



E van's temper flared as he directed the woman to their command center van. Guiding her up the steps and inside, Sergio looked up at him from the computer.

“Get out.”

Sergio cut back and forth between him and the woman, then nodded and high-tailed it out as she paced the narrow space.

Throwing his hat down, he sat in a chair so he wouldn't have to lean his body over in the small vehicle.

His eyes followed her as she paced. “What're you doing?”

“Right now? Trying to keep from passing out.”

The sarcasm in her tone annoyed him, but he saw right through it.

“Sit down before you do.”

“I'm fine.” She glared as she continued her two-step back and forth at the widest part of the vehicle. “I thought you had to talk to someone?”

“He can wait. What's your name?”

“You first.”

Ignoring him, she kept her right hand wrapped around her waist.

“Sit before you pass out. I’m assuming you wouldn’t want me picking you up off the floor.”

She frowned and shook her head.

“My name is Evan Mitchell.” Biting back his pride, he gave her the concession. “I work for the TRT. Tactical Rescue Team.”

“I know what it is.” She rolled her eyes as her pacing ended, and she leaned up against the wall separating the cab from the back.

Sliding slowly down, she grimaced and let out a breath.

“Hey. Hey? Give me your name.” He jumped down to his knees to assess her injuries as her eyes closed and her head leaned back.

“Bex ... Bexley Bowers,” she muttered.

“Okay, Bexley, let me see your side.”

“It’s just bruised.” Her voice sounded hoarse as she shook her head, gripping her shirt and tensing up.

“Your hand then, I’m pretty sure you’ve done something—”

“I’m fine.” Her voice came back strong, her big green eyes looking up into his as she yanked her hand away.

“You sure are stubborn,” he grunted, working hard to keep from yelling as he sat back on his heels. “Look, you need to be checked out. So, either way, you’ll be seen.”

“Fine, I’ll deal with the paramedics. Send ’em in. I know you have somewhere else to be.” The control had come back to her voice as she focused on him, a flash of fire intensified in her bright green eyes.

“You won’t be allowed to leave, just so you know.” He stood and grabbed his hat from the floor, stomping to the entrance before he paused. “And try to keep from hitting anyone else while you’re at it,” he shouted as he made his way down the stairs and slammed the door.

Marching up to his team, he shook his head.

“Have a pleasant conversation?” His teammate Danica Freeman looked up at him with a smirk, fueling his rage even more.

“Drop it.” His glare had her nodding. “What do we have?”

“What about her?” Buck Thompson, his team leader, nodded to the van. “She need help?”

“Yeah, but she’s not letting anyone near her so, just let her sit.”

Jeff held out a hand. “Easy there, tiger, if she needs help—”

“She’ll get it, Jeff.” Evan snapped as the rest of the team stood in silence.

“A word, Evan.” Buck motioned as he was pulled from the group, following his boss and mentor out of earshot from the others. “Okay, I need to know what happened and why you’re so ... angry.”

“Why?” Evan thrust his hand in the van’s direction. “She wouldn’t leave the scene. She moved into gunfire to retrieve one of the attacker’s bodies.” He seethed that no one else seemed to notice how infuriating and bull-headed that woman was being.

“Why do you suppose she would do that?” Buck’s calmness only irritated him more.

“I don’t know, why don’t you go ask her?” He held back a grimace.

Buck only crossed his arms, his wide stance impatient.

Evan released a breath, flexing his hands at his sides. “I guess to get the door closed. The body was blocking it from closing.”

“Anything else?” Buck raised his eyebrow.

“I don’t know. Maybe so we could ID him, if that kind of thing were even going through her head.” He doubted it; she was probably just trying to find a way to close off the room again. “She said she wouldn’t leave me alone to fight.”

“Okay, so she’s got a head on her shoulders.”

His mouth dropped. “What? She put both of us at risk. She’s a danger—”

Buck held his hand up, and Evan clamped his jaw shut. Easing his breathing, he waited. Buck was the most patient and intense man he’d ever met. Buck’s lifetime of field experience and training as a Ranger trumped Evan’s five-year stint as a

SEAL. The man had nerves of steel and was the only reason he had joined this little outfit in the first place.

“Evan, start thinking clearly. She was scared ...”

“Nope, you’re wrong about that one. I’m pretty sure she didn’t have one fear rolling through her the whole time.”

Buck raised his eyebrow. “So, you’re saying she seemed in control?”

Evan nodded.

“From what I’ve gathered, her weapon was what you used to get out?”

“Yeah, her weapon, her distraction. The guy got in a few good hits to her side ...” Evan trailed off, clearing his throat at the last part. Glancing at the van, he rubbed the back of his neck. Between her side and hand, she was probably hurting.

“Now that you’ve thought it over and calmed, let’s get an action plan together.”

“Yes, sir.”

Returning to the group, the other four members stood ready for action.

“Update?” Buck motioned to Jeff for a sitrep.

“From what we’ve been told, a group of twenty insurgents took over the wing of the mall that has the most high-end shops as well as a small bank branch. Their position has allowed them to have a large sum of money within their reach. And now, with hostages, the leader of the group is working to gather an even bigger ransom.

“SWAT arrived and is slowly emptying wings and stores, looking for anyone who needs assistance. Police started negotiations, and the FBI is en route to take over. These guys are trained and ready for action.”

Danica worked the bill of her hat lower over her face. “So, what’s their play? How are they going to get out? This place was locked down fast, and thanks to Evan, they’ve already lost some men.”

Buck nodded. “Danica, you and Sergio get to work and see

what the possibilities are for a safe exit. I was informed Homeland has an interest and is looking into the identities of the deceased from the bookstore.”

Sergio tugged Danica’s arm as they headed for the van, pausing halfway.

“Uh, Evan, you wanna handle this?” She grinned.

“Yeah, give me a sec,” Evan muttered as he pushed past her with a grunt.