

## Storyboard-7

“Finally over.”

The guard—Jensen’s his name is... Maybe it’s Johnson? Jackson? I’m pretty sure it’s a j-something. Unless it’s g?—looks up at me as I put my hand on the scanner.

“I so can’t wait to be home.”

He smiles. “Know what you mean. I can’t wait to get back to my wife after a long day.”

I grin. “I never thought married life would be for me.”

“Really? You’re good looking. You have a good job. What’s to keep someone from wanting to be with you?”

“My tendency to go off on people who piss me off.” I swipe the IRFD card.

“How does your husband deal with it?”

“Slams me against the way and fucks me till I can’t think of anything else.” I head for the door as he sputters. Outside, I scan the parking lot and can’t see my car among the others. Damn it, why am I still looking for my gray Malibu? There’s the fucking Rio.

I so can’t wait to be home. Maybe I can use that to piss Tristan off and get the fucking of my life. Well, another one. Every time it’s the fucking of my—

I pivot before the motion register to my consciousness. Someone popping up from behind a car. I duck before what he’s swinging at me registers too. A baseball bat.

Someone curses.

Someone not the baseball bat holder and I duck the crowbar.

A third kid—Emil was right, they’re fucking young—swings at me, but I’m done being surprised. I deck him with a punch and that baseball bat vanishes behind other cars. I block a swing as I maneuver us to open space—four empty spots—and fuck does taking a baseball bat to the arm hurts. I kick him in the balls and he drops. You don’t get nastier than how I fight.

I shake my arm and make a fist. It’s still working, that’s good. I’m in the center of the space with, let’s see, eleven Slicerbacks around me.

“You guys are kind of out of your jurisdiction.”

Not one of them gets the reference. You’d think that dealing with cops as much as they have to, they know that one.

They are pissed. Could be because Tristan kicked their asses, then Emil, and now I’ve taken to of them down. It’s okay. I have space now. They are about to find out that all of them against me, and everything Grams and Gramp taught me, just means I might work up a sweat.

“Let’s get this—”

“What are you kids doing?” someone yells. J or G or whatever the guard name’s is, yells. And now he’s running in our direction. If he thought his uniform and not unimpressive build was going to be enough to send them scattering, he doesn’t understand how idiotic these kids are. I mean, they are coming after me after my man and our son handed them their asses.

That doesn’t scream ‘I’m smart’. ‘I be smart’, maybe, but that’s the extent of it.

I dodge and, instead of quickly grabbing and breaking the arm, I throw a clumsy punch. It still hit hard, but these kinds know how to endure pain. Cry-babies don’t last in gangs, I expect. I go for less than effective because now that mister ‘I don’t know why he’s involving himself in this’ is close enough to see what I’m doing, I can’t have him see just how little I need him here. Kat would just love to know that her much better than he let on security expert is also basically a commando trained fighter.

That’d be the straw that breaks her back, I think.

I might not need this job, not really. Well, if you don’t count how I can use her computers as cover for some of my investigations. But, let’s be honest, I do enjoy that back-and-forth banter me and her have.

So I dial back what I can do. Stick to punches, rather than strikes, avoid getting hit, instead of deflecting onto other attackers. You know, make it seem like I only barely know what I’m doing.

“This is the last warning,” guard man said. “You don’t leave now, and I’m calling the—” I don’t the hit, but that didn’t sound good. “You little son of a bitch.”

I glance in time to see G-Man throw a haymaker that sends her down. Then he steps into the fight, threats forgotten in his anger. He punches with more skill than I expect and I figure he can hold his own until he doesn’t move in time, and a crowbar connects with his leg. That sound was not the crowbar breaking. He goes down and the way bats and bars go up around him, the kids no longer care, if they ever did, about the kind of damage they’re going to do.

Fuck, I hope Guard man's unconscious.

I deflect the attack so the baseball bat hit his neighbor in the face, then I'm in the—what, you think I'd stopped fighting? Come on, I can think and fight these...amateur would be an insult to people who just started learning to fight.

"I don't think so," I say as I grabbed the descending crowbar, twist it out of the girl's hand, hit her in the face with the rounded end, then intercept a descending baseball bat with it. "You've already caused enough damage." I kick him in the side of the knee. Not hard enough to break anything, but he goes down and I'm now holding a baseball bat, too.

I get rid of that, too clumsy, by throwing in a kid's stomach. Then I block another one and my hand spasm open from the impact and I lose the crowbar. That's okay. Unlike Emil, I do prefer not holding anything when I'm fighting.

I parry, deflect, and knee an attacker. Dodge, grab the wrist, twist until the kid screams and drops the bat. Then I trip him so his head hit the ground hard enough to keep him there for a bit. The next one I disarm before she even realizes what I did, and a baseball under the jaw sends her down.

I step over guard man, who's staring at me, eyes wide in surprise. So much for him being unconscious. This is the kind of situation where not having a sense of morality would make my life so fucking easier.

Another kid down.

How many are left? Four. I dodge a bat, punch that kid in the face, and he drops. Now it's four. Deflect, but that girl's faster than the others, and the crowbar misses her. A hit on the guy's arm and the bar falls to the ground. I move out of the way and her swing hit him, taking care of that. She's not over her surprise that I elbow her in the face and I'm down to two.

Or not.

They are retreating forms between cars.

Two smart enough to know they're out-classed out of the bunch. That's... unexpected.

"I didn't know you keyboard mashers knew how to fight," guard man says, then he groans as he pulls himself to a sitting position.

"We don't." Can I pay him off to stay quiet? He has a wife, so there is that angle. Tristan wouldn't hesitate. But I can't make it that easy on me, can I? "Can you take the credit for this?"

His answer, a refusal, by the disbelief on his face, he covered by the gunshot and a car window shattering, and then the pounding of my heart in my ear as I drop to a knee.

Are you fucking kidding me? One of them brought a gun?

I pop my head over the hood only long enough to make out a shape on the other side of the parking lot, their lower half hidden by a car. Doesn't look like they plan on moving, that's good.

"Stay here," I tell guard man. "If anyone asks, I'm going for help."

"What are you—"

I'm around the car and no longer bother listening.

I stay low. I contemplate heading to the Rio for my gun, but while that kid might not care if he kills me anymore, and wow is that stupid on their part. Like don't they get there's not going to be anything left of the neighborhood if they kill me? I don't want to risk killing one of them. They might be pissing me off right now, but they're just kids.

I don't kill kids.

Knowing where they are, I only glance to confirm they're still there. Making sure they don't notice me. That's easy since they're still looking where I was, not where I am, or where I might be, for that matter.

I want to say 'stupid kids', but I'm now close enough I carefully look around before proceeding.

That's not a kid. Grown ass man in an expensive suit. I don't see anyone else. You know, using the obvious decoy to draw me into a trap. I haven't seen the kind of expertize out of those men that lets me think they are so well hidden I can't make them out.

So I go with 'Stupid man', and proceed with my plan.

I'm on the other side of the car he's hiding behind and he hasn't moved or noticed me. Okay. He can't be that dumb. All of those we've fought before were meat head, but this one worked out where I work. There has to be a third brain cell in there to make that happen.

I go to the rear and a glance tells me that yes, it's a man, not a manikin. He's breathing and all that. Beyond us is the sidewalk on the other side of the privacy fence, then the road. Traffic there's already getting loud.

Fuck, the drive home is going to suck.

I'm around the car and at him before he has time to react. The gun moves in my direction, and I twist his wrist. The gun drops, so no worry about a shot attracting attention. I keep twisting until the wrist snaps.

Then he makes the mistake that proves deadly, for him.

I hear the music.

I force myself away from it and him, and it fades, but the knife is already in his heart.

Fuck! There goes my chance to question someone who might have a clue as to where whoever is behind Mexico is hiding!

On the plus side, I pulled away from the music.

On the plus plus side, the knife's keeping him from spilling blood all over the place.

On the plus plus plus side. He was smart enough to park in one of the few blind spots in the lot, so not worry about anyone having seen this.

I get his keys, don't find a wallet, of course. Driving without a licence. You're asking for trouble, buddy. I glance up. No crowd. Check the time. Right, I'd got out early. I was hoping to beat rush hour traffic for once and cook for Tristan and Emil. Well, Emil.

Maybe I can get Grams and Gramp to visit every day until Tristan has had to eat proper food for so long he's given up on the pemmican.

I pull the door open and show the dead man into the back. Me and Tristan will be over in the night and dispose of it. We can bring Emil so he can learn how to— no, it's a school night.

Next time then.

I lock the car and snap a picture of the license plate just in case, then head back to Guard man.

"Did you get him?" guard man asks.

"Nah, must have shot wild as they ran off." I notice a distinct absence of unconscious bodies.

"They woke up while you were over there and left."

"Just like that?"

"You kind of kicked their ass pretty hard."

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, you did. I would think twice about—"

"No," I state, "I didn't. Clearly, this was your work. I just cowered over there until you were done."

He looks at me in disbelief.

I crouch next to him. "Jensen, right?"

"Joel."

Close enough.

"Joel, I can't have Kat know I did this. I'm asking as one man to another to respect my desire to not be known as a paramilitary trained fighter."

"That wasn't military. I've been in the army and—"

"Good, so you took care of them."

"A dozen kids with baseball bats and crowbars? No one's going to believe I could deal with that. I saw you deal with it, and I don't believe it."

"Then there weren't any bats or crowbars. I can put them in the trunk of my car easily enough. They were just kids and one of them got in a lucky shot."

"Why are you so set on not taking the credit?"

"Because I'm just a keyboard masher." I hurry to gather and put away the weapons. "And that's all I want to be."

Five is about to hit.

I crouch next to Joel. "Okay, what's it going to take? How much, or what kind of favor do you need for you to take the credit in my place?"

He stares at me. "I'm not going to take something from you."

Fuck.

"You want this to stay secret so badly? Fine, I'll say I did it."

Now I'm the one staring at him in disbelief.

While I'm considering exactly how to call him out on that bullshit, the exodus starts and I'm going to have to wait to find out exactly how he'll try to take advantage of this situation.