

Thompson and Tague: A Scorpion Story

By Kate Simon

Cabe Gallo stood at the patio door and looked at his wife. Katie was wearing her favorite blue one piece swimsuit. Her long red hair was braided and wet. She'd already finished her morning swim. She was running her finger over the screen of her tablet. He marveled at how fast she could read. He smiled and opened the door.

"Hey there, Katie girl."

"Cabe!" She set down her tablet and ran toward and put her arms around him. "You're home."

"You're wet."

"I don't care," she said as she gave him a deep kiss. "Ah, that's better."

"Yes, it is," he smiled.

"Two weeks is too long, Cabe. You know I hate sleeping alone."

"I hate it too, sweetheart. It took longer than expected to get the evidence. Turns out foreign despots like to maintain their wealth by playing fast and loose with the world's economy."

"That was so inconsiderate of them," she grinned.

"It was," he said as he rubbed his stomach. "You know how middle eastern food disagrees with me."

She gave him another kiss and took him by the hand. "Poor lad," she said with the Irish brogue he loved. "Follow me and I'll tend to you."

"As much as I'd love to, it will have to wait."

"Excuse me?"

"Kathrine wants us at the garage for a briefing. I'm home long enough to shower and change."

"Both of us?"

"You probably have a text."

She grabbed her phone. "Ah, damn." She tugged at her wet braid. "I have to wash I off the chlorine."

"Let's go," he smiled. "We can conserve some water."

Tague didn't know why Katherine had called him to the Scorpion garage. His apartment, her apartment, Bennie's deli, all those he'd understand. It was his apartment on the weekends when she wasn't on call. Her apartment when she was. Bennie's when she was craving pastrami. Being in a relationship with a director of Homeland Security could be difficult, even if you were a retired spy.

He helped himself to some coffee using a "World's Greatest Dad" mug. He was going to annoy someone. He looked across the room to see Toby Curtis glaring at him. Rather than put it down and search for a plain mug, he raised it to Toby in salute. Tague chuckled to himself. The guy had it coming. He'd given Tague a rash of shit because Happy smiled at him. She seemed to be a fan of his exploits and his blue eyes. Not that he would ever give Toby cause for concern, but he enjoyed yanking his chain.

Cabe Gallo entered the garage with his wife, Kate. They'd been good friends with Katherine before he'd met her. He and Katherine had spent a lot of time with the Gallo's at their beachfront mansion. "Hey, Cabe. How's it going?"

"Okay, T. Most of the team and I just got back from a mission. Any idea why Katherine called the meeting?"

"Not a one."

"Allow me to enlighten you." Katherine said as she walked up behind them.

"Good morning, Director," said Cabe.

"Good morning, Director," said Tague. "Again," he whispered.

"Hush," she whispered back. He knew he'd pay for that later, but it was worth it to see her blush.

Katherine gave Walter a flash drive. The team turned their attention to Katherine and the big screen. "I know that you just come off a mission, but this is an urgent case. We've dug into the data you retrieved from Petrov's organization. There's a shipment of surface to air missiles due to be sold this week. We need to get people invited to the auction."

“Excuse me, Director,” said Walter. “Petrov was taken into custody by Interpol. I know this because Scorpion made it happen. How is he holding an auction?”

“He had a network of people. Someone has stepped into the breach. We need to stop him and stop those missiles from being sold to an enemy.”

“Ah, Director,” said Cabe. “If I can point out the obvious, we are known to Petrov and possibly to some of his people. We’re burned.”

Katherine nodded. “That’s true.” She sighed and looked at Tague. “You’re not.”

“I’m retired.”

She opened her briefcase and pulled out a service weapon and an ID. “I’m reactivating you.”

“You can’t.”

“I can. Tague, we need you on this. Your expertise in the weapons trade is unmatched by anyone, including Scorpion.” She softened her tone. “We have an idea of the players and they are some of the worst we’ve come up against.”

“Like who?”

“Clive Waters.”

“Ah, crap.”

“And that would be?” asked Paige.

“He’ll sell anything to anyone. His only ideology is money. He will kill anyone who stands in his way and that includes innocents,” said Katherine. “Look, T, you’re retired. You can refuse. But you won’t. You know what Waters is capable of. You saw it in Warsaw.”

Tague sat back in his chair. He closed his eyes at the memory of the bombed café and the bodies and pieces of bodies in the street. “Yeah, okay.” He reached for his ID and his weapon.

“I’m not sending you in alone. I’m bringing in Thompson.”

“Not the scrunchie guy!”

“Who?” asked Happy.

“Special Agent Dane Thompson. He had long hair for an undercover. T went up against him in an interdepartmental basketball game. He put his hair in a scrunchie during the game.”

“He’s a wild man. He charged me.”

“You don’t like Thompson because he kicked your butt.”

“Did I hear my name?”

The team turned to see a tall man walk into the garage. He had sandy brown hair and a trim beard. A well-tailored three-piece suit did not scream wild man.

“I see you found a barber,” said Tague as Katherine glared at him.

“I can clean up when the occasion calls for it.”

“Yeah, you can,” whispered Happy. Tague saw Toby shoot Thompson a glare. At least he wouldn’t be on the top of Curtis’s crap list anymore.

“Agent Thompson, thank you for coming. We’ll get to the introductions later,” said Katherine. “We believe Clive Waters is positioning himself to take over Petrov’s organization.”

“How does an English guy, I assume English,” asked Sly, “Take over a Russian mobster’s organization?”

“Money, lots and lots of it,” said Katherine. “And yes, his father was English but his mother was Russian. He’s fluent.”

“Is he in possession of the missiles?” asked Cabe.

“According to the information you and the team retrieved, he is. Tague, it’s time to breakout the brown contacts. You will go under as a Saudi national. Dane, you will be his American muscle.”

Thompson gave Tague a sly smile. “Yes, ma’am.”

Tague rolled his eyes. Great. He’d have the scrunchie guy on his heels until this was done. Even more motivation to get Waters.

Dane pointed to his car. "Get in the back," said Dane.

"Excuse me?" asked Tague.

"I'm supposed to be your bodyguard. Time to get used to it."

It was Tague's turn to give him a sly grin. "My bodyguard would open the door for me."

Dane gritted his teeth. Being with this guy for the duration was going to be a pain in the ass. He opened the door, smiled and waved him in. "Sir, if you please." Tague got in and chuckled. Dane slammed the door. "Asshole." He got in the car and turned on the engine. "Where to?"

"My place. I need to change from English American to generic Middle Eastern guy."

"You have a DNA sequencer at your place?"

Tague chuckled. "I'm used to doing this. I spent most of my career traveling Europe and the Middle East as a munitions dealer."

Dane glanced in the rearview mirror. This guy looked more like he'd be wearing face paint at a Rams game than setting up a meet in a Middle East majlis. "You look like John Q. Public." He smiled at Dane and said something to him in Arabic. "Excuse me?"

"I said I'm the Arabic version of John Q. Public. I blend in."

Tague's apartment was what he expected. Rams and Dodgers memorabilia displayed next to a big screen TV. He looked through the bookshelves and was mildly impressed. Among the mysteries were the classics and the bent spines said they'd all been read. That included the shelves of books in French, Russian, Farsi and Arabic. Okay. This guy was smarter than he looked. Then Dane found something he didn't expect a photo of Tague with Director Cooper. They were at a Dodgers game and Tague had his arm around her. He turned to see Tague coming down the hall with darker hair and dark eyes. "You and the director?"

Tague grabbed the picture out of his hand and set it back on the shelf. "You have something to say about it?"

"Your girlfriend is sending you into the lion's den."

"No, the Director of Homeland is sending me. She needs my expertise. It's why she reactivated me."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm technically retired. So is Kate Gallo. Katherine activates retired agents when necessary." He looked up at Dane. "I'm very necessary. Now, let's go."

Dane followed Tague back to the car. This assignment just got a whole lot more complicated.

Tague and Thompson pulled up to the garage. The team said they'd be ready for them by now. When Tague caught Paige looking at him, she blushed.

"Hey, Paige."

"You look so different like this."

"That's the point." He spotted Happy analyzing him.

"Yeah, that'll do. Come over here." She patted a stool set up in front of a blue screen. He sat down and faced her. She picked up camera and aimed it at him. A picture of him popped up on the screen behind her. "I wouldn't send it home to mother but it will work for your passport." She looked over at Thompson. "Your turn, big fella." Thompson sat down on the stool.

"It's Dane."

"What?"

"My name, Dane."

"Okay, Dane," Happy smiled. "So, what was the undercover that needed long hair?" she asked as she snapped his picture.

"I was riding with a biker gang. They were moving drugs through the port."

Happy's head snapped back from her screen. "You ride?"

"Yeah, a Street Glide Ultra."

"Sweet. I have a Soft Tail Slim. Cabe has a Road Glide Ultra. You should join us on a ride."

"I'd like that."

Toby made a very loud cough and Happy returned to her screen. Tague chuckled to himself. Toby would gladly beat up Thompson, if wasn't for the fact that Toby was six inches shorter and weighed a buck and a half soaking wet.

Cabe walked over to Tague with a fat envelope. "You ready for this, T?"

"Yeah." Tague opened the envelope and leaved through the bills.

"She trusts you with that much cash?" asked Dane.

"This is walking around money for someone who can afford surface to air missiles," said Cabe. Walter joined them with envelopes for both of them.

"Tague, you are Amir Aziz, born in Riyadh."

"Good choice," said Tague.

"Why?" asked Dane.

"It's the largest city. If they try to verify his ID they will find over five hundred Amir Aziz," said Walter. "It would take a long time to confirm Tague isn't one of them." He handed Dane an envelope. "You are Richard Martin. Dishonorably discharged Marine for beating up your colonel."

Dane smiled. "What did he do?"

"Raped his aide. She was a friend who came to you for help."

He shook his head. "You put all that in the official record?"

Walter looked at him like he didn't understand the question. "We are Scorpion." Cabe smiled and Tague shrugged his shoulders. Apparently, that was a sufficient answer. Happy joined them and handed them passports. Dane flipped his open.

"This is incredible work. I've never seen better."

"Happy has mad skills," said Cabe. He put his hand on Tague's shoulder. "Are you ready for this? It's been over a year since you've been in the field."

"It's like riding a bike," he chuckled.

"A bike that can take down an aircraft." He leaned closer. "I don't think Katherine would ever get over it if something happened to you, T."

“She wouldn’t send me if she didn’t think I could handle it.” He pointed over his shoulder at Dane. “Besides, I’ve got the scrunchie guy watching my back.”

Cabe drilled Dane with a glare. “Keep him safe. The director isn’t the only one who’s fond of T.”

“It’s what I do.”

Sly handed them each a phone. “These burners have our numbers coded so they can’t be traced. Scorpion is listed as Nemo’s Diner. The director is listed as Davina’s nightclub. They are also programmed with numbers you would be expected to have. A variety of felons and miscreants.”

“Happy isn’t the only one with mad skills,” said Dane.

“If that’s it, we should get moving,” said Tague.

“Hold up, Errol Flynn,” said Toby. “I haven’t given my briefing.”

“I thought you were a doctor,” said Dane.

“The best. I went to Harvard.”

“And modest,” said Tague. “Please, continue.”

“I’ve analyzed Waters file. He’s an opportunist of the first order. He will see the vacancy in Petrov’s organization as the greatest of his dodgy career. Waters has no problem in killing anyone and anything in his way. From what I read; he is personally responsible for fifty murders. That doesn’t include deaths caused by the weapons he’s sold. It is thought he is looking for the right buyer for a nuclear warhead. This auction will bring out the right players for Waters. If he can combine his existing organization with Petrov’s, he will be the most dangerous man in the world.”

“No pressure,” said Dane.

“Well, shit,” said Tague. “All right, let’s get moving. There was a club in Katherine’s briefing file. It’s a good place to start.”

They shook hands with the team, even Toby, who seemed to do it grudgingly.

Tague stood at passenger door, waiting for Dane to open it. "Ahem."

"Not yet," said Dane as he opened the trunk. Tague looked in as Dane lifted the carpet to reveal a keypad. He plugged in a code and a false bottom popped open, revealing a cache of weapons.

"Holy shit," whispered Tague.

"I find them useful." He pulled his service weapon out of its holster and placed it in a space cut to hold it. He pulled out a large gold-plated handgun and put it in his holster.

"A Desert Eagle? A forty-four will blow a hole out the back of a guy."

"Yes, it will. I'm just as effective with my service weapon, but given my cover, this is more appropriate."

"Okay, just don't aim it in my direction."

"Don't give me a reason."

The hotel suite was a beautiful penthouse. It was theirs for the duration. Dane checked out his bedroom and hoped he'd have a chance to enjoy it. There was a safe in the closet, but he wouldn't use it. He'd keep his desert eagle close. Once they made themselves known to the players, they'd be targets. He threw his go bag in the closet and walked back out to the main suite. He looked out on the balcony to assess the terrain. They had a view of the ocean and no adjacent balconies. No sharpshooter could make a shot into their room. Not even him.

"Idus de Marzo is a club where the wealthy like to rub elbows with the underworld. According to Katherine's file, it's also a favorite of Waters." said Tague.

"The Ides of March?" asked Dane. "Isn't that a little on the nose?"

"They probably thought it was meta, looking to be the next trendy hot spot. The problem is, it's hard to get in." He pulled out his new phone and pressed the number for Nemo's Diner.

"Hello, Tague," said Cabe. "Run into a problem?"

"I need to get Thompson and me on the list to get into a club, Idus de Marzo."

Cabe chuckled. "The Ides of March? Seriously?"

"Yeah. Perfect place for people with more money than brains."

"And the people who like to relieve them of that money."

"Exactly."

"Hold on." Cabe gave a piercing whistle. "Listen up. We need to get Tague and Thompson on the list for a club called Idus de Marzo. Walter's working on it, T."

"We need to get on the list for tonight." Tague heard a "Got it" in the background.

"You're in," said Cabe.

Tague chuckled. "Tell Walter I said thanks."

"Will do, and be careful."

“Always. In the meantime, Thompson and I are going to enjoy this suite Homeland is financing.” He disconnected the call and looked at Dane. “I could do with some lunch. What do you say to some room service?”

“Sounds good. There’s a tablet in the kitchen. We can put in our order from that. I’d prefer contact with as few people as possible.” Dane picked up the tablet and pull up the menu. “Holy shit. They charge fifty bucks for a house salad.”

“We’re not paying for it.” Dane completed his order and handed the tablet over. “Why do they call you T?”

“Huh?” Tague said as he pushed the order button.

“T? As in Mister?”

“No. Just T.”

“I assume that’s not the name your parents gave you.”

“It is not,” he said as he looked at their view of the ocean.

“Your first name is?”

“T will do. Besides, you should get used to calling me Mr. Aziz. I wouldn’t be on a first name basis with my bodyguard.”

Dane shook his head and walked back to his room.

Tague walked up to the doorman but didn't speak. Dane came up behind him and said "Aziz". The doorman checked his tablet, nodded and opened the door for them. Idus de Marzo was exactly what Tague expected. Loud and crass took the place of any real style. Dane touched his shoulder. He nodded toward a round table with a leather couch against the wall.

"There. Best seat in the house and easier to defend."

Tague nodded and headed for it. He sat down while Dane made a show of surveying the crowd. A nervous looking hostess approached them.

"I'm sorry sir. This table is reserved for Mr. Waters' party."

"I don't see anyone," said Tague with a middle eastern accent.

"He'll be here soon," she said looking over her shoulder. Through the crowd, he could see a most displeased manager.

"Don't worry my dear. We have business with Mr. Waters." The hostess nodded and walked toward her manager. "In the meantime, I will have a Macallan."

"Yes, sir," she said and turned toward Dane. "And you, sir?"

"Nothing for him," said Tague. Dane nodded and the girl fled. She returned quickly with his drink, and a perturbed Waters and his entourage behind her. Tague nodded to the girl and sipped his whiskey.

"You are sitting at my table," said Waters.

"So I am, Mr. Waters." One of Waters' men made a move toward the table but Dane stopped him with a firm hand to his chest.

Waters drilled him with a glare meant to terrify. It didn't. "Who are you?"

Tague extended his hand. "Amir Aziz." Waters did not accept the handshake. He nodded toward Dane.

"Who is this?"

"That's Martin." Tague indicated to the sofa as if it was his own. "Please, sit."

Waters glanced at Dane before deciding to sit. "As the Americans say, you have brass ones."

"So I've been told. Allow me to buy a round." He motioned to the hostess. "A round of drinks," he said as he handed her the black credit card Scorpion had created.

"Yes sir." She knew what Waters and his team drank so she turned to leave.

"No," Tague said. He circled a finger around the club. "A round for everyone." He glanced at Waters, who nodded at him. He'd made a good impression. They were served their drinks first, while every employee in the club scurried around delivering drinks to the crowd. He would have to leave a big tip.

"Tell me, Mr. Aziz, how do you know me?"

"Anyone in our line of work knows you, Mr. Waters."

"Then why don't I know you?"

"I generally keep a low profile but I made an exception for you."

"Why is that?"

"You have merchandise I wish to acquire. I understand the opportunity for the acquisition is short."

Waters stared at Tague, then looked at one of his associates. He was not as large a man as Dane, but he was close. Waters spoke to him in Russian.

"I want to know who this prat is and how he knows about me."

Tague replied in Russian. "We travel in the same circles, Mr. Waters. Including Cambridge."

Waters studied him. "What years?"

"I was there in 2010 and 2011, then I went to Oxford. My father valued education."

"I did enjoy my time there, but they could improve on a two-hundred-year-old dining hall."

“Peterhouse is over seven hundred years old and I found it satisfactory. Now, if you’re done with inquires, can we continue?”

Waters snickered and shook his head. “Not here.” He reached into his jacket. Dane made a move toward him but Tague held up his hand.

“It’s fine, Martin.”

Waters pulled out a card and made a notation. “Here, tomorrow, at three.”

“Why so late?”

Waters looked around the club and smiled. “I plan on enjoying myself.”

“Very well,” said Tague. He nodded to Dane. “We will leave you to your...entertainment.” He rose from the table and nodded to Waters and his men. He walked toward the manager. The man nervously handed him the bill. Tague glanced down and added twenty percent to an already large bill. “I trust that will be sufficient.”

“Yes, sir.”

Dane followed him out to the car and held the door for him. Keeping up the pretense was important. He sat back against the seat as Dane pulled out into traffic. The adrenaline began to dissipate. He could use a good night’s sleep.

“That went as well as could be expected,” said Dane.

“Yeah. It was okay. We have a meeting at his hotel room at three tomorrow.”

“That was a pretty good vamp on the whole Cambridge thing.”

“Oh, that. I went to Cambridge.”

“A ten-thousand-dollar bar tab!” yelled Katherine.

Tague held the phone away from his ear. Dane was sipping his coffee and snickering. “Good morning, sweetheart.”

“Don’t you sweetheart me! How am I supposed to justify this?”

“I was making a good impression on the target.”

Katherine quickly changed her tone. “You met with Waters?”

“Yes. Your intelligence was on point. We took over Waters’ favorite booth. We set up a meeting with him this afternoon.”

“Where?”

“Three at the Trevanion.”

“Very exclusive so they’ll have a lot of surveillance. I’ll have Scorpion tap in to their security. What room?”

“Twelve ten. It’s a top floor penthouse.”

“I’ll have a report for you by noon.”

“Thank you, director.”

Katherine chuckled. “I’m going to owe you big after this one, aren’t I?”

Tague switched to French. “I will be very creative in my request, my love.” He could almost feel Katherine’s blush.

“Stop it,” she whispered in French. “Now get back to work.”

He disconnected the call and looked at the smiling Dane. “What?”

“I should probably tell you that I speak enough French to know what you said.”

“Ah, crap.”

“I had a French girlfriend in college. You went to Cambridge?”

“Yeah. I have a head for languages. My father did value education. Scorpion built the Aziz profile based on my own. It helped that Waters went to Cambridge.” Tague didn’t like talking about himself. “What about you? You didn’t get tossed out of the Marines, did you?” he smiled.

“No. Degree in International Studies from Notre Dame. Then the Marines. I had a lot of overseas assignments. Homeland recruited me and here I am.”

“Huh.” He took a sip of his coffee. “Katherine must have a high opinion of you to put you on this. Waters is a very big fish. It will look good for you when we get him.”

“For you too.”

“No. This is a one and done. I spent the better part of twenty years undercover. Nazari was my last job. I like the way my life is now.”

Dane froze mid sip. “You found Nazari? He was underground for years.”

“Scorpion found him. Actually, Ralph found him. I grabbed Nazari and brought him in.”

“I didn’t meet any Ralph.”

“He was probably at school.”

“Excuse me?”

“He’s thirteen, I think. He developed a facial recognition program that’s the best in the world.”

“Wow.”

“I never get used to what they can do.” He took another sip of his coffee and reached for a bagel. “When we go in there today, we can be sure they will have vetted us. Be sure you have your Scorpion dossier memorized.”

“Don’t worry about me. Try not to slip into too much Russian. I need to know what you’re saying.”

“Noted. Now I suggest we go down to the pool.”

“You think we’ll be watched so we should make an appearance in character.”

Tague looked up and smiled. “You’re more than a pretty face.”

Dane stared at him. “Don’t you ever get tired of being an ass?”

“Nope.”

Dane dressed in a polo and light khakis. His gun would be too obvious without a jacket so he would have to be on high alert. Tague came out of his room dressed in shorts and a light shirt. He handed him a pair of sunglasses that matched the pair he was wearing.

“Here. Put these on. Are you on?”

“They’re on my face.”

Tague smiled. “Not you, the team.”

“Yeah, we’re here, T,” said Cabe.

“We’re going to the pool. I expect we were followed home from the club.”

“So, you can expect company at the pool,” said Happy.

“I didn’t spot anyone,” said Dane.

“They could have put a tracker on you,” said Walter.

Tague grabbed the business card Waters had given him. He held it up to the glasses and looked at both sides. “I don’t see anything.”

“I do,” said Happy. “There’s a micro transmitter in the emblem.”

“Crap. If they bugged us, we’re burned,” said Dane.

“Nah, it’s too small to transmit anything more than location. Besides, I built a jammer into the coms. It blocks any frequency except ours. Theirs likely cut out as soon as you got into your room.”

“Dane, keep your glasses on and look around the pool area. Since you’re the muscle it wouldn’t look suspicious,” said Cabe. “We’ll let you know if we spot any of Waters’ men.”

“And you will know that because?” asked Dane.

“The glasses are cameras, so warn us before you go to the can,” said Toby.

“Ah, geez.”

“I’ve tapped into the hotel’s surveillance. I’ll be able to tell you if anyone shows up at the hotel,” said a voice he didn’t recognize.

“Who’s this?”

“Hi, I’m Ralph. I was at school during the briefing.”

Dane shook his head. “Nice to meet you.”

“Ralph’s software will pick up any persons on interest,” said Walter.

“These guys are international. They won’t be in any domestic databases,” said Dane.

“That’s not a problem,” said Walter.

“We tagged a number of Petrov’s associates during our last mission. As for Waters’ men, well, sometimes it’s better not to ask how we know,” said Cabe.

“Got it,” said Dane.

“Okay,” said Tague, “Let’s get moving.”

Dane looked around the pool as Tague grabbed a towel from the rack. He nodded toward the deck chairs facing parallel to the hotel. It wasn’t the best view, but it was easier to defend. He’d be able to see anyone coming up on them from the hotel or the beach. Tague took a chair and Dane sat in the chair next to him. He made a show of looking around, hoping the Scorpion team could spot any threat he didn’t. All he saw were the same type of people he’d seen at the club. Beautiful people, young and not so young, maneuvering to be the most watched. The women had full hair and makeup for the optimal selfie. Men with washboard abs were not hesitant to show the off. The men with less than perfect bodies were covered in Tommy Bahama shirts.

“Anything?” he asked quietly.

“Nothing yet,” said Ralph

Dane couldn’t believe they were trusting their lives to a thirteen-year-old boy.

Tague stood and took off his shirt. He slipped off the shorts covering a bathing suit. "I'm going to do a few laps," he said to Dane and the team. He set his sunglasses on the small table between them. As he walked to the pool, Dane noticed a few women noticing Tague. So, the director wasn't the only woman who liked what they saw. He noticed a man coming toward the pool. He was dressed like Dane, in a light shirt and khakis. Unlike Dane, he was armed. Not that anyone but Dane could tell. He spotted the ankle holster. This guy had not come to swim.

Dane pulled out his phone and spoke quietly, pretended to be making a call. "Hey guys. Ten o'clock, blue shirt and khakis. He's armed."

"Give me a minute."

"He's wearing sunglasses so your software might not help."

"Got him," said Ralph. "His name is Jonathan Bridges. UK citizen, known associate of Clive Waters. He's wanted by Interpol for questioning about a bombing in Warsaw."

"Damn," he whispered. "You're as good as they said."

"Yeah, he is that good," said Cabe.

"Thanks, Nonno, and you too, Agent Thompson."

"Nonno?"

"It's Italian for grandfather."

Dane noticed Bridges calling over the waitress. She took his order and returned to the bar. Dane watched Tague do his laps, not wanting to be caught staring. He finally got out of the pool and grabbed his towel.

"Anything?"

"Opposite side, brown hair, khaki and shades. Ralph pegged him as Jonathan Bridges."

"Shit," said Tague as he sat down and put his shades back on. "How hasn't Bridges been picked up yet?"

“Ah, we don’t have anything on that,” said Cabe.

“Call Katherine and tell her he’s here. He blew up twenty people in Warsaw on Waters’ orders. She needs to pick him up.”

“Will do.”

Tague was flushed and signaled for the waitress. “A margarita, no salt.”

“And for you sir?” she asked.

“Cola,” said Dane. He waited until the girl left. “You need to calm down.”

“That’s what the margarita is for.”

Dane sat back and pretended to be dozing. His shades were dark enough that no one could tell the difference. He watched the crowd and no one else popped up in Ralph’s software. He watched Bridges accept the drink and then follow her with his eyes. He didn’t like this. Either he wasn’t a very good lookout or he’d decided Dane and Tague posed no threat. Bridges called the girl back and appeared to be placing another order. The girl shook her head and tried to back away. Bridges grabbed her arm, pulling her close. The girl screamed as she stumbled and fell over his legs.

It took Dane only seconds to get to the girl’s side. “Are you all right, miss?” She only nodded but was pale and shaking. He tried to help her to her feet but Bridges still had a grip on her.

“Sod off,” said Bridges. “The lady stumbled.”

“Then let her go,” he said slowly.

Bridges pulled her closer. “Ah, we’re just havin’ a bit of fun, aren’t we, love?”

The girl looked at him as tears ran down her face. That was all Dane needed. He pulled Bridges hand off her and helped her to her feet. Bridges stood to stop him but Dane held him fast with his hand covering his face. “You go back to the bar. I’ll take care of this, then I’ll come to see you.” The girl fled and Dane turned to Bridges. His voice turned to a growl. “I don’t like men who mistreat women. You need to go.”

“What business is it of yours? We were just having a little fun.”

“Well, she wasn’t laughing. Now go.”

“Americans are all so arrogant. Who do you think you are, telling me what to do?”

“I’m the American who’s going to kick your ass if you don’t leave.”

Then Bridges made a big mistake. He telegraphed a move they could see back in England. He reached down for his gun. All Dane had to do was grab his hand, and crush it. Bridges screamed soprano and Dane resisted to urge to smile. “Now go,” he repeated.

“You broke my fucking hand!”

Dane smiled. “I left you with one.”

Bridges looked up at him and Dane could see the fear on his face. Bridges pushed past him. He started walking toward the bar when Tague joined him.

“What the hell were you thinking?” he whispered.

“I was thinking I wouldn’t let that guy hurt a woman.”

“You may have burned us.”

“No, I didn’t. Do you have any of that wad on you?”

“Yeah, why?”

“I’m going to give you the chance to be the big man.”

They walked up to the Tiki bar and found the girl sobbing in the corner. “Are you all right, miss?” asked Dane.

She nodded and walked toward them. She blew her nose into some bar napkins. “Thank you for helping me, sir.”

“You’re welcome. I’m Richard and this is my boss, Mr. Aziz.”

Tague slipped into his middle eastern accent. “Hello, my dear. What is your name?”

“Charlotte.”

“Charlotte, I hope you were not injured.”

She held up her arm and they could see the handprint that was already turning blue. “I was so scared. He wouldn’t take no for an answer. He made...rude suggestions.”

“I’m glad my man intervened.” Tague pulled at a roll of hundreds and peeled off five. “Here, dear girl. So you don’t think all men are pigs.”

Charlotte smiled threw her tears. “Oh sir, this isn’t necessary.”

“I insist.”

“Thank you. Thank you both.”

Dane reached over the bar and grabbed a napkin and a pen. “If you have any further problems, call this number.”

“Thank you, Richard,” she smiled.

Dane nodded at the girl and followed Tague out of the pool. “We are going to have a conversation.”

“I assumed so.”

“What the hell were you thinking!” yelled Tague. He didn’t know whether to call off the operation or just deck him.

“You asked that already,” said Dane as he reached for a bottle of soda.

“Not at full volume! You roughed up Waters’ man. You broke cover.”

“The only thing I broke was his hand.”

“He didn’t break cover,” said Toby. They were still wearing their sunglasses. The team could see and hear everything.

“What?” asked Tague.

“Richard Martin, ex-Marine, was bounced from the service for beating up his commanding officer. He was defending a woman. If they run a deep dive on him, and they will, they’ll take this behavior as normal.”

“See?” said Dane

“Do you practice that smug look in the mirror?”

“It’s one of my best.”

“Did you really break his hand?”

“It gave a satisfying crunch.”

Tague couldn’t help but smile. “Good. Bastard killed twenty people. They were just out having a coffee and he blew them up. All to prevent me from meeting a contact.”

“T?”

He heard Katherine over the come. “Yes, director.”

“Toby assures me that Agent Thompson didn’t break cover. You should be okay at the meeting. Dane, take off your glasses.”

Dane looked at him and shrugged, but he removed the sunglasses.

“T, Bridges is at Mercy General. Thompson turned his hand into a jigsaw puzzle.”

“Good.”

“He’s in surgery now, getting it put back together. I want you to know that I have agents watching him. Once our operation is over, he’s not going to leave the hospital without a Homeland escort. I won’t let him go. I promise.”

“What about Waters? Is he going to be a problem?”

“No. Toby doesn’t believe Waters will care his man is injured. Even if he does visit, we have enough people to keep Bridges secure.”

Tague closed his eyes and remembered the horror of that day in Warsaw. No matter what happens, Bridges would pay. “Thanks, sweetheart.”

“You’re welcome, babe. Now go catch me some very bad guys.”

Tague and Dane pulled into the hotel parking lot. They adjusted their coms so they could hear Scorpion's advice. "We're here," said Tague. "How are we for surveillance?"

"You're loud and clear on our cloaked frequency," said Walter. "Happy went undercover as a maid to place cameras."

"Which did not make the husband happy," said Toby.

"I told you they ignored me. I was just one more service Asian to them," said Happy. "I placed cameras in the main room, both bedrooms and the kitchen. If you need to speak with us, use the guest bathroom. I made sure it's a safe space."

"Thanks, Happy. Anything else we should know?"

"They're slob. I'm charging the director extra."

Tague heard Katherine chuckle. "Not a problem," she said.

"We need to get these guys," said Katherine. "But use your best judgment. I want you both to come out of this alive."

"Yes, director," they said in unison.

"All right. Let's do this."

Tague knocked on Waters hotel door. It was opened by the Waters version of Dane. He tried to pat Tague down but he put a hand on the man's chest.

"I don't need to carry weapons," he nodded at Dane. "That's why I have him."

Dane moved between Tague and the man. When the man tried to pat him down, Dane grabbed his hand. The man paled. Dane's exploits were known.

"Enough," said Waters as he walked into the room.

Tague took a seat before Waters in a show of power. Dane took up a position behind, giving Tague the look of a king granting an audience.

Waters tried to glare him down. "Your man destroyed a valued colleague's hand. Tell me why I shouldn't dispose of you both."

"Martin doesn't tolerate that kind of behavior. I find it best not to argue with him. As far as disposing of us," Tague chuckled. "I'd like to see you try. It would be amusing." Dane dared to look Waters in the eye. "Also, I have the resources to make this purchase. If I didn't, you would have never let me in the door."

Waters chuckled. "You're correct. Bridges is an ass. It was only a matter of time before something like that happened." He walked to the bar and poured himself a whiskey. He held up the glass toward Tague. He shook his head. "Suit yourself." Waters took a seat. "You have quite the reputation, Mr. Aziz. That deal you made with Petrov for two thousand automatic weapons must have been well received by your clients."

"It was five thousand and yes, they were." Tague waved his hand in annoyance and swore in Farsi. "Enough of this testing. You already know I have the resources. My clients are anxious for delivery. I will offer you one hundred and twenty-five thousand for each of your one thousand missiles contingent on immediate delivery." Tague saw the slight dilation of Waters pupils.

"I have clients who were very interested. They will be angry if they don't have the opportunity to bid."

"I do not care. I will have a ship waiting at dock 27 at the port tomorrow night. I will inspect the merchandise and then transfer the funds via electronic transfer." He stood and nodded to Dane he was ready to leave. Nine p.m. Do not be late."

"Who are you to dictate to me?"

Tague smiled. "The man with the money."

Tague dialed the Scorpion garage and put it on speaker. "Hey team. I assume you got the meeting."

"You assume correctly," said Walter.

"One hundred and twenty-five million?" asked Katherine. "I'm not even going to ask if you're crazy. I know you are."

"Don't worry, director," said Sly. "I can make our fake account look like it's transferring the money."

"I wanted to cut to the chase with Waters. He only respects power and money. I was showing I have both."

"Actually, not a bad move," said Toby. "A guy like Waters, his psychopathy won't allow for the possibility that he's wrong about Aziz. All he needs is to see the confident display of power and the money. T's covered both."

"T, there is something you and Agent Thompson should know," said Cabe. "We've been monitoring Waters communications. You're going to have company on the dock tomorrow night. Carlos Ramirez and Bai Chen."

"Damn," said Tague. "Ramirez and Chen are the two biggest players since Scorpion to Petrov out of play."

"Exactly. Waters is hoping for a bidding war."

"We might be in for a real war," said Dane. "Director, we may need some backup."

"No, you will need backup. I'll have men covering the docks and surrounding area," said Katherine. "I'm going back to headquarters to set it up. And agents..."

"Yes, director," said Dane.

"Don't get yourself killed."

"Yes, Ma'am," said Tague. He knew he'd pay for that later.

Dane had finished his steak dinner and flipped through the premium channels. There was definitely an advantage to be guarding the rich and deadly. He stopped on "White House Down." He liked picking out the 'never could happens' in the fight scenes.

"I've seen that. It's good," said Tague

"Yeah, I like it." He looked over at Tague as he grabbed a drink from the bar. "So how long are you in the doghouse with the missus?"

"Not long. I promised her a vacation in Fiji. She likes those cottages over the water." He sat down on the couch. "And she's not the missus."

"Maybe she should be."

Tague's head snapped around to Dane. "Excuse me?"

"She seems like she's the perfect woman for you. She understands your work, loves sports and tolerates your off the cuff plans for which you have to do a minimum of groveling. And, she's hot. Like I said, perfect for you." Dane smiled as Tague flushed with anger then censored himself.

"Katherine is a beautiful woman but she's also your boss. You should not be calling her hot." Tague took another sip of his drink.

"She's your boss too."

"Temporarily."

"Uh huh." He got up and poured himself a small whiskey. "Are we good for tomorrow night?"

"Yes. Between Scorpion and Katherine, they'll have the dock covered. They've tapped into dock security so they can warn us if any players come up on our blind sides."

Dane sat back down with his drink. "You have a lot of confidence in them."

"Scorpion will have covered every possible scenario. Even ones we couldn't have imagined." Tague smiled. "Katherine didn't get where she is without being the smartest one in room."

Dane stood next to the small cargo ship the director had supplied. It was impressive what the director could arrange on short notice. He looked around and spotted a few shadows he thought might be the backup she had promised. Tague stood at the bow looking every bit the man in charge.

“Waters is on his way to you at from the north,” said Sly. “He’s not alone. One person next to him and four others spreading out over the warehouse floor.”

“I’ve got two other groups,” said Walter. “I count four west and six east of your position.”

Dane pulled out his desert eagle and held it to his side. He had a bad feeling about this. Two figures stepped into the light on the dock, Waters and a replacement henchman. Bridges was still hospitalized.

“You are on time. Good,” said Tague. “Where is the merchandise?” Waters nodded and two men pushed out a cart of crates. This was only one percent of the weapons.

“The rest are nearby. Once the transaction is completed, my men will load them on your ship.”

Tague pointed to a crate on the bottom of the stack. “I will inspect this one.” The men groaned as they moved the boxes and pulled out the bottom case. “Open it.”

“Not so fast,” said a voice from the shadows. Carlos Ramirez stepped forward with two armed bodyguards. At least they were the two that could be seen. “Waters promised this merchandise to me.”

“Ah, let me clarify,” said Waters. “I said I would give you the opportunity to bid.”

“You made the same promise to me,” said Bai Chen. He came up from behind the cart. Two men trailed him. Thanks to Scorpion, Dane knew there were more in hiding.

“You all have the option to match the opening bid of one hundred and twenty-five million,” said Waters.

“That’s insane!” yelled Ramirez. “They’re worth half that.”

“Never the less, that is the current offer, Mr. Ramirez. If you can’t counter, then our business is concluded. Mr. Chen, are you prepared to counter?”

Dane didn’t like this. He could tell when things were about to get ugly. He aimed his weapon a split second before Chen’s men did. Dane pushed Tague out of the way before taking out Chen’s two guards. Ramirez men reacted by firing on everyone. Dane was vaguely aware of someone firing from behind him on the boat. More men came out of the shadows and began firing. Dane saw Tague out of the corner of his eye, pulling a weapon out of his ankle holster. They kept firing until Katherine’s backup had swarmed the dock. He heard a familiar voice.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Dane looked up to see Cabe Gallo holding a gun to Waters back.

“He took off when things got hot.”

Dane, bent over, resting his hands on his knees. “That was you behind me?”

“Yeah,” said Cabe.

“Thanks for covering my ass.”

“You’re welcome,” he smiled as he holstered his weapon and cuffed Waters.

Tague patted Dane on the back. “And thanks for covering mine. Chen’s man would’ve had me.”

Dane nodded. “Status of the players?”

“Ramirez is dead. Chen is in custody. The rest of the weapons were seized in the warehouse. All in all, a good day,” said Cabe. “T, the director is waiting for your call.”

Dane tried to stand up. “Maybe you could call later.” Then he passed out.

Dane woke up in incredible pain. He looked up at the acoustical tiles. Damn. He was in the hospital. The last thing he remembered was talking to Tague and Gallo. He tried to move and the pain made his eyes water. "Shit!"

"You're alive. Good. I've never lost anyone on an operation. I didn't want you to blow my record."

Dane looked over to see Tague sitting in a chair. There were several empty coffee cups on the table next to him. He'd been here awhile. "Happy to oblige," he said as he tried to shift his body without cursing. He did not succeed.

"Stop moving around," said Tague. He stood and pressed the call button. A voice came over the speaker.

"Can I help you?"

"Mr. Thompson is awake. I believe he could use a pain med."

"I'll be right in."

A nurse the size of Dane walked into his room. "Hi, Mr. Thompson. I'm Mark and I'm your duty nurse." He began checking Dane's vitals. "I've paged Dr. Hawkins. She wanted to know when you woke up."

"She's patched us up more than once." Cabe and Kate Gallo were standing in the doorway.

"She's the best," said Kate.

"I won't disagree." The Gallos stepped aside to allow entrance to a smiling woman with black glasses and a white jacket. She looked at the vitals the nurse had recorded. "Your numbers are good considering I pulled a forty-five caliber bullet out of you. You were very lucky."

"I don't feel lucky."

"The bullet hit your spleen. You'll be fine without it. You might have bled out before you got to me. It's a good thing you had EMTs standing by."

“We did?”

“That was my doing,” said Katherine as she entered the room.

“Now it’s a party,” said Tague as he stood and kissed their boss on the cheek.

“It certainly is,” said Dr. Hawkins. “I realize you paid for all this Agent Gallo, but let’s not push it.” She pointed around the room and Dane realized it was twice the size of a normal hospital room. “Mr. Thompson is in a lot of pain.”

“Can you do something about that, doc?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll have you ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ in about ten minutes.”

Dane managed to smile. “Thanks.”

“I’ll check in on you later. Try and get some rest,” she said as she closed the door behind her.

“I see I should have been more specific in my orders,” said Katherine.

“Director?”

“I told you both not to get killed. I should have mentioned not catching any bullets.”

“My bad,” he smiled. He looked at the Gallos smiling at him. “Wait. Did I hear the doctor say you paid for all this?”

Cabe smiled. “It’s our foundation. That’s a story for another day. We had this room built to handle security for VIP patients.”

“I’m hardly a VIP.”

“Yes, you are Agent Thompson,” said Katherine. “You and T brought down three of the biggest weapons dealers in the world. T told me how you took the bullet that was meant for him. I’m putting you in for a commendation.” She leaned closer and Dane saw tears in her eyes. “You saved him. I owe you.”

Mark returned to his room with a syringe. “Okay, people. Dr. Hawkins said if you were all still here, I was to shoo you out.” He pulled off the cap of the syringe and injected it into his IV. Dane felt warmth race up his arm and beat a path to his brain.

“Okay, we’re all out of here,” said Katherine. “We’ll see you tomorrow.”

Tague walked to Dane’s side and took his hand. He could see he was looking for words but didn’t find them. He just nodded. Dane nodded in return. He watched as Katherine ushered out the Gallos. Tague put his hand on the small of Katherine’s back. He could see the deep connection between them.

“Director, you said you owe me one.”

“Yes, I did,” she smiled.

“What is his name!”

“It’s Percival.”

Dane laughed so hard tears rolled down his cheeks.

“It’s not that funny!” said Tague.

“Oh, yes, it is,” he said wiping his eyes.

Katherine grinned as Tague rolled his eyes. Dean’s laugh wound down to a chuckle as he drifted off, thinking of ways to torment his new buddy, Percival.