

CHAPTER 1 - UH OH

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"How much blood did you take from Alex?"

The words were fuzzy and almost incoherent as I came to. Ears ringing so loud and violently that even hearing a life altering phrase was near impossible. The low rumbling of the voice were enough to give me shivers had I been in my right mind. I wasn't though.

My body ached like I had just been hit by a train. When I went to open my eyes, my eyelids wouldn't budge. They may as well have been superglued together they were so dry. I wanted to scream but my lips stuck together, the taste and smell of blood filling my senses and a sharp pain registered on my lower lip. I tried to move my arms and legs but they were bounded together. I had no way of knowing but I had the distinct impression I had been beaten. Badly. A few broken ribs made breathing damn near impossible. I couldn't actually feel it given my hands being bound but there was a pounding and throbbing as if I had blunt trauma to my head. I went to reposition myself ever so slowly but my right knee cried out in agony and I immediately stopped. My body went limp and I just sat there. I needed a few more seconds to examine my situation and to think of a plan. Even if the plan was just to sit there and die, I needed a plan.

"Quite a bit. You know, just in case."

This time the words coming from a smaller, weaker voice of a man. One filled with apprehension and nervousness. I couldn't see the man but I'd imagine if I could he would've winced. As if he were explaining to his father why he was sent to the principals office. Arms up in a defensive position not knowing if a verbal or physical lashing would be next.

"I need him to live." A deep and low and irritated voice growled.

"At least for a few minutes until I find out who gave it to him. Then after I get what I want from him you can do whatever you'd like to him. Dead or Alive."

Now get back to your lab and find out whatever you can. Do not come out until you have found it or I will make her wish you had.”.

“Yes ... Yes sir ... Just ... just please don’t hurt her” mumbled the man, now gasping for air as he spoke. The nervousness stealing the air from his lungs. Sound of shuffling shoes jogging off in the distance filled the silent room and then that of a heavy door closing.

There was a moment of silence and then there was the sound of a dead bolt locking.

More silence.

A literal eternity passed. Ok, probably not literally but at the very least a heartbeat passed. I gathered my courage and opened my eyes not sure what I’d see. After a few moments of struggle more confusion and questions came rushing into my mind.

Initial darkness.

When my eyes were able to focus and when the world stopped spinning I realized I couldn’t see straight ahead. My view was obstructed and I felt claustrophobic. There was light coming from the bottom of my peripheral vision. I looked down and visually confirmed what I had previously felt. My hands were bounded together by rope and what looked like a set of handcuffs.

These were handcuffs unlike any I’d ever seen before. Not that I had seen many if any. I mean, given my current predicament you’d think I’d have been in all kinds of crazy trouble in the past but I assure you it’s been an incredibly long time since I’ve received even a parking ticket. These handcuffs were different. They pulsed a low green radiant light and there was some sort of inscription on them that I couldn’t make out in the dimness of my limited surroundings.

Another half of a moment passed and an on/off switch to my sense of smell came to me. The air was cold, damp, and stale. It smelled. It smelled like blood, rich in iron and ... and like potatoes? The realization that a potato sac was covering my head finally dawned on me.

“A potato sac? Seriously?” I scoffed and thought to myself.

Except the words rang out loudly and my voice tends to carry. Given the deafening silence it was like a sonar ping going out directly from my mouth. It didn’t help there was a faint echo in

the room too. That was meant for internal monologue and as soon as the words escaped my tongue I had wished them to be back, securely in my head. I have a bad habit of speaking out loud and saying things I shouldn't be saying at the most inopportune time. If there were an award for "Most Inopportune Time" I surely would've won it.

I like to talk to myself out loud too. Weird I know but not nearly as weird as the things that have happened in my life the past year. Hell, my entire life. I mean, just look at the situation I'm in. Really weird. More weird than say a dude just randomly talking out loud to himself. Right? I suppose old weird habits die hard.

As if on cue and a few heavy boot steps later the potato sac was ripped off my head and brilliant bright light filled my eyes. I had done some stupid things in my childhood like staring at the sun but this didn't hold a candle to those memories. A part of me wished I was staring at the sun. That brilliant and warm ball of death, destruction and fury in the sky seemed like heaven instead of sitting here bound by my hands and feet in a strange place. I'd gladly trade a million blister inducing sunburns than the taste of blood in my mouth and an aching body being bled out like a pig. The light was indeed bright but probably due to the concussion I have that is amplifying everything making a mountain out of a molehill.

"Shut up!" the man growled again in his low deep menacing voice.

Still struggling to see I only caught a glimpse of the butt end of his pistol as it cracked across my temple. I fell to one side struggling to keep consciousness. My vision even more blurred than just a moment ago and the throbbing in my head pulsating so badly that I had wished the potato sac once again over my head. At least when my head exploded it would be easy cleanup. My mind started to race. I still needed a plan, but it's only so good as the body able to execute it and if I lay limp on the floor no plan would save me now.

My face hit the floor and just a few inches away laid needles, a rubber tourniquet and band aid pieces. Those silly white pieces that get everywhere and stick to everything indicating you've just used a band aid. You know what I'm talking about? They really should rethink how band aids are made.

"Focus Alex, focus!" I thought to myself. The floor was stone and cool to the touch. It was surprisingly refreshing to my cheek as I lay there motionless. I couldn't help but notice the band aid pieces. I got back to a sitting position. "Band aids?" I thought, "My captors are polite. Professional. I can respect that". I looked down and sure enough on my left and right arms were band aids and cotton balls stopping whatever remnants of blood I apparently had left. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle band aids at that. My favorite.

"You sure do know how to treat a man" I said. A sly grin coming across my face. "I typically prefer the fuzzy handcuffs and a beautiful scantily clad woman beating me but given you're my only option I guess I'll just have to use my imagination".

Cold steel of a pistol now pressed firmly against my right temple. I closed my eyes and simply waited for the end. The only plan I had come up with in the past minute was to just die. It was a good solid plan. Simple too. One I could execute just by sitting there. I didn't even have to be a hero. There wouldn't be any pain involved. Nobody else got hurt. A real solid plan I thought to myself. One of the simplest most ingenious plan I'd come up with at least in the past few days, perhaps of my entire life.

I couldn't help but chuckle. An even bigger grin came across my face as if the grinch flowed through me. A smile that kept growing and growing and growing.

"Why are you laughing!?" the man snarled. Clearly raged beyond sanity at this point.

I cleared my throat and in my best John 'Hannibal' Smith voice I could muster and half laughing said "I love it when a plan comes together".

The distinct clicking noise of a pistol hammer being pulled back was made. Only a few more moments before the culmination of my brilliantly devised plan to die would be finalized. All I had to do was keep sitting here and do nothing.

"Please ... Please just shut your mouth Alex" whispered a low exhausted voice to the left of me.

I turned my eyes ever so slightly. There were two more individuals bounded and sitting against the wall only a few feet away from me. A woman in her late twenties and an elderly man in business attire. The man was hunched over with blood dripping

down the side of his head. He was breathing thankfully, but given the amount of blood pooled around him he would surely perish if he wasn't given medical attention soon.

She sat there stewing, perhaps annoyed. All red haired and wide eyed at our captor. Her makeup had ran where tears had left her swollen black and blue eyes. She had been here for a while it would seem. Perhaps a couple of days? There were plates of food and water cups within arms grasp and her legs were not bounded. While she didn't have fuzzy handcuffs hers were standard issued and they were cuffed tightly around her wrists as her hands lay motionless in her lap. The more I looked at her the more I realized it wasn't tears, it was sweat. She'd been holding her own for however long she was here even after the extensive beating she had taken. She was tough and I already liked her.

I didn't know her but I felt like I had seen her somewhere. She was incredibly beautiful. Even with her hair a mess, clothes worn and torn she was beautiful. Was it at the library? Coffee shop? Perhaps I saw her at the dog park? My memory raced but I just couldn't put my finger on where I'd seen her.

"A simple question before you die Alex. Who gave it to you. If you cooperate it will be quick and painless. If you do not, it will be slow and painful as it will be for all of your loved ones. Decide.

Who gave it to you?" the gun wielding man said. This time in a slow cool and calculated voice.

"I dunno man. I dunno what you're talking about. I don't know what any of you have been blabbering on about the past few months. Just get it over with."

The sound was deafening and the pain excruciating as my ear drum ruptured when the man pulled the trigger missing my head and hitting the stone wall behind me. Bits of stone scattered like missiles in all directions and a cloud of dust began to rise. My head ringing, struggling to breathe and blood trickling now from my ear I didn't know how much longer I'd remain conscious.

"WHO GAVE IT TO YOU!" The man screamed. Enraged anger fully consuming him. One more pistol whip to the temple and a boot to my already broken ribs I cried out in pain. Then walking towards

the woman he slapped her open palmed and kicked the man as if checking boxes off his to-do list for the day.

The man groaned and slowly his eyes opened as he looked toward his captor. A flash of hope as washed over me like a cool summertime breeze. He was alive and if I could just figure out how to get out of this mess our first stop would be the hospital. If he could only hold on for just a little longer we'd both find ourselves with full bellies, a warm bed and the helpful hands of doctors and nurses to fix us up.

Just like that it was over. The man in business attire was dead with a bullet between his eyes. The woman and I stared at each other in disbelief. He was dead. Our stare then turned to his murderer but the mystery man showed no compassion or remorse in his eyes. He simply walked towards me, lips snarled, gun drawn and pointed in my direction.

"LAST CHANCE" the man screamed as he walked closer to me. "WHO GAVE IT TO YOU!"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" I screamed, ribs biting into my lungs with every breathe. My head went limp and my chin touched my chest. It was the first death I'd ever witnessed. I exhaled. A long and slow breathe. He was murdered. Not in self defense, not even able to defend himself. I don't know why but this struck a cord with me and I just couldn't wrap my head around what was happening.

I didn't care anymore. Too exhausted to think, in too much pain to comprehend the seriousness that was taking place and too naive to know what the murderer wanted.

A wave of emotion came over me. Sure, I didn't know what he wanted but I did know a lot. Surely I knew a lot right? Of course. I knew that my life had been mundane up until a few months ago. I knew that I had been different but didn't quite understand why. I knew that I'd be alone the rest of my life and finally I knew how to deal with the bad hand I'd been dealt. Not only how to deal with it, but to accept and be happy with it.

I had known a lot of things but in this very moment I knew I was broken.

Defeated.

Done.