**Too late**

Too late. The truth of their involvement had dawned on him far too late. Scarlett was there when he finally came to, though. She saw the flash of understanding in his eyes and she knew; he understood his blunder. She decided to drop the charming, happy-go-lucky, dumb blonde façade that she’d used to get to this point. Right now she was going to show him the real Scarlett Reicer.

Then she pulled the trigger. The two bullets left the chamber of her silenced pistol within milliseconds of one another, each perforating his skull and leaving a trail of high velocity blood spatter on the wall behind him.

Life, as the man in front her had just learned, was a game of social manipulation. One played, alternately, between fast thinking chess players and the fools who thought themselves as such. It didn’t take the wisdom of a grand master to understand who was whom in this scenario.

**The Fortunate Son**

I stood underneath the night sky, gazing up at the stars and constellations. Their brilliance was washed out and reduced to mediocrity by the light pollution from the surrounding buildings. Placed at the hotel entrance, I had to strain my eyes to pick out any of the shapes that the stars formed. I still believe that I had let father talk me into coming to tonight’s event. Nor could I believe the 6-inch glass abomination that was lying at my feet.

Under normal circumstances, I would have referred to this celebration as ‘self-gratifying bullshit existing to satisfy the egos of bureaucrats’ but this was not a normal circumstance. First: I fell under The Defence Force now and second: my father was one of those bureaucrats.

This afternoon, as I shaved and polished my shoes, I felt an impending sense of dread that father had seen to it that I would be included on the list of those who would win an award tonight. While I don’t like these kind of events, they are an excellent barometer of one’s career standing. This branch of government was a shady conglomerate of alliances and manipulation - and I know that. However, an endorsement meant that one was well-liked and in good stead for the future.

The thing is, I really couldn’t take the idea of my father just handing me an award and a perfect career with little-to-no effort my part. I wanted to be more than just a fortunate son. I had wanted to be able to put my head down and work hard, not having to worrying about father pulling the strings and, if need be, I wanted to plunge my own hands into the filth in order to get things done. Then if I got an award, I would have earned it – honestly or dishonestly.

The one thing, at that stage of my life, which I wanted more than anything else was to be my own man. So it was difficult for me to attend tonight, knowing my father as well as I did and knowing that the Director of the Cryan Defence Force would almost certainly be meddling in order to help his son.

In total, Scarlett Reicer had expended 8 rounds across her three victims for the evening. She felt no sympathy for the target or his bodyguard but she would have preferred to have left the concierge alive. She hated leaving collateral damage behind but here it was necessary.

The golden rule of her trade was simple: targets – and those who would defend them - were not to be considered human. They were part of the mission that needed to be eliminated and never thought of again. It was a pity, though, that the concierge had chosen that exact moment to come up to the target’s suite. There he would find Scarlett standing over the freshly dead body. She regretted having to fire the 2 bullets that pierced his cranium because, in truth, the man’s only crime was being good at his job.

**Meeting Jacen**

It was neither his looks nor the suit that drew Scarlett’s interest, though both were sufficient to attract her gaze, so much as it was the man himself. He was standing outside the hotel wearing full black tie: a black suit with shawl lapels, an evening waistcoat, a butterfly bowtie, a white pocket square and a red boutonniere. Tailored to within an inch of his life.

What really interested her about him was his body language, and the fact that he was standing alone, his arms folded and his shoulder drooped with a thousand yard stare on his face. As Scarlett approached, she could see a small glass statue placed at his feet. Now she was sure that he was supposed to be at the event she’d passed on her own way out.

She had intended the thing as cover for her exit – to the outside world she would look like just another attendee leaving early.