

Storyboard-15

The burner leaning against the dash beeps and the words appear

Your Turn

Finally, I start the car. It's a Mazda Tristan hot-wired a few blocks west of here. Because they're sturdy, he said.

Let's put that to the test, shall we?

I slam the accelerator down and the computer prevents the wheels from spinning out and the acceleration is way smoother than I want. But I'm moving down the alley, picking up speed. I'm doing forty by the time I hit the street, forty five- when I hit the chained gate fence and that goes flying with barely affecting the car's control.

I'm impressed, but there's the front of the building and I'm still picking up speed, so I have better things to do than think up a review.

Fifty.

Fifty-three

Come on, tell me I can make sixty before—

I explore through the glass doors at fifty-eight.

Damn it!

I slam through the back wall of the lobby, having lost a bit of speed, and I'm conflicted between accelerating again and breaking. I mean, I am here to take these children down. But come on, I have how many hundred feet of empty space ahead of me, if you don't count on the kids jumping out of my way. How fast could I get to before the wall stops me?

Right, there's a wall. Concrete. Hitting that at top speed might not be the best idea.

I slam on the brakes and discover the car isn't equipped with high traction tires as I skid and don't particularly slow down.

This might be a problem.

The back of the car hits something and I'm spinning.

Might be a big problem.

I buckle up.

Of course, I know how to get out of a spin. But I need space for that. And I'm running out of—

The car comes to a sudden and definitive stop. I'm showered with glass from the passenger side window exploding on impact and five stars for the seatbelt as it keeps me from being flung into that flatten side.

Next time, better tires, more space and fewer people in the way.

Oh right, them.

I slam the door open into the one about to break a cheap chair against the window, and I'm prevented from leaving the car by that cursed seatbelt. By the time that's off and I'm out, slamming the door shut to show the car who's boss, I have an audience.

That's what, thirty kids, thirty-five? Looking at me like they can't believe I'm standing there, looking this impeccable, with a smashed car behind me. The average age can't be higher than sixteen, with a couple of twenty somethings balancing out the handful of twelve years old without the common sense to be running off.

What is it with these people and bringing kids into this?

"You!" someone exclaims, their voice a mix of fear and disbelief.

I grin and puff my chest. It's so good to be recognized. Makes things—

I throw myself to the side as the handgun comes up, then roll and run for a concrete support beam as more shot ring.

"Hey! Stop that! There are kids in here!"

Concrete dust flies around the pillar I use for cover. When the gun shots end, I risk a glance around it. A twenty something is changing magazines.

Does he count as a kid? We agreed no kids should get seriously hurt out of this, but that guy is in his twenties, and he's got a gun, so...

What am I thinking?

He'd fucking twenty with a gun. It's not like he's a threat to me.

I'm around the column and running.

"Take him down!" someone sounding older yells. "He's here," he says, and a glance shows me the other twenty something speaking in a phone. "Send everyone."

Everyone sounds like it's going to make this interesting.

The first to reach me is a fifteen year old girl. I punch her hard in the face and down she goes.

Of course I hit girls. I'm not sexist.

The next two are boys, and they go down just as easily. Then is another girl, slightly older and—

Wow, she packs a punch.

And she's good at dodging. Well, no helping that anymore. A kick where she's not going to want to mention it and she's on the floor, grabbing her groin.

She's why I have no problem hitting girls.

That, and I know what Gram's capable of.

Anyone who says women are the weaker sex has never fought one.

The next guy goes down, then I pause, fist wound as the twelve year old looks at me with raw anger. How the fuck am I supposed to beat the crap out of—

I step to the side, then I'm backing as fast as I can as music floats through the air.

Someone has a knife.

Oh, fuck. Someone in here has a knife.

How didn't I consider that.

Who. Who has it? How do I take them out at a distance? If I get within reach, someone's dying, and I can't have that. Fuck, how do I take the knife out of play? Anyone of those idiots' going to pick it up when it falls.

Maybe I should have brought my gun. Shooting all of them in the legs would ensure no one died.

Well, there is one gun in this room.

And it's pointed at me.

I'm on the floor just before he fires. Then I'm running, staying low to the ground. He's behind the others, so they're basically my cover unless he has no problem shooting through them.

I have a support beam between me and them, so time to think.

Well, seconds. The song's getting louder, more insistent as the knife gets closer.

And now there's another one.

Someone here has a death wish.

What do I have to work with?

Couches that should be burned, chairs I'm not sure can support my weight, a table with snacks on it. And a coffee cup.

I take a step in that direction and I'm reminded of where I am by the gunshot. They miss, well me.

“Come on! I was going to drink that!” It’s agony to watch the dark liquid drip to the floor. How did he know!

I run for the table. It’s never going to stop bullets, but that’s not the point.

The point is that I need something in my hands to ensure I’m not taking those knives out of their current holders.

Flip the table, grab the legs, then run, holding it. Can’t see much of the gang, but I don’t need to see anyone to make it to the knife holders. I can hear where they are, and the song is calling me to them.

Just have to figure out what to do about the shooter.

That a fifth shot.

Was that a regular sized magazine, or a long one? So twelve shots.

There goes number six.

I swing the table at the idiot who thought cutting me off was a good idea. Down he goes and the table’s still in one piece. Must be the one good piece of furniture in here. I get a decent look at who’s where before I bring the table between me and them again. Even see the glint of a knife and I take one step in that direction before shot number seven reminds me that’s not the plan.

I have a plan.

I’m pretty sure I do, anyway.

Not that it means anything when a dozen older guys burst out of a door.

“There!” someone yells.

Okay, are these the low IQ members who wouldn’t be able to tell which one person in here is the uninvited guest among all the other members without having him pointed out?

Someone has to do something about the admission criteria.

They’re in the twenty year old bracket and I’m unarmed, so I don’t have to worry about how hard I hit them.

The table shatters as I bring it up and into the first two.

Not that great after all.

The legs make horrible escrima sticks, but I still hit the others with them. The jagged wood cutting into flesh as I swing and then stab into the shoulder of the one pulling out the gun.

Thank you!

I grab it, turn to aim, then get tackled to the ground and the gun skids away. I knee him where it hurts and shove him off me.

Look, I’m trying to end this before anyone gets seriously hurt, and he just complicated it. Do forgive me the knee to the junk, okay? He’ll live.

I grab the next one, change in angle and then shove and he titters toward the incoming kids, fighting not to lose his balance. The gun shot takes care of that for him and he’s on his back, bleeding from the arm.

“That wasn’t me!” I yell. “I want it on the record that I’m unarmed still. So when he asks, I’m not the one who fired.”

He’s not going to be pissed. Yes, he’s taking this a tad more seriously than I think he should, but no matter what we agreed to, he understands how chaotic fights like this get. Someone was always going to get hurt.

I drop this one with a punch in the stomach that has him retching.

Well, more hurt.

I kick the knee out. Yes, that one broke. He’ll live. Then punch the other in the jaw and curse the pain, but he drops. I’m peppered with concrete dust from another shot that misses me.

Is that eight or nine? “I lost count! How many bullets do you have left?” he answers by firing twice and missing. Well, it’s basically irrelevant now.

I throw myself forward, grab the gun roll and aim as I come to a knee.

Bless their little heart, someone taught those kids to be afraid of guns and the jump out of the way, leaving gunman in my sight.

He fires wide as I press the trigger, then he staggers back, red blossoming on his right shoulder. The gun clatters to the floor, and the kids look at me, eyes wide. The twelve-year-olds run off.

Thank god.

The knives are still singing to me, so this isn’t done.

I gun whip the guy who thought I was distracted, then stand.

“Drop the knives!”

One can hope.
Really one can.
Come on. I'm the one holding the gun here. You're—
The song change and it's too sudden for me to consider my reaction. I let go of the gun as I step aside, my hand going up. The song crescendos as my fingers close around the hilt, and I close my eyes as it washes over me.
Death has arrived, and it is wonderful.
I open my eyes to the melody, and the underlying tension as they look at me, still stunned by me catching the knife in mid flight.
I will make them such a—
No! Not them.
I stagger, fighting the song. Questioning why I'm fighting it. The people here are no more than notes in the masterpiece it sings to me, to end when the music calls for it.
No. I'm in charge.
My arm moves and someone falls. A larger body coming at me registers after the fact, the music having guided my hand.
A twenty something. Not a kid.
But how long until it's one of them. The music doesn't care. They're here, they're part of this. And the music needs to reach an end. It demands it.
And I can't stop it.
Tristan's wrong.
I can't stop this.
Not anymore.
I'm going to—
"Alex!"
His voice shatters the music, and I drop the knife just before it slices into flesh. It calls to me; I have to grab it before it hits the floor. Finishing the phrase, the ending will be beautiful.
But his gaze is locked on me. Holds me still. He's angry, and I will be punished for not living up to what he trained me to do, but I don't care. I'll be at price since it means none of the kids die at my hand.
"Move!"
And that he's holding a child registers, as does the fact that I'm surrounded by a dozen gang members wanting to hurt me, two of which hold knives I can too easily turn against them.
I kick those in my way and I run to Tristan.
"The car?" he asks as we run to the hole in the wall I made.
"You wanted a diversion."
"I also wanted to be able to drive out of here."
"Ah." I look over my shoulder at the kids running after us. "You can always hot wire another one, right?"

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