

*What the hell are we doing here?*

“Cal.”

Marine Captain Callahan “Cal” Rothe frowned and nodded at CWO3 Declan Carter’s low rumble of his name, before glancing up at the black-haired giant of a man. The Marine gunner’s narrowed blue gaze remained trained on the interrogation taking place in the center of the dusty basement of the abandoned tenement, his face set in stone.

Cal’s gaze wandered across the room, skipping over the wooden table secured to the floor, and moving on to the rest of his former Elite Squad in Counterintelligence and Human Intelligence. Their technical surveillance and countermeasures specialist, Second Lieutenant Garrett Wallace, and linguist, Sergeant First Class Solace Davidson, stood casually enough in the opposite darkened corner, but they too were grimly focused on what Cal could only describe as a man losing control.

A slap rang out through the room followed by a stifled cry, jerking Cal’s attention back to the young woman seated at the table under the dim overhead light. Hell, she was more of a kid—eighteen or nineteen at the most—and so slight she couldn’t weigh much more than a hundred pounds. He scowled at the shackles securing her wrists to the table and chains tying her to the chair. What? Did someone honestly believe she could overpower a squad of Marines and escape?

But it wasn’t his call to make.

Behind the interrogator’s back, Solace took a step but stopped when she caught Cal’s eyes and slight shake of his head. She grimaced and arched a blonde brow, her golden-brown eyes flashing her displeasure. She hesitated only a moment before stepping back in place with a stilted nod.

He didn’t like it either, but they’d been ordered to follow Major Roland Celeski’s directives—orders the major had made crystal clear to them.

Cal and his team were to stand aside while Celeski and his men, Lieutenant Morton and Sergeant Woosley, handled the interrogation, regardless of what they witnessed.

He wasn’t one to disobey, but God help him, he was with Solace on this one. Celeski had gone beyond established protocol thirty minutes ago after nearly three hours of unproductive questioning, and things were escalating with the other man’s level of frustration.

“You *will* tell me what I want to know,” Celeski yelled in the woman’s native Turkish tongue while grabbing the hair at the back of her head. He twisted the long dark brown strands in his grip and forced her head up and back, and then pulled her hair tighter and grinned when she winced. The sadistic bastard was enjoying himself. “Now, once more. Where is Sadik? Where is your base of operations?”

Mazhar Sadik.

The rebel leader had been a pain in the ass to several government officials in this small Turkish province for more than a year. Cal couldn’t blame Sadik for inciting citizens within certain districts and municipalities to oust the governor and his cronies. He and his team had witnessed the corruption first hand and knew how Sadik’s people were suffering.

But why had American military forces been brought in?

The US alliance with Turkey was iffy at best, and he doubted the Minister of Interior would appreciate their interference. With the covert nature of the operations, he questioned whether the Turkish leader was even aware of their presence.

In fact, this particular operation had been just one more questionable maneuver in the past seven months since his team had been assigned to Colonel Robert Whitman. And damn if it didn’t make him miss the days under their former commander, Colonel Duncan Sheppard, even more.

It had been more than a year since Colonel Sheppard had retired to be with his terminally ill wife. Since then, the former Elite Squad in CI/HUMINT had been attached to various units requiring interrogation and intelligence gathering throughout the Corps.

It was a damned shame when they *did* get a permanent assignment it was under Whitman, who had immediately deployed them to this *special* unit in Turkey where they took orders from Celeski.

His team hated it.

Not only because they couldn’t stand the entitled little shit. It was the fact they’d been informed their primary directive was to find and bring in the elusive leader of the rebels by any means necessary. But they hadn’t been told what constituted *any means* or who would retain custody afterward.

The whole thing was hinky.

Again, case in point, the handling of this young woman who'd been caught up in a raid at one of the rebel encampments the previous day. She alone had been singled out for questioning and brought to this remote site under cover of darkness.

"You might as well tell me."

Cal narrowed his gaze at Celeski's whispered words against the captive's already bruising cheek, and then he tightened his fists when the other man jerked her chair back onto two legs. The action pulled her arms impossibly taut from the point where her wrists were shackled in one of four sets of cuffs bolted to the tabletop. "You're as good as dead anyhow."

She hardened her features and remained silent—her straining hands closing into white-knuckled fists in the too-tight restraints the only chink in her otherwise stoic facade.

Celeski let the chair back down with a thud before wrenching her head back by her hair again, the cords of her neck standing out in relief, and then bent close to her face. "We can protect you." Celeski licked his lips and ran his gaze over her heaving breasts made more prominent by her arched position. "I might just ensure your safety *personally*."

Declan tensed.

"Easy, brother," Cal said under his breath while the young woman visibly swallowed, her sawing breath loud in the room as blood trickled from her nose and split lip.

Declan huffed while Cal met Solace's narrow-eyed gaze as she stared a hole through him. Beside her, Garrett gripped the butt of his sidearm while his moss-green glance went from Celeski back to Cal with a raised brow.

Cal was going to have to intervene.