

Nine Years Later

“**W**hat do you mean, polished?” Her Yorkshire accent thickened as she glared at the older man behind the desk, the apparent ruler of her world at the moment.

“Don’t take it that way, love. You know I value your abilities, and the fact you’ve learned so much in such a short time proves you’re right where you need to be.”

Olivia Lloyd frowned at her uncle, irritated at his need to put her in her place. Being her boss didn’t entitle him to take over her life.

“If you had stayed, I’m not sure you would be as happy as you are here.”

“I was doing what I loved before you stepped in.”

“You and I both know you wouldn’t have enjoyed where that road would take you.”

She huffed. “You mean you wouldn’t approve of where the road would lead. I’ve already emailed a friend of mine. I can re-enlist as an officer. I’d pass the test and return as a Second

Lieutenant. I believe within a year, I would become Lieutenant.”

“No more working here with me?”

She rolled her eyes. “Working here with you has been good. But the action of military, I ... Can’t you see that’s what I need? This life is stifling, boring. And being in the States is ...” she trailed off, unable to finish that sentence.

“Lonely?”

Cutting a glare at her uncle, she stood.

“Olivia, you do realize telling me all this now is the worst possible timing. Our job here is in jeopardy.”

“Yes, I know it’s bad. But I wasn’t going to let you know afterward. I’ve thought this over, and now that I have confirmation I can re-enlist, I’ll be leaving for the UK next week. I have an appointment next Friday with my former CO. I’m headed back. That’s the bottom line here.” She turned and strode to the door. Gripping the knob, she paused. “I’ve got rounds to make, and then I’ll be headed to lunch.”

Ignoring his stern glare, she left the room before he could offer a rebuttal.

GRIPPING HER KEYS, Olivia scanned the parking garage as she stepped off the elevator. Her heels clicking across the cement echoed, and she paused. Fingering the holster at her side, she reached her car, unlocking the door and sliding inside.

Starting the engine, she scanned the area. Someone was there, watching.

“Must be a lonely voyeur.” She rolled her shoulders and backed out, turning onto the busy street and heading home.

Tapping the wheel, she let out a slow breath. Fighting with her uncle always came with guilt. He had done so much for her

and was basically an adopted father. Although, he did have a habit of sticking his nose where it didn't belong.

But this job was never the plan. Moving to the States and working in the largest city in Texas, of all places, was never on her radar. Offering security detail for a high-tech company wasn't exactly a thrill. She'd been involved in one of the top training programs, the special armed services in Britain, and now she watched monitors and maintained security within the building.

She should've stayed in the military.

The ache of missing Daniel hit again. Another failed plan.

Why did everything go wrong?

Checking her mirrors, she took the exit to the large, lonely estate.

Her uncle had been right. She was lonely. Devastatingly lonely.

The sudden jolt of being hit from behind sent her head into the deployed airbag. Ringing echoed in her ears as spots danced across her unfocused vision.

Metal cracked, and the smell of fumes and gasoline filled the air. The car had stopped, which meant she needed to move. Unbuckling her seatbelt, she reached for the gun mounted next to her right leg.

She shoved it down to chamber a round, and as the heated breeze hit her skin, turned to see a masked man yanking on her arm.

"Let go," she hissed, but the man kept pulling.

Gritting her teeth and ignoring the bitter taste of blood, she wrenched her hand up, firing her weapon and hitting the first man square in the chest.

He fell back, and she flew from the car, searching the area and centering on the large SUV behind her still running.

"Get her!"

Movement to her left made her dive to the right as gunshots

resounded. Peering from over the hood of her car, she returned fire. Someone was set up on the other side of the road, hiding behind a parked car.

Two men slid from the van, one yelling, "Stop shooting! She's no good to us dead!"

She smirked and swung her gun around, narrowly missing a man with an assault rifle. If they wanted her alive, they were going to pay the price. The assailant from across the street hustled toward the SUV.

Yanking open the passenger door, she pulled an extra clip from the glove box and made her way toward the SUV, shooting and pushing them back. They dove behind the SUV as she dropped the empty clip and reloaded smoothly.

But she'd turned her back to her car. A sudden burn and sting made her scream, gun dropping as her world turned black and her body went weightless.