

# The Waiting Game

The surveillance van had been Maya's second home for three weeks now. Through the scope of her rifle, she watched the same window on the third floor of the apartment building across the street. Day after day, the target never appeared. Day after day, she remained perfectly still, a crosshair between two worlds.

Her earpiece crackled. "Status report, Ghost."

"Still waiting," Maya whispered, her breath fogging the lens slightly. "No movement."

She'd been tracking Alex Rivera for months—a former intelligence operative who'd gone rogue with classified information. The agency wanted him eliminated, but Maya had discovered something they didn't know: Alex was her former partner, someone she'd trusted with her life countless times before everything fell apart.

The apartment door opened. Her finger tensed on the trigger.

Alex stepped into view, and their eyes met across the distance. Even through the scope, she could see the resignation in his face. He knew she was there. Had probably known for days.

He raised his hands slowly, not in surrender, but in a gesture she recognized—their old signal for "talk to me."

Maya's radio buzzed again. "Take the shot, Ghost. That's an order."

Her crosshairs centered on Alex's chest. One squeeze and it would all be over. The mission complete, the waiting ended. But Alex wasn't moving. He stood there, vulnerable, trusting her even now.

"I can't leave here without answers," she whispered to herself.

Through her scope, she watched Alex mouth the words: "You don't know the truth."

Her finger trembled on the trigger. The agency had told her Alex betrayed them, sold secrets, caused the deaths of operatives. But standing there, willing to die rather than run, he looked like the man who'd once saved her life in Prague.

"Ghost, take the shot now."

Maya closed her eyes for just a moment. When she opened them, Alex was holding up a flash drive, tapping his chest where she could easily hit him. The choice was hers: trust the agency that had never told her the whole truth, or trust the man she'd once loved.

Time moved like molasses. Every second stretched into eternity. If she moved now, if she pulled the trigger, Alex would die. If she hesitated much longer, the agency would send backup, and they'd both die.

Alex pointed to the fire escape, then to himself, then made a breaking motion with his hands.  
*If you leave me here, I'm already broken.*

Maya shifted her aim slightly to the left and fired.

The window shattered. Alex dove for cover as agents stormed the building. In the chaos, Maya saw him slip down the fire escape with the flash drive still in his hand.

She'd missed on purpose, and now there was no going back.

"Target escaped," she reported flatly into her radio. "I'm compromised. Extraction needed."

But Maya was already packing her rifle, knowing she wouldn't be going back to the agency. She'd made her choice. Sometimes the only way out was to stop being the crosshair and start being the person pulling the trigger on their own life.

As sirens wailed in the distance, Maya slipped out the back of the van and disappeared into the crowd, finally free from the waiting game that had defined her existence.

The hunt was over. The real chase was just beginning.