

The End of the Matter

Andrew

As Jake brought the Humvee to a halt, Andrew could see his father holding the same .45 to Brin's head that he *could've* used to save his mother, once upon a time, but hadn't. He felt the flames of hatred ignite all over again, and he almost didn't hear Jake's questions.

But he did.

"This guy? Again? Who is that?"

Andrew didn't take his eyes off of Brin as he answered.

"That piece of shit is Dale, my father. He runs this town. I tried to kill him like four times. Cain't claim success, obviously."

Jake didn't even hesitate, raising his sidearm.

"Get out. I'm right behind you."

Andrew thought to protest, but knew it was a waste of time. This guy was full metal jacket at this point. He did try, though.

"Look, man, I ain't the best choice of hostage."

Jake put the gun against Andrew's head, a mirror of what he could see through the windshield.

"If we all survive this, she can choose you. Until then, you're just a bargaining chip. Get me?"

Andrew answered by opening the door and exiting the vehicle. Jake followed him out the same door.

He felt Jake press the business end of the pistol against the back of his head as they walked forward a few steps. Jake said,

"Stop."

He did, and wondered briefly if this was it. Part of him hoped he'd see him mom again somehow, and another part raged at the possibility that he'd never see any justice for her in this life, or whatever came after.

Bear

He watched the boy exit with Jake right behind him, and could read Jake's body language, even from the corner of his eye. He kept his rifle trained on the dude with the AR, but knew instinctively this was going to be between the two opposing pairs holding guns to heads.

The man they'd met on the road riding the white horse spoke first.

"Well, who knew, right, kid? Y'all did a number on Evanston, and now you're here, military style."

Jake didn't waste any time, or words.

"Let her go. You get yours, I get mine. Then we're out. Simple."

Dale laughed, pressing the gun so hard into Brin's temple that she had to incline her head away from it.

"I got all the time in the world. Y'all don't. There's gonna be the better part of a whole town here in a couple minutes. That truck ain't gonna save ya."

Bear watched Jake divert his pistol to the side, and intuited what he was going to do. Two gunshots overlapped, and the tall dude with the AR went down hard with entry wounds to the right eye and the chest. Jake's gun came right back to the blonde kid's head as Bear then sighted in on Dale. Jake responded.

"You say that. I would disagree. We can shred this town without breaking a sweat. Make the right choice."

Andrew

The report of Jake's M-9 next to his ear sent shockwaves through his brain even as he saw Ray drop to the ground. It was at once devastating, and cathartic. He could barely hear the words that Jake said right after, but they didn't matter.

There were only loud echoes of it in his head as he launched himself forward, breaking Jake's grasp on his shoulder. There was nothing left but to call his father to account, and his father knew his intent as he watched his son barrel towards him. It was clear on Dale's face.

If he was too slow, so be it. If he was killed in the attempt by either Jake or his father, so be it. There was nothing left except to try. Brin's kiss on his cheek was enough to put the ending period on the sentence of his life. He'd never expected to be here for very long, anyway. His father had established that expectation pretty early.

The last thing he heard his father say was,

"You ungrateful little shit."

Dale started to swing his gun around, and Andrew saw Brin shake her right arm at the same time. He caught a glint of metal in her hand even as she turned and lashed upward, burying the blade he'd given her into his father's throat. The .45 went off, but the bullet went somewhere else. Two more gunshots sounded, and Dale toppled backwards, no longer among the living.

Andrew slowed his charge, reaching for Brin, but she side-stepped him and sprinted to Jake. She launched herself into his arms and Jake staggered, propelled backwards against the truck. But he caught her, and held her tight.

From up above, he heard the big guy say,

"Gotta go, people."