

Chapter 10

Ethan ran around a corner, following the trace of jacket that had flown round it seconds before. Just as he had expected, he saw a small dog sitting in front of him, looking up with large eyes.

"I know what you're playing at, Disappearing Man. I know it's you."

Slowly but surely, Ethan raised his pistol hand.

The hair on the back of his neck stood up. He felt someone breathing.

"I wouldn't do that. The poor mutt... hasn't done anything..." whispered a voice, haltering unusually. "Unless there's something... she hasn't told me..."

Petron laughed. Ethan brought his gun to his side. The breathing stopped, and Ethan saw a shadow pass forwards, and Petron was standing directly in front of him. The dog, still staring fixedly at Ethan, with her ears folded back, whimpered as the wheezing man kicked her to the side.

"There's nothing... wrong with defeat, Ethan."

"There's the knowledge that you're still out there."

There was a slight breeze, which only aided in making the silence more awkward.

The sickly looking man coughed. "Ah... There's nothing wrong with... that. I don't... mind being alive." He scratched his ear and leaned slightly to the side. "I've got..." The man breathed in slowly. "A feeling that you dislike the stories... that are told about me."

Ethan stood silently watching his bounty.

He aimed quickly at the sick man, and pulled the trigger a few times. Petron was suddenly not there, but Ethan heard him shuffle around a corner. He lifted his hand to his earpiece, and hit a button.

"Boss? He's disappeared again. Are you sure there aren't any 'abilities' you neglected to mention? ... What do you mean? He just disappeared! I fired a shot, and he wasn't there!... Of course I'm following him! Damnit, just have Aphid or someone meet me here at the old insurance building, by the bridge."

Ethan ran around a corner and saw the man sitting on a bench.

"Wondered... how long it would take... for you to catch up..." The Man got up from the seat and lifted up a stick. Using it to support himself, he hobbled gently towards Ethan. "So exhausted..."

Ethan's gun lifted once more, but it was flung out of his hands, into the water. An old walking stick clattered to the ground beside Ethan.

"What the he-" Ethan was thrown to the ground as Petron flung himself from a nearby wall into him. Slowly, the man shifted his weight and reached over to pick

up his walking stick.

Grabbing the end of it and pulling the other, he revealed it to be a sheathed sword.

"I am tiring... of your... efforts... Ethan..." Petron panted.

Ethan felt the sickly man's chest breathe in and out with difficulty. It seemed that any more of these special tricks would kill him. At least, if it didn't, it would completely wear him out. It was working.

"Yes. You are tiring." Ethan stood up once more, completely ignoring the shining blade, and praying that Petron would not know that he was as scared as if he were under a guillotine. "I bet one more trick would kill you."

"Trick... Yes..." Petron wheezed. It could have been a laugh. "But are... you willing to bet... your life?"

Ethan looked down at the man, holding his sword as though it was all he had. He was shaking considerably and, if it had been any other man, Ethan would have been surprised to see him breathing at all for the condition he was in.

"Yes." Ethan raised his gun again. He felt his mouth move itself into a smile. This was it. He pulled the trigger.

There was a click.

"You're... out of bullets... I see..."

Ethan snarled. Why now? "But you haven't pulled any tricks yet. You must have been pretty sure I'd run out."

"Or... I was... counting."

Ethan felt a hot surge run up through him. He felt angry. He felt as though his eyes were bright red. He wanted to throw the empty gun at the helpless man, but this would be futile. There was nothing more to do, short of using his fists, and he was still unsure about the sick man.

His hand felt his pocket as Petron stood up again and backed away. He still had rounds left. If only he had time to reload.

Oh well, he thought, there's no alternative. His hand reached into his pocket, and quickly brought out a bullet. As he was quickly pushing it in, he saw a movement in front of him. The mysterious man now sat in front of him as a ragged grey wolf. It stared at him for a few seconds, then let out what could have been a cough.

Ethan swore, pulled up the handle on the gun, and randomly spun the barrel on his gun.

The maddened wolf jumped at him. He aimed. He shot. There was an explosion of sound, and the wolf flew backwards, whimpering. It staggered towards the bridge, turned back into a man, and stumbled over the edge, into the river.

There was a deep peace within Ethan. He had won.

He turned around, to see a shadowy figure holding a smoking shotgun. After a moment of realisation, he pulled the unused bullet out of his pistol.

"I met you here, as you said." The Boss used his free hand to pull a smoking cigarette out of his mouth. The smoke mixed with that of the gun.

"Thank you." Ethan smiled. He had never seen the Boss out of his office. "Tell me, Boss. Why didn't you send Aphid? Is she out on a job at the moment?"

"No." The Boss blew out a puff of cigarette smoke. "She's been taken. The men we killed in the apartment under the pretense of being Mr. Moon and Brutus

were autopsied, Ethan.”’

”Don’t tell me.”

”Their identities were mistaken. They were a pair of workers from ‘Uterior Motifs’. Also, Christopher Langley has gone missing.”

Ethan’s head began to hurt.

”I didn’t just come here to help you with the Disappearing Man, Ethan. You have a new mission.”