The sound of sirens from the fire trucks can be deafening. But as much as it scares you it brings about relief. This however, wasn’t the case for Elizabeth or as her friends called her, Lizzie. All those sirens meant to her was a reminder. A reminder that she had failed to do the most important thing, protecting her family. She could still hear the screams from inside the house. What made it worse is that as the sirens grew in volume, the screams grew quieter and further apart, and all she could do was stand and watch. When the firemen finally tried to get into the house it had all caved in. As much as this was not the time to be thinking it, Lizzie thought it felt symbolic, for as the roof of her house caved in, so did her hopes of ever living a normal life. This reality was shock enough to elicit a low hollow groan. She tried to let it out, scream but no sound came out. She had no control. No control over her voice, even her limbs failed her too. But wait why she was shaking. It felt like an earthquake was raking through her entire body

“Lizzie wake up!” someone was shouting her name.

With great effort she finally pried her eyes open. she had been dreaming.she was not in front of her burning house , instead she was at her desk down at the station. three years later and she still grieved her family. still felt the loss just like it was yesterday.

“wake up everyone has left.we need to go home.” it was Casey her best friend.

She had that look in her eyes. Pity. Sadness. For her and Lizzie wanted none of it. Her only goal now was to find out exactly what happened to her family. Who killed her family, and why? Then she would make them pay.

Lizzie couldn’t go home because it would mean giving herself more alone time, which in turn would lead to more thinking and pining over her family once more. Instead she decided to go to the park. There wasn’t a lot of people at the time so she found a spot quite easy.

“Mommy you can’t get me” a child shouted in the distance.

She could make out two figures running in the distance and from what she could tell it was a young girl and her mother. She felt a familiar ache settle in her belly once more. She and her fiancé Scott had always made an effort to take their daughter to the park. She always loved it and had so much fun. But then something else caught her eye. Someone was running towards the pair. At first she assumed it was the child’s father but after further scrutiny something about him made chills run up her spine. He may not have been a villain, but he definitely was up to no good

There was something on his shirt. Something red. At first she thought of blood but quickly abandoned the idea since the red spot was actually moving. Before lizzzie could decipher exactly what it was there was a deafening loud boom. Her first instinct just like everyone else at the park was to take cover and protect her head. A few minutes passed and the chaos had somewhat abated. She looked over to find the mysterious guy who had caught her attention earlier crouched and holding onto his left arm. Having been to several situations involving gunshot wounds, Lizzie could tell that he was wounded. Reason told her to just walk away, but something else made her run over to him and offer a helping hand. As she got close she could tell he was in a lot of pain if the groans coming from his general direction were anything to go by.

“Hey sir. That looks nasty, need me to call for an ambulance?” she asked tentatively peering over his back.

The strange guy snapped his head up towards her. Something in his eyes had her wanting to flee and stay at the same time .she chose the latter but just to be safe she moved back a bit. His eyes were as dark as night. So piercing she felt like he could see right into her soul. Lizzie was never one to cower in a confrontation but something about how he looked at her shook her.  She tried to swallow back the lump that had formed in her throat but that was a difficult task too. She was having doubts. Maybe coming to help out a complete stranger who had just gotten shot wasn’t the most brilliant idea.

Oblivious to the ongoing turmoil in her head the stranger kept on looking and so did she. She was so entranced that she almost missed the fact that he had actually spoken to her.

“Sorry, what did you just say?” she asked trying to get her nerves in check.

“I said I would appreciate some help getting a cab. “He replied and his voice carried just as much mystery as his eyes.

“Sir have you taken a look at yourself? No offense but you look like hell.no cabbie in their right mind is going to allow you to get into their car. Also you just got shot, you need a hospital and then you have to come with me down to the station for an official statement.” Lizzie replied finally getting her jumbled-up thoughts in order.

“Just my luck, you’re a cop.”He scoffed rolling his eyes

“Excuse me, what’s that supposed to mean?” she asked angrily. Then added “and also, what grown up man rolls their eyes?”

That seemed to get to him because suddenly he stood up and started walking away albeit a little too shakily.

“Where are you going?”  Lizzie shouted after him.

“Thanks for trying to look out for me but I can take care of myself, ma’am, “he replied not even bothering to look at her.

Lizzie couldn’t believe his nerve. All she tried to do was help him out and he was so rude. What was up with him? And better yet, why did he get under her skin so much? And who says ma’am

It had been three days since the encounter at the park. Lizzie hadn’t been able to get much information about the mysterious guy at the park despite having the precinct’s resources at her disposal. Of course the fact that she didn’t even know his name didn’t really help the matter. It had been a long day at work. So much to file away and she hadn’t even been able to get any field work done. It was well past eight o’clock and the office was basically deserted. It was time to head home.  She packed all the things she required into her bag. She made sure to pack the file on the ‘park guy’ as she had decided to call him, the headed to the lift. As she hit the command to ground floor she made sure to ensure that the lights were off. However just as the doors were about to close shut a shadow flickered past her. At first she thought that there was someone else in there with her but that couldn’t be it since she was the only one there. Lizzie decided to let the issue go and conclude it was just because she was exhausted.

Once she exited the lift she went straight to her car. Something about the whole night had her feeling on edge. She had an eerily feeling that somebody was following her or maybe just watching. She quickly ran to her car and tried to start the engine but she couldn’t. Her hands were shaking so hard she couldn’t even put the key into the ignition.

“Calm down lizzie, it’s all in your head’ lizzie berated herself. And besides she was in the safest building in the entire city. She slowly reversed her car and left the parking lot, pulling onto the freeway.

However as soon as he did that a black S.U.V also turned the same way. Coincidence, she thought. But after turning her third left and finding the car still behind her she started panicking.  She drove around in circles until she was completely sure that she had lost the guys following her. She finally pulled on to her drive way completely spent and her body running on pure adrenaline. She had not eaten anything all day and it was definitely showing on her face. Her housekeeper always left food in the microwave for her, so she warmed it up, ate and headed to her bedroom. A hot shower would do her a lot of good.

Walking into her room Lizzie went straight for the closet to change into her robe, but one look at her bed told her somebody had been in her house. The bed had been moved from its original position and so had the mat beneath it. A floor board was also missing. It seemed as though somebody had pried it off the floor with a crow bar which meant whoever did this came prepared. However Lizzie wondered what they were looking for. She had rebuilt her house after it burned down. There wasn’t much damage from the fire so she decided to just fix it up and keep it, as a reminder of the family she once had and lost.

Lizzie stood in the middle of the room assessing it. It was then that she had a creak on the floor boards downstairs. She was now sure that she wasn’t alone in the house. Tentatively she creeped towards the window and drew back the curtains. And there it was, parked across the street was the black car that had been following her earlier on. As if that wasn’t enough to get her on alert, there was something in the air. The unmistakable smell of gas. Despite not having any tangible evidence, Lizzie knew something was horribly wrong. She also knew that if she wanted to save her life, she needed to get out of her house.

As she stood looking out onto the street, Lizzie felt rather than heard someone come up behind her but before she could scream a hand came around her mouth muffling her screams. She tried tackling her assailant to the floor but he easily overpowered her and rendered her defenseless in mere seconds.

“Shhh, I’m here to help. I know you know it’s only a matter of time before they figure out exactly where we are so we need to move now!” commanded the stranger. Except it wasn’t really a stranger. She knew that voice, couldn’t exactly place a name to it but she knew it.

Going by pure instinct Lizzie allowed him to lead her outside through the fire escape. Once their feet hit the ground they broke off into a run. Lizzie was about to ask him exactly why they were running when she saw him pull out some sought of remote device and press it. From then on everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. First she looked back in time to see her precious house burst into flames. Next she was being ushered into the black van she had seen through her window.

What was going on and who was this guy? Better yet, why did he blow up her house? Her only link to her family? And why did everyone seem to think burning down her house was a good idea?

“Stop the car!” she shouted at him but he just kept on driving.

“I said stop this car right now or I am jumping out” she said and he finally looked at her. He must have seen the determination on her face because reluctantly he brought the car to a slow halt.

“What?” he demanded curtly?

“Excuse me? I don’t think you have any grounds to have that kind of prissy attitude, your just blew up my house, I believe you owe me some answers don’t you?” she replied in a calm voice that did not even remotely show the array of emotions going through her head right then.

“My name is Kyle. I work for the government, kind of. And in case you didn’t notice I just saved your life back there. But those guys, the once in your house are still following and the longer I stand here waiting for her highness to get her emotions in order, the closer they get to us. So get in the fucking car right now or so help me God I will knock you out and carry your unconscious self-back in there.” He had a sought of menacing look on his face that made Lizzie shudder. If she didn’t cooperate this man was going to do exactly what he had threatened so she obeyed. This however was not the only think that made her shiver. This man was quite the specimen and the thought of his arms around her body just got her nerves in a frenzy. At the moment Lizzie knew she was focusing on the wrong things so she decided to wordlessly get into the car. However once they were safe she would get her answers one way or the other. To hell with the consequences.

After what seemed like hours on the road they finally pulled up to a house well off the road. Kyle got out of the car and she took that to mean that she should too. Lizzie was a bit light headed. The adrenaline that had helped her get through it all was finally wearing of and behind all that was left was a hollow feeling. She was in shock. There is only so much that a human being can accommodate.

KYLE

He knew he had been too harsh with Lizzie, but he didn’t know what else to do in the situation. Guns blaring and bullets flying he could handle, but hyperventilating women was way out of his comfort zone. He led her towards the house knowing the questions were bound to come now and he had no choice but to tell her what she wanted to know. Lizzie didn’t look like the type of person to just let things lie. If that were the case then they would not be in their current predicament. She would not be in danger.

“Make yourself comfortable, I will go get you a glass of water,” he instructed her. As she walked towards the chair her legs trembled a bit and she would have lost her footing had he not rushed to support. However he was not prepared for what he saw when he looked into her eyes.  Instead of the strong abrasive Lizzie he had come to know, in her place was a shadow of the person she once was. Her sight was unfocused and her breath came in shallow gasps. He had to do something top snap her out of whatever trance she was in. he tried shaking her but that didn’t seem to work, so he had to go for option number two. The ice in his freezer would have to do. It was either that or cold water and he was sure lizzie would not take too lightly to being splashed with cold water.

LIZZIE

Lizzie was still trying to get a hold of the situation. She knew she was spiraling but didn’t know how to stop it. She wasn’t used to feeling this much out of control of the things around her. Maybe getting a feel of where she was would help, she thought. However just as she was about to stand from where she was seated, she was hit with a bucket full of ice. The ice cubes were not even fully melted but the damage was done. She spluttered as she tried to squeeze the water from her eyes.

Did this Neanderthal of a man just splash ice on her face? She zeroed in on him. If he thought he could just act like that and get away with it then he had something else coming. Without giving it too much thought she charged forward, ready to tackle him. If she was being honest all she wanted was a distraction from her thoughts and beating him up seemed like the next best thing.

KYLE

He could tell the minute that the confusion in her eyes turned into anger, however he was not ready to see it directed at him. He was also not ready for the pit bull that came flying at him all kicks and fists. It caught him off guard and the both tumbled onto the floor. She kept kicking at him and so it took a while to finally contain her. If he was being honest, her punches were quite painful and it took a lot of strength to actually restrain her and get her to calm down.

“Quit hitting me would you,” he commanded even as she kept raining blows on him.

“I will stop hitting once my questions are answered. Starting with why you thought it was a good idea to hit me with ice cold water, didn’t you momma teach you any manners?’ she screamed at him. Kyle was about to answer but she cut him off with a wave of her hand.

“Am not done. Why did you blow up my house? How did you know where I live? And lastly who were those men after me?”

“Are you done now?” he asked and she nodded and he went on, “all your questions can be broken down to one answer, Sean.”

That knocked the wind of her sails,

“You knew my husband?’ she asked as she slowly got off the ground where she had him pinned, and he immediately missed her presence on top of him. Served to fulfill some of his wild fantasies.

“Yes I knew him. We served together.” He replied in a monotone as he watched the various emotions flicker across her face. First there was surprise, the anger, and finally she was raging mad.

“He lied to me.” The statement was delivered in a calm manner but he could tell she was barely holding it together. Kyle wished he could help but something told him the last thing Lizzie needed was sympathy or worse, pity.

 “Tell me everything.” She demanded

The minute she got that determined look on her face he knew there was no escaping this. He had made his bed by telling her the truth, now he had to lie in it and explain himself.

“Sean and I were part of the same crew but he was just there as a medic. At least that’s what we all thought. He left a year earlier than me. When I finally left that’s when I came to realize what his purpose really was. Sean was like a brother to me Lizzie but there are things about his life that even I didn’t know about. He was quite secretive. And as much as it was what made him a good agent, I think the same secrecy is what led to his death,” he explained. Lizzie looked as lost in thought as she tried to process all the information.

How was one supposed to just come to terms with the fact that the one person she trusted didn’t trust her enough to share such things about his life?  He felt for her. But he also knew that for Lizzie to remain alive in the world that he had now introduced her to, she needed to be in the loop.

“What secrets are you talking about?” she asked tentatively.

As much as he hated this he decided to tell her everything. “The unit I was in used to go on a lot of “off the books” missions. That meant that we had access to a lot of classified information. On my last mission we were sent to Russia. A drug lord needed to be taken care of, so to speak…”

LIZZIE P.O.V

“So you were hired mercenaries? What does this have to do with my fiancé” Lizzie asked confusedly.

“Lemme just finish without you cutting me off. It’s hard enough as it is,” he paused and after a nod of encouragement he proceeded. “Something was wrong with the mission from the start. Sean never went on such operations but a last minute change led to him joining as part of the tactical team. When we got to his compound Vladimir was nowhere in sight. But his men definitely were. We barely managed to get out of there alive. I lost so many of my teammates that day.” He paused as if the mere memory was too much to handle.

As much as she hated to admit it, Lizzie felt for the man in front of her. Despite the impenetrable amour he seemed to have put up around himself, he was hurting. More so he blamed himself for what happened. As a team leader it was very easy to try and shoulder all the responsibility and the consequences that followed.

“It was not your fault Kyle. From my experience, there is only so much you can do to prevent some things.” She told him tentatively.

“After we managed to get away we went back to our operations base to regroup. No matter how hard we tried, Vladimir Kersof was gone. We went back to our jobs but I always had the nagging feeling that there was some foul play involved so I kept investigating. My findings brought me to the park that day. Sniffing around always raises alarm. I think I’m getting close to uncovering what happened and those responsible do not like that very much.”

Lizzie tried to wrap her mind around what she now knew. However none of the information that Kyle had volunteered explained why she was involved, she was sure that having helped him out at the park did not warrant the hit that was issued on her. She voiced her opinion to Kyle and he shared her concerns.

“I only talked to you for a few minutes before you decided to go all Rambo on me and ditch me. I don’t think that small interaction would bring armed men to my door. So what are you not telling me?”

“I really don’t know that much. I didn’t even know about you until that day in the park. I think for now, we should lay low for a while as we try to figure out what is happening,” he said in a gruff voice.

“Am sorry, we? “Asked Lizzie incredulously.

“Yes. We. If you remember correctly you don’t have anything to go back to. Not even a house.

This really annoyed lizzie considering he was the one who blew up her house.” I don’t have a house because somebody decided to enact one of his childhood Rambo movies and blow up my house!” she shouted really losing her composure. Oddly enough her reaction only served to amuse him. She could see the reluctant shift of his lips as he tried to hide his smile. And damn if it didn’t make him look sexy as hell. Great now she was on the run with a guy she barely knew. Albeit he was easy on the eyes and she did almost marry a guy she clearly didn’t know anything about. The irony was not lost on her.

“Okay. I will stay here. But only until you clear up this mess. As fun as this has been, I’m not really in the habit if cohabiting with people I barely know, “she added sarcastically and headed down the hall way. She may not have known where she was headed but it was better than standing in uncomfortable silence as she tried not to mentally undress the guy in the house with her. Also stopping to ask for directions would have ruined her dramatic exit, and we all know how important those are. Not.

Lizzie went into the first empty bedroom and finally allowed herself a moment to analyze the situation. Facts. Sean was in the military. Someone was trying to kill her. Somebody was at her house looking for something. Now the only question was if they found what they were looking for. Or better yet, *what*were they looking for? Not having all the answers was something she was not used to. The one thing she knew for sure was that it all came back to Kyle. Her life has been a mess since that day at the pack. But in a way she was glad she met him because it meant she was closer to uncovering the mystery behind her family’s death. First things first she needed to get an extended leave from work. As she took her phone to dial her boss the screen lit up with an incoming call from her best friend Casey,

“Lizzie what the hell is happening? I have been trying to reach you. I’m at your house and the place is on fire!” Casey ranted on without waiting for Lizzie to reply,

“Calm down would you. I’m fine. I can’t explain much but I need you to do me a favor,” Lizzie replied.

“Sure what is it?”

“Talk to the boss. I need a leave to figure out some things,” she replied hoping Casey would do as she asked without asking too many questions. However knowing her that was as possible as a pig suddenly sprouting wings and flying,

“I will get you your leave, but make no mistake, you wil l tell me what is happening,” Casey replied in a tone that left no room for argument.

“Fine,” She said, “I will call you in a few days ok?’

“No not ok. Call me tomorrow morning and explain everything or I am tracking your phone and coming to you,”

“Ok fine. I will call in the morning. *Frigging best friends”*she muttered under her breath.

“I heard that. Talk later. Bye. Love you,”

“Love you too Casey.” She replied and hang up.  Casey was loyal but could be a pain in the you-know-where at times. After calming down she went out in search of Kyle. They needed to come up with a game plan.

After wondering around without seeing him she decided to check the next bedroom. She knocked but there was no reply so she pushed the door open. Right there at the vanity stood Kyle. His shirt was off as he focused on something intensely. After getting over her initial shock she refocused on the man in front of her. He was trying to clean up his gunshot wound from the day in the park. He must have been in a lot of pain since she could see the thin sheen of sweat and the way he tightened his jaw. In all the commotion she had forgotten all about it. Without giving it further thought she walked in and took the gauze from his hands,

“Sit. Let me do that,” she offered.

Kyle was about to decline but he knew he could not reach the wound on his shoulder so he let her lead him to the bed and sat down. As she got to work, it gave him a chance to really look at her. There was no denying Lizzie was a beautiful woman. At the same time she was tough, tougher than he expected. She was also very young which made him wonder, what kind of demons did she have to deal with to make her as she is? He face was a mass of concentration as she focused on the task at hand. If he was being honest she looked kind of cute playing nurse like that.

“Staring is rude,” Lizzie’s statement jolted him from his traitorous thoughts. He tried to cover it up by scoffing and changing the topic,

“I have a friend. He works with the F.B.I. I think he can help us. We need all the information we can get on Vladimir.”

“Good. When do I get to meet him?” she asked as she finished cleaning the wound.

“You don’t have to meet him, just a phone call will do,” he replied grumpily.

“For someone who has been rogue for such a long time, you sure can be daft.” She replied nonchalantly

“Excuse me?” he asked incredulously

“These people after us seem to have done their homework. They found you that day at the park. Which means they probably traced your phone signal. I wouldn’t put it past them to actually try and tap into your phone calls,” she said as a matter of fact.

He knew she was right, but no way was he telling her that. Her ego was already too big as it was. No need to inflate it more. Hence he only gave her a grunt as a reply. Lizzie quietly laughed as she thought to herself, *men and their pride.*