

# SURVIVAL INSTINCT



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# Survival Instinct

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# Section 1:

## Outbreak

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# 1: Tobias

Tobias trailed behind Lucas Jonas through the crowded park. It was hot, noisy, and smelled of hair gel and body odour. The camera bag he carried started to slide again, so he pulled the heavy thing higher up on his shoulder and pushed through a particularly tight knot of people.

The press of bodies was starting to get to him. He hated crowds. Even though he stood taller than almost everyone did, with the average person reaching only up to his nose, having so many crammed around him was unsettling. Tobias wasn't a loner. He had a good group of friends, but anyplace that had more than ten people made him uneasy. Here, there were hundreds, thousands even.

He was beginning to think that living in the city wasn't such a great life choice after all. It wasn't the first time he thought it either.

"How much farther?" Tobias called up to Lucas.

Lucas's only response was a flick of his wrist at shoulder height. Tobias grumbled to himself. Working with big names like Lucas Jonas was always the worst. They never answered questions and they always insisted on the heaviest equipment. Tobias had packed a much smaller and lighter bag earlier, but then, when Mister Big Shot saw it, he insisted on the big stuff. Bigger was not better, but it looked more impressive. And looks were all these guys really cared about. And what kind of name was Lucas Jonas anyway?

Finally, they broke through the crowd next to the security fence. Tobias stopped to take a refreshing breath of air. Well, as refreshing as the air could be in a city park, standing next to a mass of sweating bodies in the hot, August sunshine. During his break, Tobias had briefly lost sight of Mr. Jonas, and when he spotted him again, Lucas was trying to make his way through the security point. Tobias sighed and made his way over. Lucas was arguing with a big, black security guard who had arms as thick as Tobias's legs.

"Do you know who I am?" Lucas stood on his tiptoes but still wasn't even eye-to-eye with the massive guard. "I'm Lucas fucking Jonas! See this pass?" The laminate he waved in front of the guard's face moved so fast, Tobias was pretty sure the guard wouldn't even have registered its colour. "It lets me go wherever I want in this whole damn shebang!"

Lucas finally noticed Tobias standing next to him and yanked him over. He grabbed Tobias's bag and opened a zipper, nearly spilling out the expensive contents.

"See? Video camera equipment!" With his face red, he turned on Tobias, "Don't just stand there like a lump, Toby, show the man your bloody pass!"

He let go of Tobias's arm with a slight shove. Tobias seethed about being called Toby, he thought it was something you'd call a dog, but pulled his pass up on the string around his neck. He handed it to the guard and let him look it over thoroughly.

"Rough day today, Mackenzie?" The security guard asked in his rumbling voice as he looked at Tobias's credentials.

"Is it that obvious?" Tobias gave Lucas a somewhat smug look. Having met a lot of security guards while working for the Leighton Network occasionally had its perks.

"You know this man?" Lucas looked from the guard to Tobias. "Then why the hell didn't you say something sooner? God, amateurs." He annoyingly pronounced it am-e-tures.

The security guard stepped aside and let Lucas storm past, a cheeky grin revealing his pear-

whites.

“How’d you get paired up with him?” the guard asked as he watched Lucas go.

“Bad luck I guess.” Tobias hiked his bag up once more. “So Bruce, me and some of the guys are going to The Foxers next Friday, you wanna come?” He liked The Foxers because it was never crowded. It was easy to breathe there, unlike the packed clubs. Unlike that crowd he had just passed through.

“Sure thing, Mackenzie. He’s not coming, is he?” Security man Bruce jerked a thumb over his shoulder towards Lucas, his grin still lighting up his face.

“If he is, then my life is over. I better get going before he calls my boss, demanding someone else.” With a sigh, Tobias Mackenzie started walking in the same direction Lucas had gone.

Bruce’s booming voice followed after him, “Your boss would never be that mean to anyone else. Just you!”

Tobias flipped Bruce the bird over his shoulder. The laughter resulting from this gesture echoed after him as he looked for Mr. Lucas Jonas. It would be some time before he heard such honest and completely carefree laughter again.

As Tobias worked his way around the scaffolding and the usual equipment you’d expect to find piled up behind any stage, he finally spotted Mr. Jonas again. When Lucas spotted Tobias in turn, he rushed over and Tobias knew it couldn’t be good. His arm was grabbed and Lucas hauled him along quicker.

Counting slowly to himself and taking deep breaths, Tobias allowed himself to be forcibly led. *Goddamn TV personalities always seemed to be in a rush*, he thought.

Lucas stopped between the edge of the stage and the corral of buses the rock stars were in.

“Here.” Lucas pointed between his feet.

“What about here?” Tobias sighed. He couldn’t see anything particularly different or interesting about that spot of trampled earth.

“I want you to film from here,” Mr. Jonas’s eyes rolled like it should have been obvious. “All the rockers have to pass by here to get on stage. It’ll be the perfect opportunity to get interviews with a lot of them *and* get some shots of the performances.”

“You want everything filmed from one spot?”

“Have you never seen my show? Of course you haven’t, you’re just an ingrate. My stuff is way beyond you.” Lucas waved Tobias off with a flip of his wrist and started looking around.

Tobias was fairly certain that Lucas didn’t know what ‘ingrate’ meant, but that he was using it to insult him. He took another deep, steadying breath, and closed his eyes. “You realize, if we film here we’ll a) be in the way, and b) be so close to the speakers, nothing you say will be heard over the music.”

“What?” The speakers, sitting only a few paces away, suddenly came to Lucas’s attention.

This was why Tobias hated filming at concerts. Especially the charity kind. The music caused problems for the sound, and the sight of the cameras caused the crowds to flip out more than usual. He would have loved to have been one of the other guys, the ones who just sat at the stationary cameras. They didn’t have to follow an *idjit* around, just point and shoot at what looked interesting. At least the money for this was good.

“All right, we’ll free-roam it then,” Lucas said this like he was making some great sacrifice. “Get your camera out.”

After unzipping his bag, Tobias lifted out the heavy piece of equipment. He placed it on the ground by his feet and began hooking everything up. He even had a waist and leg harness, like rock climbers used, to help him carry the large battery and various other bits and bobs. While he strapped this on, he watched Mr. Jonas out of the corner of his eye. The guy was ogling himself in a small mirror and

picking at his no-doubt expensive teeth.

“Here, can you put this on yourself?” Tobias held out a microphone attached to a battery pack that clipped onto the back of the user’s belt.

Lucas once again rolled his eyes as he took it.

Tobias finished setting up his own equipment, trying not to grind his teeth, and lifted the camera up onto his shoulder. He slung his now almost empty bag across his back. The last time he had let his camera bag out of his sight at one of these things, it disappeared forever.

Once he was ready, they did a sound check. Tobias couldn’t hear anything Mr. Jonas said through the noise-cancelling headphones he wore. Apparently, Mr. Jonas had attached the microphone correctly, but had forgotten to turn it on. Somehow, Tobias got blamed for that.

“All right, I want you to film everything from here on out, you got it? The editors can splice together later.” Lucas looked down at himself and straightened his clothes once more. He tried to look like a reporter and a rocker at the same time. Tobias thought he just looked like a douchebag, but he might have been somewhat biased.

Tobias was a jeans and T-shirt kind of guy. Currently, though, he wore beige cargoes. He had learned early on that the large pockets were very handy for work. He had never been one to care about his appearance too much and let his light, sandy hair grow out like a mop on his head. He had been told he sometimes reminded people of a surfer bum with his laid-back appearance, especially when he became tanned during the summer. He always thought he looked like a really tall teenager with softer features than the rest of the guys around him. It did seem to help him get girls though. They felt safe around him with his disarming looks.

After counting down from five with his fingers, Tobias pressed the record button. Instantly, Lucas and Mr. Jonas’s TV persona took over. Tobias never knew what to call it, but he had seen it hundreds of times. The people on the TV would shift from one personality to another as soon as a running camera was on them. The shift was so great with Mr. Jonas that it made him look like an entirely different person. Now Tobias could understand how this guy got to be so popular. He seemed a lot more approachable this way.

Soon Tobias switched over into his own altered state; what he and his buddies called *film mode*. He trailed Mr. Jonas wherever he went and kept his mouth shut. If someone Mr. Jonas was interviewing asked Tobias a question, Lucas would answer for him, or Tobias would give a slight shake or nod to the camera if it were a yes or no question. His boss had told him that Mr. Jonas’s viewers liked that.

Otherwise, Tobias was completely absent-minded. He went somewhere else in his head. Currently, it was to next Friday. He and the guys, which now probably included Bruce, were going to The Foxers. It was a favourite bar of theirs that they visited often. Tobias was looking forward to the visit more than normal, because Katie would probably be coming. One of Tobias’s friends had just started dating this chick who had a best friend, Katie, who came to almost all of the group gatherings. Katie was Tobias’s current dream girl. His dream girl changed often. This one was extremely smart and Tobias wasn’t used to girls who were smarter than he was. He was enjoying the difference mostly because the last girl he dated was a complete airhead.

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Tobias Mackenzie was filming a crowd reacting to the on-stage performer when Lucas started snapping his fingers in front of the lens. Tobias turned to face him, frowning slightly at the intrusion. There was no one around for Lucas to be interviewing.

“What?” Despite his own small microphone that went straight to an earpiece Lucas had on, Tobias still had to shout to be heard over the music. Even with his large headphones on, the music was insanely loud.

“What do you think is going on over there?” Lucas spoke into his own microphone and pointed

across the sea of fans.

~~Tobias's eyes followed Lucas's arm to see what he had seen. On the other side of the crowd,~~ pocket of people was moving at odds to the rest. The general populace was surging toward the stage, trying to reach its idols, but over on the far side, people seemed to be moving out in all directions away from a central point.

"I don't know." Tobias zoomed in with his camera for a better look. The distance was still too far to make out perfect detail, but he made out enough. He made out terrified faces trying to run from something in the centre of the ring.

"What is it?" Lucas shook his arm.

"I can't tell, but they're fleeing from something." He lowered his camera. "It's probably just a stink bomb or something."

"Or something. Let me see. Open that little viewer." Lucas's manicured hands reached for Tobias's camera.

Tobias pulled it away from him though. He didn't want him touching any of the expensive equipment. He flipped open the LCD view finder and turned it so that Lucas could see. The small screen filled with the crowd as Tobias pointed the camera back at the people. Some of them were not literally trying to climb over others to get away from whatever it was.

"That is definitely something!" Lucas grinned with enthusiasm. He showed all his teeth, like a crocodile.

Tobias didn't hide his disgust when he looked at him. Terrified people should please no one.

"Come on, Toby, we're getting over there." Lucas slapped Tobias's arm, ignoring his look.

"Why do you want to do that?"

"What are you, daft? To report on it obviously!" Lucas started to go around the back of the stage, swiftly stepping over and around the wires and scaffolding.

As Tobias tagged after him, he tried to convince Lucas not to go. "There are probably other cameras already filming it. You can do a voiceover or something later."

"Lucas Jonas does not do voiceovers. It's on-scene or nothing." Lucas wove around a particularly dense clutter of cables and equipment.

Carrying the camera made manoeuvring far more difficult for Tobias. It didn't take long for him to fall behind.

"Shit," Tobias grumbled to himself as he got snared on cable. Damned overachievers were always getting into shit they should keep their noses out of. That in itself, wasn't so bad, but did this one have to drag Tobias with him?

He finally made it to the security point and found Bruce, who was always easy to spot. Not only was he one of the few people Tobias knew who was taller than he was, but he was also two to three times as thick. Today, he particularly stood out due to his crisp, white T-shirt contrasting starkly with his ultra dark skin.

"Hey, did you see that annoying jerk I was following earlier?" Tobias pulled off his headphones. Thankfully, over here, the sound of the concert was somewhat dampened, and they could hear one another. Still, the sudden assault of sound pounded into Tobias's head like a hammer. He really hated concerts.

"Yeah, he went out that way." Bruce pointed out into the crowd.

"I think there's something going on out there. Something bad." Tobias didn't want to go back out into the mob.

"Out in the crowd?" The big security guard didn't wait for an answer. He climbed up on a cement barrier holding onto the edge of the fence for balance. After a quick look, he turned to another security guard, "Hey, Jake, hand me the binocs."

The other guard, equally thick but not as tall, grabbed a pair of binoculars off a table and handed them up to Bruce.

“What do you see?” Tobias stood on his tiptoes, but he couldn’t see very far over the heads of the crowd.

“Give me a moment.” Bruce was fiddling with the binoculars, trying to focus them. “Shit, I see blood. It’s bad.” He pulled a walkie-talkie off his belt and spoke quickly into it.

Tobias couldn’t hear what he said over the music.

“I take it your friend is heading over there hoping for a story?” The walkie-talkie was put away and Bruce hopped down next to Tobias.

Tobias nodded, although he would never use the term ‘friend’ to describe Mr. Jonas. Not even sarcastically.

“Come on, you’re going to help me get that idiot.” Bruce moved out through the gap in the fences.

“But...” Tobias *really* didn’t want to go. This feeling was even worse than it usually was. Something in his gut just told him it was a bad idea.

“Stay close behind me.” Bruce reached back and pulled Tobias after him.

As they reached the crowd, Bruce let go of Tobias, but Tobias reluctantly continued to follow after him. The big security guard was a lot easier to follow through the crowd than Lucas had been. Bruce’s huge size and commanding voice got people to move out of the way quickly. His broad shoulders made a large enough path for Tobias to follow with his camera easily. Still, that unsettling feeling sank deeper and deeper into Tobias’s gut, the further into the crowd they got. When he used his free hand to grab hold of the back of Bruce’s shirt, he saw that his own skin appeared to be getting quite pale, losing its nice summer tan.

When Tobias was very young, he had been separated from his parents at a theme park. He spent hours wandering around, lost in the crowd. All he could see was a strange forest of legs everywhere he went. Eventually, someone noticed and brought him to the lost and found where his parents, a weepy eyed, picked him up. He figured that was where his dislike of crowds had come from. He always felt some anxiety in them, but he learned to deal with it. It was part of his life.

Right now though, in this crowd, his heart was hammering harder than the bass line the band on stage was pounding out. He kept looking up at the clear, blue sky, something usually guaranteed to calm him. Not in this mob, though. Something just wasn’t right; something he couldn’t name.

He noticed that Bruce’s yelling had increased in volume, and that they had slowed their progress considerably. The people around them were all trying to head in the other way. When they first began to wade through the crowd, people were generally calm, albeit somewhat annoyed, but their expressions changed as Bruce and Tobias pushed deeper.

Bruce completely stopped moving forward and created a break in the flood of people with his body. They moved around him like a river around a boulder. The faces of the people slowly changed from a bit scared, to frightened, and finally to straight-out terrified. It wasn’t until Tobias saw the first people bleeding that he realized he was talking.

“Please, Bruce, we have to go, we have to leave. Come on, Bruce, let’s get out of here. Let’s go back to the stage.” His grip on Bruce’s shirt tightened. He even tugged it slightly like a small child would tug on a parent’s hand or pants leg.

The music suddenly cut off, allowing the sounds of screams to be heard. It looked like someone in charge finally realized something was going on.

The press of people lightened dramatically.

“Jesus Christ,” Bruce mumbled just loud enough for Tobias to hear.

He carefully moved out from behind Bruce now that there was an opening. In front of them, a clearing had formed. Lying in the middle of it, amongst the dropped trash, were people writhing



pain from bloody wounds. A few looked either unconscious or possibly even dead. At least one was dead. A man had an umbrella speared into his ribs. Tobias couldn't help but think that that was such an odd thing to die from: death by umbrella.

Across the clearing, several security guards and a handful of police officers were fighting with a man who was completely unresponsive to their shouts and the occasional punch they threw. As Tobias and Bruce watched, the combative man bit into one guard's bare arm and tore a sizeable chunk out of it. The two of them could only watch in shock and horror.

Tobias slowly brought his camera to his eye. Looking through the viewfinder detached him from the scene, as if it was already on TV. A police officer pulled out a Taser and zapped the violent man. The man twitched slightly but didn't stop. The Taser did virtually nothing. He grabbed the officer who had the Taser and instead of biting his arm, he went for his face. *Aw hell, he tore his throat out!*

There was movement in the bottom of Tobias's view. He panned down to the dead man. Only he couldn't be dead, because he was moving. Tobias didn't know how; the umbrella was right through where his lung should be, but he was beginning to sit up.

Further horror dawned on Tobias as he realized he knew the man. It was Lucas Jonas.

Lucas somehow managed to sit upright, and then stand, the umbrella sticking out of him like some absurdly large and garish corsage. He shuffled in a slow circle, a wheeze escaping him. He seemed rather disoriented, and understandably so. He then spotted Bruce and Tobias and began shambling over.

"Bruce..." Tobias whispered, not able to get his voice out. "Bruce..." he couldn't think of what else to say.

Lucas continued shambling towards them, his microphone dragging along the ground behind him, still attached to his waist. Tobias could hear the rumbling sound of its drag coming out of the headphones around his neck. As Lucas reached his hands out toward Bruce, Bruce stepped forward to help him.

"It's going to be okay," Bruce assured Lucas, "we'll get you a doctor; you're going to be all right. Everything is going to be all right."

Bruce grabbed Lucas's arms, steadying him. Lucas sagged, allowing the large man to take his weight.

Then he bit into Bruce's arm.

Bruce screamed and shoved Lucas back on instinct. He fell, the umbrella getting pushed into his chest slightly further, but he immediately started getting back up.

"Did you see that? Fucker just bit me!" Bruce turned to Tobias. "Put the goddamn camera down on that man." He grabbed the lens with one large hand and shoved down.

Tobias was suddenly jolted back into reality. Lucas really did have an umbrella sticking out of his chest, and he really did just bite Bruce. Thinking of bites...

He looked across the clearing to where the guards and police were still fighting with the first attacker. The officer with his throat ripped out lay on the ground, his eyes glazed over, and blood no longer pumping out of his wound. But then his body jerked, and like Lucas, he began to move, to get up.

"Bruce, let's get out of here." Tobias started backing away, his eyes so wide they might fall out of his head. "Let's leave now!"

Lucas Jonas scanned the people around him. Many of them had stopped fleeing once they had gotten to a safe distance and were now watching. Most were taking pictures or videos, while others texted frantically on their sophisticated cell phones; some even used their cells *as* phones and actually talked to people. Like witnessing a car crash, it was hard to look away. Then Lucas started running toward them, full speed. When the people turned to flee, they didn't get far before slamming into the back

of the rest of the crowd. Lucas grabbed the first person he came to and started attacking him viciously, violently. He was tearing him to pieces.

Tobias backed up until he bumped into the wall of people at his own back. Bruce didn't take long to join him.

"You're right, let's get the hell out of here." The big man shoved his way into the wall of people more forcefully than before. He practically threw one man right off his feet.

Tobias looked back at the carnage one last time and then followed after Bruce. Unfortunately, he wasn't the only one who decided to do this. Several people tried to get in behind Bruce's large frame using him as a human plow. Tobias was jostled around as he tried to keep pace. He reached for Bruce's shirt but fell short, his fingers lightly brushing the cotton fabric. More and more people got between him and his friend. Panic began to rise as Bruce pulled away, getting farther and farther from Tobias.

"Bruce!" He pushed harder but the crowd was too dense. He wasn't as strong as his friend was. "Bruce!" But Bruce had already gotten too far away.

Tobias took deep, steadying breaths. The crowd was flowing out of the park gates. He'd get out by just going with the flow. There was no rush. Just go with the flow.

He got shoved shoulder to shoulder with some punk rocker chick. He glanced over at her and saw that she looked ill. That was another reason to hate crowds, especially ones this big. There was always a bunch of sick people dispersed throughout them, infecting everyone else. And, of course, Tobias would end up right next to one.

After a moment, he took a longer look at the girl. She was really pale, and sweating. Tobias was pretty sweaty himself from the stress, the compressed body heat, and the blazing sun, but this girl was dripping buckets. Her eyes were sunken and she leaned heavily on the people in front of her.

He finally decided to say something. "Hey, are you all right?"

The girl turned her head to face him. "I'm fine," her voice came out weak. If Tobias hadn't been jammed right up next to her, he probably wouldn't have heard her. "Some psycho bit me a few days ago. I guess the hospital didn't disinfect it properly. Those quacks."

She turned her head and tried to cough into her arm. Tobias was glad she turned her head away from him, even if it meant she was coughing on others. And had he heard her say she was bitten?

His mind flashed back to the man who had his throat ripped out. It probably wasn't as bad as it seemed. He did get back up. Same with Lucas. But then, why did he attack someone else? Shock? He must have been in shock and thought he had to defend himself or something. That was probably it. Yeah, that was it.

While Tobias tried to convince himself that nothing was as bad as it seemed, the girl next to him dropped to the ground. Thankfully, the people behind her noticed and managed to stop before they trampled her.

"Hey!" Tobias didn't dare bend down. He wasn't sure he'd be able to stand back up even without the camera on his shoulder. "Hey, come on, you have to get up!"

The people behind the girl nudged her with their feet, trying to coax a response from her. Her body suddenly jerked just like the guard's, and just like Lucas's.

Somehow, Tobias's body still had adrenaline to pour into his system, which it unloaded by the dump truck. His eyes widened again and he struggled desperately to get through the crowd, but he couldn't get anywhere. There was literally a wall of flesh and clothing.

He looked back down over his shoulder and watched as the girl lifted her head. She lashed out and grabbed hold of the nearest leg. Her teeth sank deep into the bare calf. Screams of pain ripped out from the victim while more screams of terror and shock escaped those who witnessed it. One of the loudest was Tobias's own, but he was completely deaf to it all.

Before he knew it, he had grabbed his bag off his back and shoved his camera into it along with a slack from the wires. ~~A brief thought about just dropping it crossed his mind, but because of the wires~~ attaching to the battery system, harnessed around his waist to the camera, he wouldn't be able to unhook himself quickly. He slung the bag over his shoulder once more, its earlier weight now unfamiliar. Tobias then grabbed the shoulders of the nearest person and pulled. The combined weight of his body and his camera nearly crushed the man as he climbed on top of him. He then proceeded to crawl across the heads and shoulders of everyone, not caring about, or even hearing, the cries of protest and pain from those beneath him.

Although he never stopped moving forward over the mass of people, he did take a look around. Behind him, a ring was slowly pushing outward from where the sick girl had fallen. Even farther back, a much larger ring had formed where he had left Lucas. They reminded him of pebbles being dropped in a pond, the ripples all headed outward. It looked like even more people were attacking others, some in the strange biting manner of the first attackers. Others fought with each other as they tried to get away. There were other places in the crowd where these pockets, the ripples, were forming. Screams were now the predominant sound. They were near constant. What had started out as screams of joy was now ending as screams of terror.

Tobias watched as one man dropped beneath the flood of people. He had been pushed over. No one stopped for him as they had for that girl. His head never popped back up. Tobias wasn't the only one crawling across flesh and hair. Several other people had the same idea, responding to the same drive, the need to flee.

The crowd had become bottlenecked at the gates, but many had stopped bothering with them. Several concertgoers were climbing up and over the stone walls to get out. Tobias figured they had the right idea, especially because he was closer to the wall than he was to the gates. Also, with the height he had already gained from his position on top of others, he was halfway up the bricks before he even reached them.

When he finally did reach the wall, he hauled himself up onto its large, flat, stone top. Once balanced up there, he sat for a moment, trying to catch his breath. How much time had passed since Lucas Jonas first noticed the disturbance, anyway? Lucas...

Tobias pulled his camera back out of its bag. He was amazed that there wasn't a single scratch on it. It was also still running, still filming. Tobias hadn't bothered to stop it at any point. He began using it to scan the crowds, trying to find Mr. Jonas or Bruce.

Lucas Jonas was actually easier to find. He was still at the edge of the largest growing space, still tearing into people with his hands and teeth. What made it especially eerie was that he could still hear the attacks coming through the headphones. He quickly unplugged them. The umbrella appeared to be gone. It had been replaced by a gaping hole straight through his torso. It was so absurd, it seemed unreal. Tobias suddenly felt very sick. He leaned over and puked on the sidewalk that ran along the outside of the wall. His revulsion, making him want to turn away, was the only thing that saved the crowd on the other side from his bile.

What was going on? Tobias couldn't understand what was happening. His head spun and he had to grab hold of the wall to keep from falling off. He took several deep breaths, trying to clear his head. Maybe he'd think about things later, when he wasn't sitting on the park wall.

He looked up and finally noticed what was happening outside the park. The flood of people was dispersing in all directions. Several people had gotten to their cars and had tried to drive away, but in their haste, had caused accidents and traffic jams. People ran in all directions, panicked. Police, firefighters, and paramedics were all over the place, trying to help and to create order. So far, they weren't succeeding. Some people even seemed to be looting, as if they were at a riot.

The attacks were happening outside the park as well.

Tobias decided he needed to get out of there, find somewhere safe, maybe get home if he could. Although he didn't know how safe his tiny and empty apartment would be, it seemed like a better option than staying where he was.

He looked around from his high position on the wall and spotted all the media vans, including the van he had come in. Too bad they were parked several blocks away and across the park. Tobias used his camera to see if anyone he knew was there. Several reporters and other cameramen stood on top of the vans, filming the surrounding chaos. Tobias thought he might have recognized one of the cameramen, but it was hard to tell. Cameras had a habit of blocking the faces of those who held them.

As Tobias watched, an arm reached up and grabbed one of the reporters. He was pulled off the wall and Tobias could no longer see him from his vantage point. His imagination did a good enough job to fill in that part, though. The cameramen over there all turned and filmed the reporter being attacked. No one tried to help.

"Hey! Hey, can you help me? Please!"

Tobias lowered his camera and looked around. Down beneath him there was a young girl looking up. She couldn't have been older than sixteen, and her eyes were filled with tears, causing her mascara to run. She was reaching up to him, the tips of her fingers cut up and bleeding. Her hot pink and black painted fingernails were all broken.

"I can't get up on my own!" she cried up at him.

That was when Tobias realized even more people were flooding over the walls. One glance at the gate showed why. An attack had started in the middle of it. Another ripple. Tobias figured the girl's fingers were bloody from trying to climb and falling. Several other people climbed over on either side of him, and more were pushing to get at the wall, knocking the girl repeatedly into it.

Tobias thought of the camera crew and his own earlier, selfish actions. He put his camera back in the bag and lay on the wall, stretching his hand down to the girl.

"This is as far as I can reach. You'll have to do the rest yourself!" Tobias called down to her. If he tried to reach any further, he knew he would be pulled off the wall the moment she took his hand.

The girl began trying to climb again. She got close several times before falling away, her fingertips brushing his.

"Come on!" Tobias did not like the position he was in, but now that he was committed to helping this one girl, he couldn't leave her. "You can make it! Try harder!"

"I *am* trying!" She missed again, but this time when she dropped back, the crowd pushed someone right under her. She used the man's shoulders to boost herself up and finally reach Tobias's hand. He pulled as hard as he could, straining the muscles in his arm, almost over-balancing and tumbling on the other side. It was a good thing he was used to carrying heavy weights.

"Thanks," the girl panted on the wall beside him, "I'm Tammy."

"Tobias. Let's get off this wall before someone pushes us off."

"Good idea." The girl dropped down the other side easily, landing on her feet and avoiding the puddle of puke.

Tobias cradled his camera bag and dropped after her. He wasn't nearly as graceful, but he also managed to miss the puddle. He hit the sidewalk hard and fell to one side, scraping his arm on the cement. It stung, but wasn't a bad injury. Tammy helped him get back up on his feet.

Tobias held Tammy's hand to pull her across the car-choked street. He didn't want to be near the wall and risk someone landing on their heads. Eventually, they stopped in the service doorway of a restaurant to catch a breather from the chaos. They were sheltered there for all the people continuing to move past.

"You by yourself?" Tobias asked Tammy as he poked his head out, looking for street signs.

“I came here with some friends. Ashley, my best friend, her parents won a bunch of tickets from this radio station and offered to take us all. We got separated when everyone started screaming and running. What’s happening?”

“I have absolutely no idea.” Tobias pulled his head back into the doorway trying to visualise a map of the city in his head. He didn’t have a very good sense of direction, though, and only knew his way around his work and apartment, both of which were across the city. “Do you have somewhere to go?”

“Ashley’s mom was supposed to take us home.” Tammy started to fidget with one of the three necklaces she was wearing. Her fingers looked raw.

“Was there a place where you were supposed to meet up if you got separated?”

“Yeah.” Tammy pointed one of those raw fingers back at the park. “By one of the souvenir stands.”

“Well then, that’s out.” Tobias took another quick look up and down the street. “Look, I’m going to get a police officer over here to help you, okay?”

“What? No.” Tammy grabbed Tobias’s arm.

Tobias shook her off. “Look, they’ll be able to help you a lot more than I can.”

“But they’re already dealing with all those people.” With a grip like a bear trap, Tammy grabbed him again.

Tobias was beginning to regret his decision to help her. “I don’t know what to do with you. I’m going to try and head home and I don’t think you should come with me.”

“Just help me get to the subway station,” the young girl pleaded, her eyes welling up with tears. “I don’t know how to get home from there.”

Tobias thought about it. The subway did seem like a good way to get out of here. That was until he thought about being jammed in a car with all the other people fleeing the area. He had had enough shoulder-to-shoulder crowds for one day.

“I’ll get you to a station, but don’t expect me to come with you. I’m walking where I’m going.”

“That’s fine, just help me get there.” Tammy smiled as she shifted her grip from Tobias’s arm to his hand.

Tobias sighed. Perfect. This girl probably always knew how to get what she wanted. “You wouldn’t happen to know where the nearest subway station is, would you?” Due to his fear of crowds, Tobias avoided subways whenever he could.

“Oh, hold on one minute.” With her free hand, Tammy reached into a pocket and pulled out her smart phone. It had a sparkly red cover wrapped around it. “I have a maps app.”

Tobias thought about how many people had told him to get a smart phone, and how he always avoided them, thinking they were a waste of money. He didn’t think he’d need all those fancy apps, just something to send and receive text messages on and make the occasional phone call. Maybe after he got home and had a beer, or ten, he’d look into them.

“Got it.” Tammy held out her phone so Tobias could see the little digitised map on the screen. “The nearest one is on the other side of the park.”

“No good,” Tobias shook his head. “Where’s the next closest on this side of the park?”

“Umm...” Tammy used her thumb to scroll around the map, an expert with the touch screen. “Here. We have to get to those lights over there, and then head about five blocks down.”

“All right, let’s go.” Tobias was about to step back out onto the sidewalk but stopped. “Actually, can you give me my hand back, so I can get out my camera?”

“What do you want your camera for?” The girl held on tighter, suspicious.

“I don’t know,” he said truthfully. “Maybe if I record some stuff and give it to the authorities, it’ll help them figure out what happened here.”

“Oh, okay.” Tammy let go, but watched him carefully.

Tobias hauled his camera out of the bag for what felt like the hundredth time. He thought about putting it on his shoulder, but then decided just to cradle it against his armpit so that it wouldn't block his vision. It was also still recording. He was going to have a lot of footage of the inside of his bag edit out. At least he had the new drive loaded, the one that could record hours and hours of footage. Once the camera was settled in a way that it would record whatever was in front of him, Tammy grabbed his free hand again.

The two of them headed up the street. Tobias let Tammy walk next to the walls and shop fronts, taking the brunt of the passers-by to his shoulder. He worried about his camera being knocked out of his arm, since he was still attached to it. Almost everyone was running in one direction or another, heading to destinations unknown to Tobias. Several people were just standing still, not knowing where to go or what to do. A few even broke down and sat crying in the street. As Tobias watched, a man went running down the centreline of the road. Close on his heels was a woman with blood running all down her front. Her teeth were bared and she kept reaching out, trying to grab the terrified man. They were gone before Tobias could even think about doing something. He just hoped the man wouldn't trip.

When Tobias and Tammy reached the corner, they started heading down a new street. The mayhem continued block by block, but so far, no one paid any attention to them. The crowd thinned out the farther they got from the park, until they finally reached a pocket where they had a considerable amount of space between them and the next group of people.

As they passed in front of an alleyway, a bloodcurdling scream burst out of it. They both turned and found at least five people clawing and biting at what must have been a sixth down on the ground. One of the attackers was the screamer. She stood up and started running at them.

"GO!" Tobias pulled on Tammy's hand, half dragging her, as he started to run. Thankfully, Tammy kept pace, because all five of the attackers ran out of the alley and started chasing after the two of them.

"Drop the camera!" Tammy shouted as she took a quick, panicked look over her shoulder.

"I can't just drop it! It's strapped to my waist!" Tobias cursed the harness that helped hold his gear. "You go!"

"What?" Tammy looked up at Tobias.

"You go ahead! Get to the subway! I'll draw them off!"

"But..."

Tobias let go of Tammy's hand and half shoved her ahead of him. "Just do it before I change my mind!"

After one last look at Tobias, Tammy took off at a speed Tobias couldn't match even without the camera. He headed into the clog of cars hoping his pursuers weren't as agile. It turned out to be a good idea. One nearly had him but she clipped her hip on a bumper and was completely spun around. Too bad, she didn't stay that way, because she quickly resumed the chase. Tobias weaved around the cars, but he knew he couldn't keep it up forever. It was like when he was in high school and played for the school's football team. Only this time, the goal posts were nowhere to be seen, and his camera weighed a lot more than a football. Not to mention that being tackled meant losing his life.

He finally spotted a pizza shop that had its door open. He headed straight for it, listening to his pursuers pounding along behind him. Tobias rounded one last, sharp turn and headed straight into the pizza shop.

The reason the door was open was because the door had been ripped off. Shit, well there went the protection.

He spotted a door in the back and jumped over the counter. Here was the agility he had been missing earlier when hopping off the wall. Apparently, he just needed *even more* adrenaline for it.

His pursuers slammed into the waist-high counter, knocking themselves flat across the top of it. And a normal person would have been badly hurt and winded, but these guys just started crawling across the counter as if nothing had happened.

Tobias ran into the back room and slammed the door shut. Great, this one had no lock. The first thing he spotted was stairs, so he decided to head up. If he had taken more time to look around, he might have spotted an exit door in the back of the kitchen. It was too late now though.

Tobias climbed flight after flight, listening to the sound of the others coming after him. They must be getting tired, right? Tobias was exhausted, so shouldn't they be as well? There were just too many stairs.

Finally, he reached the top of the stairwell and burst out through the door up there. He was in sunlight, up on the roof. Nearby were several wooden beams, and without thinking about what they might be for, Tobias started bracing them against the door. Someone thumped into the other side and started hammering away just as the last board was wedged in place. The wood dug into the gravel rooftop and managed to hold, but it wouldn't last forever.

Tobias ran to the side of the building and looked over the edge. Aw hell, he was at least four stories up. There was no way he could jump that. He looked up the street but couldn't spot Tammy anywhere. He guessed she got away. He hoped she got away. He told himself she *did* get away.

He then looked around the roof but couldn't see anything useful to him. The building was detached from those around it and shorter by several stories.

With a sigh, Tobias sat on the edge of the building and faced the door. The beams wouldn't hold up much longer under the force of the hammering hands. Tobias put his camera up on his shoulder and placed his eye against the viewfinder. He took a deep breath and went into film mode. At least his last shot was going to be a killer. Literally.

The door burst outward, the beams clattering off over the stones. The mini mob took no time to look around and ran straight at their prey. Just as they were about to reach him, though, something ripped Tobias's mind out of film mode. Something had grabbed him around the waist, and somehow that something pulled him over the edge of the building. Out into space.

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## 2: Cillian

Cillian put his booted feet up on the dashboard, a cigarette hanging from his lips unlit.

“If you’re not going to smoke it, why do you have it?” Jim sat to his left in the driver seat, looking out through the windshield.

“I can’t smoke it in the truck, and I’m not going out there unless I absolutely have to.” Cillian settled deeper into his seat and closed his eyes. “I hate babysitting calls.”

“Oh? And you have something better to do at the station?” Jim hit him on the arm. “We’re getting a free concert man, lighten up.”

“So far they’ve only featured bands I don’t like.” After opening his eyes again, he hit Jim back. “They have their own security guards and a bunch of police officers are walking around. There’s no reason for us to be here too.”

“But what if there’s a fire?” A sarcastic grin pulled up the corners of Jim’s mouth. He put on a stupid voice that all the guys used to represent the mayor, “Gotta have them there firemen all ready at the scene just in case. Maybe they should start putting us on street corners, and then we can always provide an immediate response.”

This caused Cillian to break out into laughter, dropping his cigarette. He liked working with Jim. Jim was all right.

The back door creaked open and Doyle climbed in. “Man, it’s hot out there, especially in all that damn gear.”

“No shit, Sherlock, why do you think we’re staying in here?” Cillian sat up straighter and twisted around in his seat. “You get the pop?”

Doyle passed a can of Pepsi up to Cillian.

“Pepsi? I thought I said Coke?”

“Pepsi is all they had.” Doyle handed another can to Jim.

“Lame.” Cillian snapped open the can and took a huge swallow. “Bleh. I don’t know how some people can say they can’t taste the difference.”

“I’m one of those people.” Jim cracked open his own drink.

“Yeah, but we’ve already proven you have no sense of taste. That goes for clothing too,” Cillian grinned at him. A good ribbing was common at their firehouse. They all had something to poke fun at each other about, but lately the guys had toned down on Cillian. You couldn’t poke fun at a guy in a long-term relationship if he was no longer in one.

“You know we’re wearing the same shit right now, don’t you, Knight?” Jim pointed out.

“Uniforms don’t count.” Cillian knocked Jim lightly in the head with a nearby helmet. After a moment’s thought, he put the helmet on his own head and pulled it down over his eyes. It was rather effective at blocking out the sunlight. “Now shut up, I’m thinking of napping.”

The uniform was probably what Cillian wore most often and he had no problem with that. When he was not at work, he just wore whatever was clean. On a day like today, it would probably be just a pair of swim shorts. He personally thought the uniform suited his broad shoulders and chiselled, da Vinci features. When he was in college, a chick who was an art student had told him he was made of squares. He hadn’t a clue what that meant at the time, but over the years, he started to figure it out. Abstract things always took him a little while to figure out. He liked simple.



Cillian Knight was also a guy who liked his job... most of the time. Actually loved his job. It was during slow times like this that he hated it. He loved putting out fires, even the small ones. He loved paramedic calls, whether it was prying someone out of a three car pileup, or assisting someone who had a heart attack. He even loved hanging around the firehouse with the guys, waiting for a call to come in. This, though, was boring. At the firehouse, you knew a call would eventually come in, but here, nothing was likely to happen. All Cillian had to do here was nap.

Of course, he had just taken a big swig of a caffeinated drink, so he wasn't likely to fall asleep any time soon. He continued to take large gulps under his helmet until the can was empty. Maybe he could fall asleep when the inevitable sugar crash hit. He'd first have to ride out the sugar high though.

As Cillian slouched there, futilely trying to block out the sound of the concert, he thought about Jessica and how it had all gone wrong. He and Jessica Clay were supposed to be getting married in about a week. Instead, he was living on Doyle's couch and she was moving to Australia. They were happy up until about a month ago. Jessi was offered a big promotion: personal assistant to the president of the Australian branch of the company she worked for, the Marble Keystone Corporation. Her current job was assistant to an assistant for only a vice president. She had accepted the promotion without even talking to Cillian about it. Cillian didn't want to go to Australia. He loved his life right where they were. One fight led to another, and another, and then to throwing dishes, and finally ended with Cillian being booted out the door with a suitcase of clothes. Jessica was selling the house they shared and taking all her things to Aussie Town. She didn't even tell Cillian the date she was leaving. She might have left already.

Cillian had a lot of time to think about it over the last month, and talk it out with all of his buddies both from the station and not. He figured it was for the best. Better they had their fight and falling out now, rather than after they were married. Or worse, after they had a kid. That was something they did agree on. They both wanted kids. They were going to start trying right after they got married.

He was thirty-six now. He had no idea where he was going to find another girl like Jessica who he could love enough to settle down with. Raise a family with. Hell, he didn't even know if he could find it in him to love again at all. That part still hurt deep down. Jessi was younger than he was by several years so she could easily meet a new guy her age. Cillian was lucky to have had her and he knew it. Maybe he should call her. Maybe he'd reconsider the whole Australia thing. They needed fire fighters in Aussie Town too, right?

Cillian thought about that a lot, and like most times he thought about it, he fell asleep. Maybe that had been one of their deeper problems.

\* \* \*

Cillian Knight's dreams were twisted and strange. Throughout the course of his dreams, music was playing, and try as he might, he couldn't turn it off. Other people tried to help him, but no one could. Even people who were dead. In his dreams, he saw the faces of victims he couldn't save in the past. Everybody at the station admitted to having dreams like that, but this one was different to Cillian. Normally, he'd be frightened, or perhaps upset, but in this dream, he was rather indifferent to the victims. In fact, he found them comforting compared to the shadowy figures in the distance. The music though, it was so irritating! Where was it coming from?

Cillian awoke with a slight start. He thought he heard something hit the back of the truck, but it was probably just the tail end of his dream. He noticed, though, that the music *had* finally stopped. Probably its absence was what woke him.

"Jim?" Cillian propped the helmet up off his eyes and looked to the seat next to him. It was vacant. "Doyle? Guys?"

He sat up and looked around the cab. The other guys were gone. Probably out to get more drinks. Thinking of...

Cillian reached into the foot well to grab the empty can he had dropped when he passed out. His cigarette was down there too, now covered in dirt. He was debating picking it up anyway when heavy knocking hammered on the door next to him and scared the crap out of him. As he jumped from his seat, he swung around to face the door. It was flung open, and a cop started climbing in.

“Hey man!” Cillian crawled across to the driver’s seat, as the police officer wasn’t stopping. He didn’t seem to care whether Cillian was in his way or not.

When the cop got in, he slammed the door closed and locked it. He also reached into the back and locked that door too. There was a look of panic in his eyes as he turned to face Cillian, “Lock the doors on your side!”

“What? Why? What’s going on?” Cillian thought briefly that he might still be dreaming.

“Lock them!” The cop climbed into the back and locked the door behind Cillian.

Cillian locked the driver’s door. “Okay, done! Mind filling me in now, *officer?*” He let the words hang, not sure if he should be applying it to this jumpy guy or not.

The cop looked at the driver’s door, visually checking that Cillian had indeed done as he said. He then sat back in the seat with a sigh. “What do you mean what’s going on? Haven’t you taken a look outside your rig?”

“I was asleep,” Cillian’s brows came together. He turned around and looked out the windshield. Outside it was utter chaos. People were attacking each other and everyone was running everywhere. He once again had the feeling he was asleep, but his nicotine craving proved otherwise.

“What the hell? What happened?” As Cillian watched, a man dug into another’s chest with his teeth.

“I don’t know.” The cop climbed back into the front seat. “We got called in when some guy flipped out and started attacking people. Next thing we knew, lots more people were fighting.”

“Some terrorist group or cult trying to stir up shit?” It was the first thing Cillian thought of.

“Maybe...” The cop took a deep breath.

Cillian sensed he wasn’t telling him something. “What is it?”

“What?” The cop faced him, his blue eyes wide open.

“You saw something, I can tell. What happened?”

The cop looked back out the windshield and then back at Cillian. “You’re not going to believe me.”

“Try me.” Cillian liked to think he was fairly open-minded.

“Well...” The cop took another steadying breath. “There was this security guard, right? He and a bunch of others were trying to subdue this attacker. The guy had already injured several people, even stabbed one with an umbrella. Well, this other officer tased him, but the guy bit into his throat. I mean, he ripped it right out. The officer bled to death right there.”

“Jesus.” Cillian took the helmet off his head and ran a hand through his dark, stubby hair. “You didn’t know him, did you?”

“No, different precinct. That’s not even the worst part.” The cop was starting to look a little green. “Later on, he got back up.”

“Who got back up?”

“The officer.”

“The dead officer?”

“Yeah, the dead officer.”

“Are you sure he was dead?”

“Of course I was sure!” the cop snapped. “You don’t think I’ve seen a dead guy before? I used to work with a cadaver dog. I’ve seen plenty. His blood had totally stopped pumping. He was dead. I was dead but he got up and started attacking more people anyway.”

"I *must* still be asleep." Cillian closed his dark eyes and shook his head. This cop was nuts, right?

"You wish, buddy. Hey, can you drive this thing out of here?"

Cillian looked over at the officer. "One, I'm not leaving without my partners. And two, there is no way I'm trying to drive through that mob of people."

"Dude, look out there. I don't think your partners are going to come back." The cop pointed out through the windshield. It was pretty hectic out there.

"I'm still not going to drive through them. Someone is bound to get run over, and they might start attacking the rig. These things *can* be flipped with enough force, you know. Aren't you supposed to be a cop? Shouldn't you be helping those people?"

"I tried, believe me I did. But I need to get home. I have a little girl I have to get to. If she heard about this, and she will, she'll be so scared." Real concern crossed the cop's features as he slumped into the seat.

Cillian felt for the guy, well, more for his kid, but he still wasn't going to drive into that mob.

"What's your name, by the way? I'm Sam Carter." The cop named Sam held out his hand.

"Cillian Knight." They clasped hands and shook once. Sam's hand was disgustingly sweaty, so Cillian wiped his hand on his shirt, not caring if he offended the officer. Sam didn't seem to notice.

*Slam!*

Both men jumped and turned towards the passenger door where something had just collided with it. Sam moved as far away from it as possible and put his hand on his pistol.

A red hand reached up and smacked on the glass. It left a bloody print. Cillian tried to lean over Sam to see better, but the frightened policeman pushed him back.

"They could be hurt," Cillian justified, trying to push forward again.

"No." Sam continued to hold him back.

A second bloody hand joined the first and they began hammering on the glass window. Thump thump thump-thump thump thump thump thumpthumpthumpthump. Then they disappeared and started pulling on the handle, over and over again, as if the twentieth time it would suddenly be unlocked. The shriek of rage and frustration that followed caused Cillian to reconsider his curiosity and sit back in his seat.

All sound suddenly stopped. The policeman and the fireman sat perfectly still, staring at the door. Neither of them even breathed.

Another shriek pierced the quiet of the rig's cab and a blood-covered boy threw himself into the side window. Both men jumped, Sam nearly landing in Cillian's lap. Everything went silent again. Cillian realized he was near the other window and quickly moved away from it on instinct, pushing reluctant Sam closer to the passenger door. He looked out into the side mirror and saw a girl walking up alongside the truck. She was clearly lost and confused, tears running down her face, ruining her black Gothic makeup. Or making it better, who knew with these kids.

Cillian knew he should warn her about the crazy guy on the other side of the truck, but he couldn't move. He didn't dare open the door or even crack the window. He was having enough trouble remembering to take in oxygen. He watched the girl pass right under him. As she reached the front of the truck, she looked around hesitantly, never noticing Cillian and Sam sitting in it. The girl then began to make her way toward the crowds in the distance. The men watched her progress in silence, hoping she would make it.

The blood-soaked boy thought otherwise.

He ran out after the girl, screaming. She turned around just in time for the boy to land both his feet onto her stomach. She hit the ground hard, her head bouncing once off the dirt and grass. The boy sat on her, clawing and biting at her chest. There was blood, and she screamed, but Cillian still couldn't move to help. The girl's screams reached a high when the boy pulled what looked like her collarbone

right out of her chest with his teeth. He then grabbed it with his hands and stabbed it into the blood hole, silencing her pain.

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He then turned his attention back to the truck.

The boy was now covered in even more blood as he ran back at the fire truck. He jumped onto the wide front bumper and began beating on the windshield with the girl's collarbone. Sam started screaming when the windshield cracked.

"Shoot him!" Cillian was pressing himself into his seat.

"What?" Sam had forgotten about his pistol.

"Shoot the fucker! Self defence!" The crack got bigger.

Sam tried to get out his pistol, but he fumbled with it. When the crack got larger still, he dropped the gun on the floor. Cillian scooped it up. He had talked to enough cops to know how to turn the safety off and did so now. He pointed the gun at the boy and fired.

Part of the windshield smashed out. The bullet passed through the attacker's shoulder, throwing him off balance and off the bumper.

"You got him!" Sam actually cheered.

It was a short-lived moment as the boy reappeared quickly. He jammed the bone into the bullet hole in the windshield and started to pry it bigger.

"Shoot him again!" The cop was clearly torn between keeping his eyes on the boy and turning to climb into the back seat.

Cillian once again pointed the gun and fired. This time he missed.

"Christ!" It seemed Sam finally decided he'd feel better in the back seat and climbed over.

Cillian fired off another shot. He hit the boy again, but this time, it just seemed to pass through his chest as if it was nothing. And the hole in the windshield just got larger with every shot. The boy started to use his hands to try and get in, peeling away the safety glass and causing deep wounds to his fingers.

"Stay the fuck down!" Cillian screamed at him. He put the gun right up against the windshield where the boy's head was and pulled the trigger. Blood and brains splattered out behind him as the boy dropped. His arm got caught in the windshield causing him to hang down the front of the rig like a gruesome hood-ornament, the collarbone still loosely clutched in his hand.

Cillian and Sam sat in silence, waiting for something else to happen. Nothing did.

"Is he dead?" Sam whispered, fearing his voice would set off some terrible reaction.

"I shot him in the head." Cillian didn't bother to whisper and the loudness of his voice shocked him. "I shot him, in the head." Cillian looked at the gun in his hand. He tossed it onto the passenger seat as if it had suddenly become red hot and then absentmindedly wiped his hands on his shirt. It was a tool of death.

"What about the girl?" Sam leaned forward, trying to see out the unbroken half of the windshield.

"She had her collar bone stabbed into her heart," Cillian snapped at him. "I'm pretty fucking sure she's pretty fucking dead."

"I'm not that sure." Sam pointed out the window.

Cillian turned and looked. The girl was trying to get up, her one arm hanging limp and useless. Somehow, she managed to get to her feet and started looking around.

"What the hell?" Cillian leaned forward as if moving slightly closer would dispel the illusion.

"I told you man." Sam leaned back, his voice rising to a higher pitch, "I told you they get back up."

The girl looked at the fire truck. Without warning, she ran at it.

"Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit." Sam disappeared in the back seat, hiding.

The girl jumped up on the bumper and pulled the dead boy out of the broken window with her one arm. The moment he was clear, she started trying to get in through the same hole. Unlike the boy, she

was disturbingly silent, which meant that Cillian could easily hear Sam whimpering in the back.

“Goddamnit!” Cillian got his heavily booted foot up and kicked the girl in the face as she tried to climb in through the windshield. She got knocked off the bumper but recovered quickly and came right back. Cillian scrambled for the gun he so heedlessly tossed away, not remembering why he would have done that. Before he could grab it, the girl was coming in again. He tried to kick her one more, but because of the awkward angle, he missed. The girl grabbed his leg with her good arm and started gnawing on his boot. The heavy material that caused him so much discomfort in the day’s heat now protected him. While she was distracted, Cillian managed to reach the gun.

“I hate this shit! You mother fucker!” The firefighter pointed the gun at the side of the girl’s head. She turned to bite his hand and Cillian shot her full on in the face. There was more blood and brains, only this time they splattered the inside of the vehicle.

Cillian yelled in frustration and kicked the limp body out the window. It collapsed with a thump on top of the other one. Still furious, Cillian sat up and looked in the backseat. Sam was still cowering back there.

“You... are officially... the *worst* cop... I have EVER MET!” Cillian flicked the safety back on and threw the pistol at Sam’s head.

“Are they gone?” Sam whispered as he sat up, cradling the pistol to his chest.

“I don’t know, maybe they’ll decide to get back up and attack again.” Cillian threw his arms up. “Hand me that coat will you?” He reached over the backseat for a firefighter’s jacket.

“This one?” Sam picked it up and handed it to him. “What do you want it for?”

“I need something to wipe away the grey matter and there’s nothing else inside the truck.” He started using the outside of the jacket to clear gore off the steering wheel and the inside of the windshield.

“Grey matter? You mean brains?”

“Of course I mean brains. Calling it grey matter just makes it easier to deal with,” Cillian clenched his teeth. This was not part of his job description. Cops carried guns. Cops were supposed to shoot people if shooting had to be done. Firefighters were only supposed to save people. Cillian was running on autopilot, doing his best not to think about it.

“Here, these should help.” Sam handed some firefighter’s gloves up to Cillian.

Cillian put on the gloves and wiped away the rest of the chunks. “You know, you could also help.” He then started breaking out the rest of the broken windshield on the passenger side.

“Why are you breaking that out?” The cowardly cop shrank back into the seat again.

“Because then I’ll be able to see better when we drive out of here.” When Cillian finished breaking out the glass, he put his jacket down on the bloody driver’s seat, clean side up, and sat on it. He tried to clean the glass in front of him some more, but just ended up smearing the blood around. On partial visibility was achieved.

“I thought you didn’t want to drive through that crowd.” Sam started to climb into the passenger seat again.

Cillian pushed him back, the blood on his gloves leaving a mark on Sam’s chest. “I’m not going through them. You’ll want to stay back there.”

“But they’re between us and all the exits.” Sam put on a seat belt. “Even the vehicle entrance is clogged.”

“We’re not going through an entrance.” As he turned the keys that had been left in the ignition, the truck started up with a rumble. Cillian let out a small sigh of relief that it didn’t have any engine problems.

“Then how are we getting out?”

“Did they tell you much about this park, *Officer* Sam?” Cillian put the rig in drive and slow

pulled out from between the other fire truck and the police cruiser it had been sitting between.

“Not really. Just where the exits were. I was told more about the concert and how security was going to work.”

“Well, we firefighters got a more thorough breakdown in case a fire did break out.” He started carefully turning the fire truck around. He tried very hard not to think about the two people he had shot and was now running over, repeatedly. “You see these big brick walls all the way around?”

“Yes.”

“They’re actually two walls. Two brick walls with a large gap in the middle and a flat stone lay on top to make them appear much thicker than they are. We were told this because if a fire were to break out near them, the air inside could super heat and possibly even cause an explosion. It’s highly unlikely, but still, not a good design.” The fire truck was now completely turned around. Cillian found his helmet and put it on his head.

“And what does that have to do with us?”

“I suggest you duck your head.” He stamped his foot on the accelerator, turning on the sirens and flashers for good measure.

“Wait, you’re not... Oh God, you are.” Sam bent over, placing his head between his knees and his hands on his head. One of them still clutched the pistol.

“Hold on to your ass.” Cillian was speeding the truck right at the wall.

Just before they hit, he ducked down, holding his helmet tightly to his head. The fire truck rammed into the wall, sending bricks in all directions. Many crashed in through the already-broken half of the windshield and several more got in by breaking the rest. The heaviest hit came from the stone slab. It hit into the truck cab’s roof making a big dent and causing the sirens to sound distorted. It scraped along the roof for a moment before sliding off to the side.

Once Cillian thought they were through, he tramped his foot down on the brakes. They didn’t stop in time before ramming into several cars on the street. The crunching squeal of metal on metal drove Cillian back up. They were in the middle of the street, jammed between a couple of cars.

He groaned and pushed the chunks of brick off himself. After putting the rig in park, he partially stood up and looked out through the broken windshield. Cillian looked at the cars around him for a moment and noticed that they were mercifully empty.

“You’re a crazy man,” Sam groaned from the back seat and sat up, rubbing his neck.

“Well we’re out of the park.” Cillian sat back down in the driver’s seat. He put the truck back in drive and started scraping his way through the vehicles. The easiest route was the one they took, up the centre of the road. The big fire engine plowed the cars to either side out of the way. Cillian thought about the guys and how they were going to hate what he had done to the rig.

\* \* \*

“Where are we going?” Sam unbuckled himself and started climbing back up into the front. The constant bouncing off other cars made it a somewhat difficult thing for him to do, but he finally got up there. Before being able to sit, he had to first shove some bricks into the foot well and toss others out through the broken windshield. Once seated properly again, he buckled back up.

“I don’t know,” Cillian finally answered. He was choosing his route randomly based on the space between cars.

“You’re bleeding,” Sam gestured to Cillian’s head.

Cillian took his hands off the wheel for a brief moment to strip off a glove. He touched his bare hand to his forehead while the other resumed steering. It stung a little and his hand came back bloody. It seemed that, despite the helmet, something managed to hit him hard enough to draw blood. “I don’t think it’s bad.”

“Still, we should head to the hospital. Maybe there’ll be someone there who can tell us what we’re

should be doing.”

“That’s right, why haven’t I heard anything over the radio? Try getting someone on it.” Cillian grabbed a handset and passed it to Sam. The moment he looked away from where they were going they slammed into something and came to a dead stop.

“Oh, God,” Sam whined.

Cillian looked out the windshield. There was a huge multi-car pileup in front of the rig. “I’m getting out to look around.”

“Are you shitting me? Out there?”

“You have a gun, remember?” Cillian had to kick his door to get it open. He took off his other glove and jumped out of the truck. Looking around, he saw panicked people running all over the place. Except that not all of them were panicked. Some were running after others with murderous intent in their eyes. Cillian couldn’t see as much as he would have liked, so he climbed up on top of the fire truck.

“Cillian! Where’d you go?” Sam called from the other side of the truck.

“I climbed on top!” Cillian rolled his eyes. He couldn’t believe his luck getting stuck with the complete idiot. At least he had that gun though. They both would have been screwed without it. It didn’t take long for Sam to climb up on top with Cillian. He dragged up two firefighter jackets with him.

“Here, you should put this on.” Sam handed Cillian the jacket he had used to wipe away the gore. He then put on the clean jacket himself.

“One, this jacket is disgusting. And two, it’s like forty degrees out here.” Cillian shook the jacket out over the side of the truck, trying to knock the chunks off it.

“I noticed only the outside was... dirty, and it’s the only other jacket in there. If someone attacked us, they shouldn’t be able to bite through the material.”

So maybe he wasn’t a *complete* idiot. Cillian put the jacket on as he started looking around again.

As far as he could see up the street, cars were stopped and abandoned. Some were even piled on sidewalks as a result of their drivers trying to pass the traffic, only to end up slamming into light posts, garbage cans, mailboxes, and bus shelters. Cillian thought he saw a way around it though. He pulled his helmet off, tossed it over the side of the truck, and looked to the sky for a moment, trying to clear his head. A headache was starting to form, most likely from the bump on his skull, but maybe just from Sam’s constant whining. He also really wanted a cigarette. That’s when he spotted him.

On a four-story building nearby, a man with a camera under one arm was looking frantically up the street. He kept glancing over his shoulder at something. Cillian could probably guess what.

“Sam, follow me.” Cillian made his way across to the back of the rig, having to step carefully around the damage the stone slab had caused.

“What is it?” Sam stumbled a few times but made it over to him. They stood at the base of the fire truck’s turntable ladder.

“See that guy?” Cillian pointed up to the roof while he flipped some switches.

“What about him?” Although Sam shielded his eyes from the sun with a hand, as he looked up, his eyes squinted into narrow slits anyway.

“We’re going to help him. Pay attention.” When Sam looked, Cillian pointed to the levers before him. “This extends the ladder up and down and this one moves it left and right. You have to get me up there.” He got on the ladder and started to make his way to the end of it.

“But...” Sam was nervous as all hell.

“Just do it, Sam!” Cillian snapped. He couldn’t stop thinking about the girl outside the rig, the one he didn’t warn. He didn’t help her. He didn’t help any of them. He *killed* two people. This man, though, he thought he might be able to help him.

The ladder shook and moved in jerks as Sam worked the controls, but Cillian held on tight. He ro up and began moving towards the man on the roof. Cillian didn't bother calling to him, as it look like the guy had given up. That, and climbing the ladder, was exhausting; he needed to save h breath. The man was just sitting on the ledge, doing nothing but filming with this large camera on h shoulder. Cillian wasn't going to give up on him though.

Sam didn't raise the ladder to the height he would have preferred, but it was good enough. H stood very carefully on the end of the ladder as it neared the roof. The stairwell door burst open a Cillian watched as five deranged and bloody people ran a beeline at the man.

Cillian gritted his teeth and silently urged the ladder to move faster. Come on, come on!

At last, he could finally reach the man. Cillian wrapped his arms around his waist and pulled. T man gasped in surprise as he was swung out over the edge.

"Move us away, Sam! Move us now!" Cillian shouted as loud as he could, but it was unnecessary. As soon as Cillian had laid hands on the guy, the ladder began swinging the other way. The motio and Cillian's momentum from pulling the man to him, caused them to topple over. They went ov the edge.

Amazingly, Cillian managed to wrap his legs around some ladder rungs and hook his feet throug them. The man nearly slipped out of his grasp, but Cillian caught onto a strange harness around h waist. The stranger started screaming as his camera fell and hung by its wires. Out of the corner his eye, Cillian saw two of the attackers leap over the edge at them. One came terrifyingly close, b both missed and fell to what Cillian assumed would be their deaths. He couldn't see what the oth three were doing.

"Sir!" Cillian shouted at the man he held. "I need you to calm down and stop squirming!" He w making it difficult to hold on.

The man's terrified face looked up at him and nodded once, his brown hair hanging straigh towards the ground.

*Why was the ladder still swinging?*

Cillian looked down at the control station. Sam was gone and he had left the lever up. Someon probably whoever had scared off Sam, was now slowly climbing up the ladder after them.

"Shit. Sir!"

"Tobias!"

"What?"

"My name is Tobias." The man, Tobias, patted his chest twice then let his arms hang again. H hands and face were going red from the blood collecting in them.

"All right, Tobias, I need you to cut loose your camera." Cillian was trying hard not to think abo whoever was climbing up. Right now his biggest concerns were losing his grip and the ladd swinging completely around into the building again. At least the ladder's current slant meant couldn't hit anything on the other side of the street.

"With what?" Apparently, Tobias had no sharp objects with him.

"I don't know! Just get rid of it!" Cillian tried but he couldn't pull Tobias up at his curre weight. He didn't even know if he could pull him up without the camera's weight, but he had to try.

Tobias first grabbed the strap of a bag he had on and threw it off over his head. The mostly emp duffel bag fluttered as it fell. He then reached down and grabbed all the wires between him and th camera. He started pulling and jerking at them. One by one, they popped out of the sockets in th camera. When the last one went, the heavy thing dropped to earth. Tobias seemed distressed by thi but then immensely relieved. Probably because it wasn't him plummeting.

"Okay, good!" Cillian was getting tired. Even without the camera, Tobias was still pretty heavy "I need you to help me now! You have to try and climb over me, up onto the ladder!"



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