

C. ELIZABETH VESCIO

UNCONTROLLABLY WASTED

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For John

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Chapter One

Just once I'd like to slow down and enjoy the fucking scenery. I'd like to vacation on another continent and take in the rich history and culture. I'd like to learn about cities in my own country and partake in eating challenges in popular restaurants. I'd like to shop.

Impossible.

I slammed my foot down on the gas pedal to accelerate into the intersection before the light turned red, swerving dangerously to avoid hitting a slower moving vehicle.

Katharine sat in the passenger seat with her arms crossed in front of her and her lips pursed.

"This isn't my fault," she said.

Downshift. Sharp turn. Sorry cute couple making out in public, whom I almost ran over, violently.

"Enlighten me as to how this isn't your fault," I said, keeping my eyes trained on the car in front of me. I better catch him soon or we were fucked.

We were currently racing through the streets of Long Beach, California in a stolen Volkswagen Golf. I was trying to catch up to a mark Kat had accidentally tipped off moments before my sniper took him out of his human sex trafficking misery. His name is Tomko Vaan. I hoped I could make that name a memory by the end of the night.

Instead of answering me, Kat started rummaging through the car's glove compartment.

I had to control my impulse to slam on the brakes and split her head open on the dashboard.

"Are we fighting?" Addi's voice wafted through my earpiece. "I mean, he hasn't gotten away yet, right?"

"iPod!" Kat held up the colorful device and plugged it into the stereo.

"No, he hasn't gotten away yet," I huffed, screeching around another narrow curve. "I only left my best gun on the roof of Villa

Riviera, negotiated the sixteen story building, found the parking garage, only to be thrown into a high speed chase through surf central on a Saturday night.”

“Turn right,” Addi said. She was somewhere on an adjacent street, tracking a bug that Kat successfully placed in Tomko’s drink before she drank some wine with him and opened her big fat mouth.

“If it wasn’t for Addi, you’d be walking home,” I seethed at Kat.

She pressed play and some obnoxious pop song began to blast through the speakers. “He could have killed me. I’m happy you’re not taking that into consideration. I mean I kept up with him, didn’t I? I lost my high heels, I broke a nail. It’s not my fault you missed your half of the Kiss, Kiss, Bang, Bang scenario.”

“Left,” Addi’s voice sounded. “You’re going to lose him if he reaches the port. This bug will dissolve in thirty minutes and if he gets to his ship he’ll have reinforcements.”

“Won’t happen,” I responded, trying to focus on my mark and not let Kat’s music selection get to me, even when she started to sing along.

The bug was mainly to track a target from another building, lining up a sniping shot. It wasn’t for chasing.

“I’m heading to the port now,” Addi responded. “Do you think we’ll need help?”

“No,” I said quickly. “Don’t you dare call him.”

I don’t often find myself in such predicaments, but when I do, my two cousins were always with me. More often than not, one of them was a direct cause of said dilemma. All I could do was smile and ride the roller coaster.

My name is Frankie, and I’m a contract killer. I promise I’m pretty good at my job. Just give me a chance to prove it.

“This time, baby... I’ll be bulletproof,” Kat sang.

I loathed her in that moment.

I glanced to my side; Kat was also thumbing through a Vogue magazine she had managed to find.

I would have taken time to ponder whose car we hijacked, but another sharp turn snapped me back to attention.

This time I lost a bit of control and the car sideswiped the guard rail, slamming Kat into the window. Her head made a loud thunk as it hit the glass. I smiled.

“Seriously?” Kat grabbed her head.

“Oh, man,” I faked concern. “I hope that doesn’t leave a mark.”

I pressed down on the gas once more, shooting the Golf forward,

catching up to Tomko. If I could just...

He slammed on his brakes suddenly, causing me to swerve and bank off onto the shoulder.

"I'm almost caught up to you guys," Addi said. "We can try to corner him if he heads into the freight yards."

I straightened the car back out, grabbed my gun from its holster and smacked it on Kat's shoulder "Take this and shoot his tires."

She looked at me as though it was a huge inconvenience to help me out. No, by all means, keep reading your magazine while I chase this hardened criminal down.

Kat huffed and puffed as she undid her seatbelt, rolled the window down and held the gun out with unstable hands. "How am I supposed to shoot his tires out? It's dark!"

I hit a large bump in the road and the gun went off anyway.

Kat gave a frightened yip and grasped the gun with both hands. "Watch it!"

"I'm watching!" I snapped and positioned the car to give Kat a better shot. It was pretty dark, but my headlights shone enough for her to see.

As we drove into the freight section of the port, there was nowhere to go but forward. There was a canyon made from the docked barges on the right and stacked containers on the left. Of course, the street was wet.

Kat tried to take aim. She took a shot and missed. "I need him to stop swerving so much!"

"I'll let him know!"

Kat's Gucci dress began to ride up as she leaned farther out the window. Her stockings had large runs in them. I'd undoubtedly never hear the end of that.

The road was about to break off into a fork. A huge building was in the middle, daring us to make a move.

"Take the shot!"

I kept the car as straight as possible. Kat took aim once more and fired.

And tell me now, I'm much too proud to walk away from something when it's dead.

Tomko's gas tank exploded and his car did a somersault into the building. Fire, smoke and debris sprayed in all directions as the car landed on its roof.

Kat fell back into the car, wide-eyed. She dropped the gun and it

landed somewhere near my feet.

I slammed on the brakes, Tokyo-drifting my way to a stop before we hit Tomko's ruined car.

Headlights filled my rearview and I squinted.

"What the fuck happened?" Addi asked.

"Holy shit, did I do that?"

Kat had the crack shot gene, but only the blindest of luck could have made that happen.

Movement on top of the containers caught my eye.

A dirty blond head, a sexy smile, a sniper rifle on his back, loaded with explosive rounds.

Gabriel "Spark" Dawson gave me a wink and a thumbs up.

I sighed in both relief and frustration, reaching down to retrieve my gun.

Addi got out of the car behind us, while Kat and I emerged from the Golf.

Amidst the wreckage, Tomko Vaan groaned in pain. I walked around to the side of his car where he was trying to drag himself away from the fire.

The man was already in bad shape, but not dead yet.

He looked up at me as I raised my gun.

He spat at me and uttered something in his native tongue which, according to his file, was Ukrainian.

"What? I didn't catch that," I batted my eyes at him.

"You'll be sorry," he said, with his thick accent.

"I'm sorry that I have a run in my pantyhose," Kat pulled at her legs.

Addi's expression was indifferent. "I'm not wearing pantyhose," she shrugged.

You could still hear the music wafting out from the open car.

Tick, tick, tick, on the watch and life's too short for me to stop. Oh, baby, your time is running out.

"I hate this fucking song," Addi said, flatly.

I pulled the trigger.

That was an adventure. So much trouble for one measly little villain. At least his sex trafficking would come to an abrupt halt since he couldn't pay his thugs anymore.

I glanced into the distance where a large ship was docked.

The name on the side was barely legible. The letters were weathered and worn off.

I took a few steps towards it, curious as to what Tomko was hiding.

I could hear a few shouts coming from the direction of the ship. The fireball most likely caught someone's attention.

"We should probably get out of here," I said. "That wasn't exactly low profile."

I turned and looked up at the container where Spark had been.

He had disappeared from view and a few metallic clanks later, he moseyed his way around the front of the canister, whistling.

"Ugh!" Kat stomped her bare foot on the pavement as she focused on him. "I should have known it was you!"

Spark lifted the sniper from his shoulder, slid it into the Golf's back seat and climbed in after it.

"I guess I'll meet you back at the hotel," Addi said and I nodded in agreement.

"I need to go get my rifle," I called after her.

I followed an angry Katharine back to the car and let myself back into the driver's seat.

"Nice," I threw Spark a look in the rearview mirror.

"This is why I don't like you coming on assignment," Kat threw up her arms. "Because you steal my fucking thunder!"

Spark just shook his head and chuckled.

"What? You think it's funny? You and Yeh are like these omnipresent ass hat control freaks. If it's not one of you it's the other."

On really bad days, it was both.

"Look, Coco Chanel," Spark threw her his trademark charming smile. "I listen to the feeds, too. Frankie always says she doesn't need my help, and that's code for 'check it out, in case.'"

"I had it under," I started.

"Control," Spark finished for me. "Yeah, I got that much, Frankie."

I tried not to get angry. The truth was I couldn't complain. He was a senior agent, his report was read first and the last thing I wanted was to get benched via Kat's sophomoric behavior. She had improved a lot over this past year, but every once in a while, she was just a magnet for Murphy's Law.

"How did you even know where to be?" Kat turned her head to glare at him.

"I read the mission files too, you know," Spark said. "I figured he'd make a break for his ship."

"We should keep going," I said before I started the car. "Search that boat. Take anyone else out."

"I like the way you think, but no," Spark said. "Too risky. Maybe

if we had Yeh.”

Ah yes, Johnny Yeh... the magical ingredient in any blood bath.

I started to back the car up. “Whatever you say, Boss.”

Kat turned back around and crossed her arms in front of her.

“Just don’t tell Alexa it was my fault.”

Alexa was our aunt, head of the Osiris Corporation. If you think being a contract killer is tough- try being one for a family-run company.

“Your earpieces feed into Osiris. If Overbeck knows, everyone knows,” Spark said.

“I’ll kill that little twerp,” Kat spat back.

I inwardly sighed as we made our way out of the ship yards.

A year ago my life as a lone killer-for-hire came to a bloody family standoff resulting in the death of my aunt, Greta and the revelation that her twin sons and crazy sister-in-law had been plotting her demise since she blew her husband’s brains out when I was a kid.

Did I mention that the husband she killed was actually my father because he cheated on his wife with her sister- my mother? We put the fun in dysfunctional.

“I just want to go home,” Kat started to rub her temples.

“It’s five hours that way,” I said, pointing inland.

“It really wasn’t my fault,” Kat looked over at me. “He was acting weird from the start. It was like he knew who I was and it freaked me out. I lost my cool. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Spark’s tone softened. “It happens. We got the guy.”

“You mean *you* got the guy,” Kat continued her sulking. “All I do is sit and look pretty.”

“You’re a Wingback, not a Striker.”

“Well, maybe I want to switch it up,” Kat said.

“Man,” Spark hit the back of her seat. “You squash one bug and suddenly you want a career change.”

“It’s been a year,” Kat reasoned. “Frankie has taught me a lot.”

Oh, don’t bring me into this.

“The company is bringing in two Strikers in a couple of months,” I reminded her. “We’ll have too many.”

“Let me do both,” Kat said. “My main job will still be Wingback and I can fill in for contracts where needed.”

“That’s something you have to take up with Alexa or the twins,” I said.

Katharine wasn't the most adept at handling intense situations, but she had gotten better since she blew our Aunt Greta's brains out-which I'll admit was impressive. She also juggled running an etiquette school called Elegance, Inc. At least she could multitask.

"I'll talk to Yeh about it," she said, not liking my answer.

She could be so impossible.

"No," I frowned. "It's not Yeh's company. It's Alexa's."

Johnny Yeh was one of the company's assassins. He's not like me- you know, half assed and irritated all the time. I'm not a fan of propriety when it comes to collecting contracts. Yeh has this respect for death. He's one of those killers you don't see coming.

Yeh has no sense of humor and one facial expression. He's the last person on Earth you should want to work with in any way. Enter Katharine Fucking Fairholm.

"Technically, it's Nero's. He's in charge of day to day operations," Spark said. "If you really want a change then we can all go and talk to him about it, together."

My eyes narrowed at him in the review mirror. Since when was Spark Dawson the camp counselor?

I parked the car in an alley halfway between the Villa Riviera and our hotel. Katharine seemed to be coming down off of her hissy fit and now just looked tired. She took off down the narrow street.

"Can you make it back to the hotel by yourself?" I asked her.

"I think I can manage," she called over her shoulder.

I took off in the other direction and made my way down the poorly lit path. I noted that Spark chose to follow me. I did my best to stay ahead of him. His sudden support for Kat the Striker was getting to me.

Spark grabbed my hand and pulled me back towards him. He stopped and placed his hands on my shoulders.

I was too surprised by his touch to shrug it off.

"You're not mad at me are you? I didn't mean to interfere with your hit. I should have let you handle it."

I shook my head no. "It's not that."

"Are you upset that we're back where we first met and we haven't had the chance to hit up Iguana Kelly's like the good old days?"

I threw him a subtle smile. "No."

"What then?" He responded. "You're obviously pissed about something."

I paused and studied his face. He was so stupid cute. I hated when

he cornered me and forced me to deal with my feelings.

I refused to give in to his advances- although at times he was persistent. Since I kept him reasonably shut out, he had taken to acting too much like my trainer again. It was most likely his way of trying to get to me in hopes that I'd cave and sleep with him.

Spark always seemed content in waiting for me to come around. That drove me nuts. There was obviously something wrong with the guy.

"I just don't understand why you'd encourage Kat to be a Striker," I sighed. "I don't like the idea."

"You worry too much," Spark said. "Give Kat a few months in our shoes and she'll run screaming the opposite direction. Sure, she's not crying at the sight of guns, nor complaining when you get someone else's blood on her precious clothes. She's come a long way. But she's still your lovable dumb cousin who drinks too much and doesn't like getting dirty."

"You aren't thinking about the danger you're putting her in," I said. "She's already a trouble magnet. Just because you're not used to a family, doesn't mean you get to be careless with mine."

He dropped his hands from my shoulders and frowned at me.

"That's not a very nice thing to say."

"Well," I huffed. "You act like you know it all. You've never spent years watching out for a family member, hoping their next move doesn't get them killed."

Yeah, that was a low blow. They blended well with my frustration.

"I suppose I don't," he muttered. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you."

I remained silent. A lot had gone down over the past year... since I was introduced to the rest of Osiris. Since I was suddenly regarded as one of the family.

Since I let Spark and his lazy smile back into my life, and since I had to face the fact that part of me was a Siriso. Since then, I've been overlooking a lot of facts.

My mistake.