another run? Infiltration, maybe? Was he delivering another letter, like that time with the Militia? The Militia; recalling them made his skin crawl. That might have been the only job he'd turn down, he thought; another run for the Militia.

He would have no time to consider the alternatives, though, as he could hear the faint tapping of footsteps in the dark beyond the streetlight. This was where he was told to wait; the light by the warren entrance.

He was surprised to see not the slender, cunning shape of a Collective runner, but instead something that looked like the silhouette of an enforcer. When she stepped into the light, Nick felt like an ant in her presence, instinctively taking a step back.

Dean: "You would be Nick Grey?"

Nick: "Er- Yeah. You are... Collective?"

Dean: "I am. I have your assignment."

The towering woman pulled out a flash drive. Nick had come prepared, quickly plugging it into the side of a laptop he already had set up on a nearby brick wall. When he opened the drive, he was greeted by a set of GPS coordinates and a PDF.

He quickly opened the document to read the parameters, startled to find 'seek and destroy' as his objective.

Nick: "Seek and destroy?"

Dean: "That a problem?"

Nick: "Shouldn't be, but... I don't see what you need destroyed."

Dean: "We included a picture."

Nick focused his eyes on the screen again, worried to find only one image; the portrait of a man that apparently went by the name of Vick Accada.

Nick: "I don't think I understand."

Dean then lifted a large bag from her shoulder and placed it on the ground before Nick. Nick shot her a confirming look before opening the bag and revealing what tools he was supposed to work with.

Now even more concerned, he found it to be only one. He found a barrel, then a trigger, then a stock, a magazine, a tripod, a small box with a blue stripe on it and finally... A scope.

Nick: "I don't know how to use this."

Dean: "You won't need to, courtesy of our friends. All you have to do is place it on the tripod and pull trigger when it lets you."

Nick: "No, I- I have never shot someone before."

Dean: "Do you want to help the Collective or not?"

Nick: "Yes! Yes, of course, but... Does he have to die?"

Dean: "You won't be shooting any innocents. That is Vick Accada, CEO of ForeverTech. Tonight, he will be at the described coordinates. You will be on an adjacent rooftop. When his path crosses your sight, you shoot him."

Nick: "ForeverTech? But I'll never live that down!"

Dean: "No one would. Not even Raven, which is why we need you to do it."

Nick: "And if I refuse?"

Dean: "Then this man walks free, so he may work another division to death."

Nick scowled at the thought, then at Dean.

Nick: "That's not fair."

Dean: "It isn't? And letting him walk is?"

Nick: "Killing him is not the same."

Dean: "No. Letting him walk is murder. Killing him is a mercy."

Nick: "I just don't want someone to die because of me."

Dean: "If you refuse, people will die because of you."

Nick shifted on his feet as he could feel a cold sweat forming on his forehead. His face was heating up as he thought of the man, this Vick, dead on the pavement somewhere. His blood boiled when he thought of his father. When he thought of his brother.

Dean: "So? What will it be, pup?"

Nick: "I'll do it."

Dean: "Syrella's Square. One hour before midnight, the parking garage. No one will stop you. Use the Warrens and you will see your brothers again."

Dean started to walk away, when Nick called out immediately.

Nick: "Wait! How do I find you?"

Dean: "You won't. We'll come to you. Have the gun with you when we do."

With that, Dean opened the hatch to the Warrens and slipped through, shutting it again behind her, leaving Nick with a flash drive and a very large rifle.

He unplugged the drive and looked at it for a moment, a part of him wishing that he would just chuck it into the sewers, throw the rifle down into the Warrens and walk away.

But, as Dean said, they would find him.

He was just wondering if the PKF would be first.