

Luck Dribbles Away

Stunned, I lay blinking up at the ceiling, surprised to find myself apparently laying on my back. This certainly was not where I wanted to be, nor was it where I should have been. A moment later the pain in my chest caught up with me. I'd been shot. More than that, I'd been shot while obfuscating.

That hadn't happened before.

A pretty woman's face suddenly appeared over mine. She had red hair with streaks of orange and yellow running through it. Cocking her head to the side, she gave me a long look before saying, "I guess you didn't know that some of us Toreador are hard to sneak up on. We have a way of seeing things other vampires miss. Sorry about using the scattergun. I prefer my dueling pistol, but we needed you alive. When I noticed you were wearing body armor, I figured even with both barrels you would probably survive the hit, given the range, and the size of the shot I was using. Glad to see I estimated correctly." Chatty little thing. To be honest, until she'd mentioned it, I hadn't realized she was anything other than another Brujah punk. Most of the young Brujah thugs were oblivious to anything that wasn't right in front of their face.

"Oh, what a beautiful pistol!" she breathed, before leaning down out of my immediate sight to pick up my hammer. Almost immediately, I heard the sound of electricity arcing. This was quickly followed by peculiar noises coming from her and then the sound of a body hitting the floor. Nobody used my pistol but me. I took a moment and healed my chest somewhat.

Dammit, but I hurt.

"Okay," Karl informed us. "We've got an address for Jack Kiesel's squeeze."

"Jack talk?" Robert asked, sounding curious.

"Hmm? Oh, no. Traced it from the license plate number you boys brought back. As for Jack, the prince finally got annoyed with him and stuck him in a steel coffin last night. By now, he's probably bricked up inside a wall somewhere."

"Damn," Kegger muttered. "That's harsh."

"Exactly," Karl agreed fiercely. "And I assure you that word of Jack's punishment will get out. People will be a little less enthusiastic about breaking the prince's peace." None of us agreed or disagreed aloud. Personally, I thought it much more likely that word would get out and the enemy would do something worse to the next one of us they caught. With a rather combative frown, the large, dark Brujah continued, "Find the girl and find her fast. Location is on our side but time is against us. The Sabbat woman will most likely guess we're going after her as an information source. Get there before they do. Assuming she hasn't jackrabbited on out of town already."

"Where is she?" Randal asked.

"She's in a town home in Irving," Karl informed us, handing Robert the address and a map.

"Irving? Is she crazy?" I asked. "That's deep in the prince's territory."

Karl shook his head. "I would have said 'yes', but no one picked up on her being there. So until we finally tracked her down, I'd have to say her hiding in plain sight worked."

“What’s the plan?” Kegger asked, looking over the town homes from the back seat.

“I suppose I’ll sneak into her place,” I replied, thinking aloud. “Pick up any weapons she might have laying around. Probably get her cell phone and address book while I’m at it. What was her name again?”

“Gale Carver,” Samuel replied, looking annoyed to be with us on such an unimportant little run.

“Right,” I muttered, remembering the name now that he’d said it.

“What about close-in backup for you?” Randal asked. I had the impression he wanted to be the backup in question. However, I didn’t know him well enough yet and what I did know suggested he wasn’t up to the task.

“Robert’s finally picking up on some of the Obfuscation stuff,” I replied. “He can wait out between buildings,” I finished with a look at Robert. He gave me a ‘why not’ shrug.

“Well, what about the rest of us?” Kegger half asked, half demanded. I was beginning to get the impression he was an action junkie even if he wasn’t a combat junkie. A fleeting question of whether I might be something of both myself crossed my mind only to be immediately ignored for the moment.

“Keep your eyes peeled and wait quietly,” I replied, getting out of the car. “With a little luck, this will be a quick snatch and grab. Karl promised extra money for bringing her in alive.” That did absolutely nothing for any of the vampires in the car. Evidently, all of them had money. I had known Samuel and Robert were loaded. Looked like the other two were as well. Shaking my head, I walked over to the town homes with Robert tailing along behind me. When I stepped around a corner, I began obfuscating.

Looking inside Gale’s town home from across the lawn, I could see a shadow moving occasionally through the draperies. After silently testing the downstairs doors and windows, I quietly climbed up to the balcony on the second floor. Finding the door open, I slipped inside.

This immediately put me in the bedroom. Her cell phone and a nice .45 were both sitting on the night stand so I took them. No address book though. Hardly surprising but still a bit disappointing. A quick search around revealed no other weapons. Rather unBrujahish to be sure. Still obfuscating, I made my way downstairs. I was a bit surprised to find Gale walking around in the buff. Pleased too. She was nicely put together and she’d shaved her nethers except for a little.... Okay, interesting as the view might be, that wasn’t why I was here. Even if she did have very nice, perky tits and a cute ass... amongst other nice attributes. However, there was no way I’d be able to get her from the town home to our vehicle without drawing attention. Not without her clothed.

Sneaking back upstairs, a little looking around turned up a blouse and a pair of jeans. Returning downstairs, I found her sitting in a recliner watching the television. Such good looks were wasted on a Brujah. Dropping my obfuscation, I appeared between her and the tv. She froze.

“If you run,” I began in a quiet, dead voice, “I will shoot you. If you yell, I will shoot you. If you fail to do what I tell you to do, I will shoot you. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Put those on,” I said with a nod to the clothes I’d left next to her chair. She seemed

surprised but did as I commanded quickly. Such a shame to cover up such a beautiful bod. “Now, we are going to walk out of here together. We are going to walk away from the complex and get into a car. There, you will be handcuffed. So long as you give me no trouble, you’ll get there in one piece. Understood?”

“Yes,” she growled, becoming angry now that the surprise was wearing off.

So, we walked outside the apartment. I kept the barrel of the hammer pressed against her back. When we reached the street, I was rather annoyed to discover that our armored SUV wasn’t there, just empty-looking cars. However, a group of six or seven vampires from down the street began walking towards us. Crap. There was an old factory of some sort across the street from the town homes. “Go that way,” I whispered with a nod. She walked that way as calmly as could be.

“Old plan off now? I suppose the new plan is to get me killed along with you?” she asked almost cheerfully. Not bothering to reply, I made sure she continued moving.

The approaching vampires continued walking towards us, neither slowing down nor speeding up. I wondered if the others of my team were still alive. I hadn’t heard gunshots. Seemed likely they were around and about.

Hopefully somewhere close by.

Dammit, why were traps so easy to spot from the inside? The Sabbath had definitely gotten to Gail first. And they’d waited for us to come along to grab the bait. Damn them to hell!

Taking some of my frustrations out by kicking in a door at the smaller end of an old building, we entered what looked like a factory of some sort with the other vampires still in slow pursuit. Why slow pursuit? Because they had friends coming from the other direction was my guess. This strongly suggested that I needed to start improving the odds before matters got completely out of hand. With that in mind I moved us around to a position behind a cement pillar that had a good view of a bank of dirty windows.

Pulling my backup pistol, my old Glock, I turned to Gale. “I’m going to reach around you now,” I told her as I did so. I then pressed the barrel of the Glock gently under her chin. “I think you know what’s going to happen if you so much as twitch?”

I had to strain to hear her ‘yes’.

Seeing movement outside the dirty window, I began firing off three round bursts from the hammer at the vampires who’d been leisurely pursuing us. There was almost no noise. I’d opted for the barrel with the integrated silencer for this mission. Two vampires dropped while the rest scattered. A bullet in the back spun me around and I just barely stopped myself from accidentally popping Gale’s top.

Damn, their friends were already inside.

Dropping the backup piece, I began dragging Gale along as we began sprinting for an open doorway, me firing the hammer like mad all the way. Automatic weapons returned my fire and with a gasp, Gale was torn from my arm a moment before I dove through the doorway. With a roll, I came up and running again. A bad guy appeared across from me and I shot him dead. Almost time to reload. Just as I was about to charge down this new corridor, a pair of grenades came rolling towards me from further down it. One stopped ten feet from the door and the other one rolled almost to the door frame as I skidded to an abrupt halt. Suspecting I was being herded but not having any other options, I charged to the rear. Behind me, the first grenade blew and the other almost instantly followed.

Obfuscating my ass off, I jogged down a corridor I hadn’t noticed in my earlier haste. Up ahead I heard quiet voices. Slowing, I cautiously approached. The voices seemed to be coming

from one side of a cross corridor. Sounded like a man and a woman. It looked like most of the lights weren't working up there.

Still making no sounds, I stepped up to the edge of the new hallway. A Brujah with a Mac-10 stood at the back of the hall. From the shadows to the right, I spotted a glint of metal just a little too late. The shadows disappeared for a moment in the flash produced by both the sawed-off shotgun's barrels firing.

Having healed my chest somewhat, I suddenly remembered that there had been a man with a Mac-10 here along with the chatty, and now unconscious, Toreador woman. Looking around, I found no sign of him. Perhaps he'd gone to get help or to report their success. Suppressing a groan, I sat up. Oh damn it all, that hurt. First things first, I picked up the hammer and popped in a fresh mag. That made me feel better. I also dragged the unconscious Toreador back into the shadows where I took a long drink from her. She tasted good and made me feel even better.

Frisking her with the hand that didn't have my hammer in it, I found a long pistol holster complete with pistol across her back. With a little effort, I unbuckled it and slid it over my shoulder. She made a groaning noise so I slugged her a couple of times in the jaw. That shut her up nicely while simultaneously giving me a warm and fuzzy feeling. Her double barreled shotgun went into the back of my belt. It had been a long time since I'd had one. Might be nice to have one again.

Off in the distance, I heard a shotgun firing followed almost instantly by the sound of an explosion. Seemed likely that was Samuel. And that most likely meant that the others were around and about. Took 'em long enough. Walking back to the hallway, I used some of the Toreador's blood to heal the last of my chest injuries.

Three Brujah, led by the fellow with the Mac-10, were only fifteen feet down the hall from me. I fired off a three-round burst into the first fellow's head. The splash of blood and gore momentarily blinded the second guy so I turned the hammer to the third fellow and shot him in the heart. As he fell backwards, his Uzi stitched a line of holes across the floor and ceiling. Brujah number two turned and ran as fast as his little Brujah legs could carry him. And that was how he died again.

Things were looking up. It was time for me to find Gale and get the hell out of here.

Walking back the way I'd originally come, I found something of a standoff in progress. In the larger area I'd first come in through, I spotted Kegger and Samuel on the other side of the room behind cover. Over to my left, I saw three Brujah and someone else behind cover. It seemed that no one wanted to brave the open space at the moment. Which suggested that various backups were circling around even as I stood there watching. Oh yeah... Gale was crouched down, not too far from me, in between the two groups. Looked like she'd been hit in the leg or legs. I was just about to shoot one of the Brujah, when the other fellow looked up. Not Brujah...Tremere. I could smell the magic in his blood from here. And as he looked me in the eyes, I realized he could see me just like the Toreador woman.

Twice in one night. This couldn't just be coincidence.

He dodged a split second before the bullets could kill him again. The Brujah punk beside him wasn't so lucky as I continued firing. Someone I hadn't been able to see, because of the wall between us, began putting a lot of peepholes through said wall with the help of some sort of

automatic weapon. One of the bullets caught me in the belly. My body armor slowed it down but the bullet stopped somewhere inside me. Ow dammit. I had halfway expected Samuel to shoot the fellow while I had him distracted. Instead, there came a crash and a scream. Despite the danger, I moved to the edge of the wall to see what was happening. Almost immediately, I wished I hadn't.

Robert had finally put in an appearance. It appeared that he'd dropped from the ceiling. And while I'd been hearing for years vampires threatening to tear someone's arms off, the big Nosferatu had literally done just that. Ouch.

"In the name of the Camarilla, stop!" the Tremere man commanded.

What the hell? That bothered me enough that instead of shooting the two remaining Brujah (who were busily aiming at Robert) in the head or heart, I shot them in the legs. There followed a lot of screaming and cursing from the two injured people. They cursed more when I shot the weapons out of their hands and accidentally removed a finger or two along with the weapons.

"Oops," I called showing fangs, "my bad."

"You've taken too long, Sabbat!" the Toreador man growled. "You're deep inside Camarilla territory. Give up now and I'll see to it that you're treated fairly."

"Samuel?" I called without taking my eyes off the fellow.

"I'm on it," he replied.

"Kegger, you still dead?"

"Yep, and pretty much in one piece, too," he happily replied from cover.

Randal came back inside with his sten gun pointed squarely at a Brujah's back while that person marched ahead of him with hands on head. That, I supposed, explained where he'd been.

"Well, that's convenient," I called to Kegger. "Check on Gale. Make sure she's not worm fodder."

"I'm alive," Gale called, sounding angry. "Some dickhead shot my leg though. It hurts like a bitch and I can hardly move."

"I've got it covered," Kegger called. "Got a spare blood pack here." It was nice to see he was good for something, despite my many misgivings to the contrary.

Once all the shooting stopped and most of the screaming had died down, we got the communication lines going. And we found out that Gale had been double-booked. Karl had us going out to bring her in. At the same time, the prince's Scourge, Letty the Wolf, had sent one of her teams out to snag anyone who picked up the Sabbat woman they'd discovered in their midst.

Except it was more complicated than that.

Seemed that the Toreador woman, the Tremere man, and the assorted Brujah (I later learned that one of the dead had been a Gangrel and another a Malkavian), well, the lot of them had made up one of Letty's strike forces. There'd originally been sixteen members of this team. They were now down to five who were mostly intact plus the fellow who'd be regrowing his arms. However, Letty hadn't sent them to watch Gale. But they were certainly all convinced she had.

Gordon Vanderhaus, the prince's right hand man and the Ventrue primogen, ended up finding the root of the problem. Using some arcane Ventrue ability, he played around with the heads of the vampires in question. Samuel looked like he was watching the greatest thing ever,

rather than a spooky and unnatural poking around in people's thoughts. The whole thing was disturbing.

"Rabid," the Gordon growled.

"My lord?" Karl asked as the unpleasant realization visibly washed across his face.

"Rabid tricked them," the prince's man declared firmly. "Turned our prince's forces against one another." Turning to look directly at Karl, he said quietly, "The woman was bait for Rabid's trap. He must have set it up immediately after your team accomplished their latest assignment. This night has been a disaster. You played right into his plan as did Letty and her people. Find Rabid Karl. Deal with him. Now get this Sabbat trash out of my sight and find out what she knows." Karl bowed rather shallowly and quickly before grabbing Gale who limped along with him. With a gesture from our boss, Samuel, Kegger, Robert, Randal, and I followed him on his way out.

Before we left the room, we could clearly hear Gordon tell Letty to rebuild her team and to set them to training harder this time. I couldn't help but grin. We'd handed them their asses and everyone present knew it. My smile faded as we walked outside. That would likely end up bringing more problems with it. We'd killed or captured vampires from most of the major Camarilla bloodlines. I doubted they'd be singing our praises for having done so anytime soon.

And it was official now. We were going to try to track down and deal with the crazy Malkavian known as Rabid. A man who could make you just as crazy as he was. A man whom most of the Sabbat seemed to fear. We'd been accidentally following his trail and seeing the signs of his presence for a while now. The more we saw, the worse it looked. At first appearances, Rabid seemed a bit out of our league. Rather than Letty's people, maybe we should be the ones training harder.

If it weren't for bad luck....