



TWENTY FIVE – THE EXCHANGE

Luke watched closely as the trackers, the size of a grain of rice, were planted into the bag.

“How does it work?” He inquired.

The deputy was happy to explain.

“The trackers are wirelessly connected to our central computer right here. Not only does it tell us where the money goes, but it’s also fitted with a tiny camera that even though isn’t wide ranged, helps us with hints on what the environment where the kidnapers are operating from might look like.”

Luke was awestruck.

“Cool stuff.”

“Thank you. Oh, and Mr. Luke?”

“Yes?”

“Have you perhaps received another video from the kidnapers? We need a drop off location for the money.”

Shit. That was true.

“No. No, I haven’t. Maybe they’ll send one later.”

Luke paced the room nervously and tried to do some homework while they waited for some kind of message



from the kidnapers.

He tortured himself with countless images of Nina probably lying dead and broken somewhere. All that did was shoot up his blood pressure even more.

Seconds ticked into minutes and minutes gradually turned into hours but there was still no word from them.

When it started to get dark, most of the officers had gone home or stepped out for a break. Luke shot to his feet, unable to sit still.

"It's been nearly twenty four hours. What the hell are they waiting for?" He seethed in frustration.


Rashford tried to get him to eat something but he vehemently refused. He was too shaken to eat. Meanwhile, the hackers from headquarters were still trying to track the number but there'd been no luck yet.

Just when the officers were about to completely lose hope, Luke's phone buzzed with an incoming text, snapping him to reality.

He hurriedly got the phone out of his pocket with trembling fingers and scanned through the text.

"Deputy. They've finally sent something." He called.

The deputy left his perch at the window and walked briskly to Luke who handed the phone to him. The message read;



“Drop the money at the back gate of Bridgeville University at exactly one AM tonight. Come with the cops and you might as well kiss your little friend goodbye. Make sure the cash is clean and complete. We do not accept excuses.”

“What do we do?” Luke asked.

“Exactly as the text says. You’ll drop the money at the required location, but my men will be stationed in positions not too far from the gate. Your grandfather has also hired more security guards for your protection and they’re coming as well.

We won’t come all the way with you to avoid being detected. You only have to drop the money there and leave. I hope you understand, Mr. Luke.”

“Of course I do.”

Go time finally arrived and despite all of his grandfather's pleadings to let a clone go in his stead, Luke chose to drop off the money alone.

His heart thumped wildly as he drove deeper and deeper into the night. Despite the knowledge that the police were behind him, his hands fingers still trembled with trepidation.

When his headlights finally illuminated the Bridgeville University’s gate, his pulse was all but ready to explode.

He came to a stop in the exact spot which the kidnappers ordered him to – a small parchment of grass just a few

metres after the gate.

Immediately he alighted from the car, the fine hairs on the back of his neck prickled with tension. That could only mean one thing...he was being watched.

His blood boiled with the realisation that the bastards who kidnapped his friend were hiding in the dark somewhere. As he was directed to do, he moved slowly to the trunk of the car and retrieved the bag.

Luke hefted the heavy bag above his head and stood in the middle of the street as he was ordered to. The only thing that calmed his raging heartbeat was the knowledge that the deputy and his men had followed discreetly behind him in their armoured vehicles.

Just when he thought they were not going to show up, a booming voice sounded from within the shadows;

"Luke Bradford."

He froze, his blood nearly icing over. He heard the sounds of heavy footsteps as it got closer and closer and quickly turned in its direction.

In a split second, the cold barrel of a gun pressed against the back of his neck and he froze. The stupid bastards had snuck up on him.

The footsteps finally came to stop just before him but Luke could not see anything due to the pitch blackness.

"Luke fucking Bradford." The man before him mocked. "The brand new golden boy. How's life in the land of the wealthy treating you?"

Luke took a deep breath, praying his rage would not get the best of him. He will think about how the kidnapper knew about his wealth later.

"I'm here for Nina. Why don't we skip the chit chat and get on with the night's business."

The man laughed. A long laugh which held no trace of humor. He still made use of the voice larynx, making it difficult for Luke to identify him through his voice.

Before Luke could react, the man backhanded him. Pain exploded behind his eyes and he went crashing against the man behind him.

He was pushed back to a standing position and he obeyed without a fight, his ears ringing.

"Let me explain something to you, Luke Bradford. On my turf, I make the rules. I dictate the pace. Don't think you can come into my territory and disrespect me. Am I understood?"

Luke nodded despite the rage simmering in his veins. His foster father had always taught him to choose his battles wisely, which is exactly what he was doing right now.

He was outnumbered and Nina was still within the grasp of

these scoundrels. Starting an outright fight could cause a lot of damage.

"Where's the money?"

Luke tightened his fingers around the bag.

"It's right here. We agreed on a trade. Where's Nina?"

The air thickened with dangerous tension as the man, apparently their leader, stepped forward and got in Luke's face.

"Hand the money over, punk. You don't make the rules here. I do."

The leader grabbed the bag and Luke struggled with him, trying hard not to let go of it. The leader's scent wafted into his nostrils and Luke nearly froze.

That cologne. Was it just his imagination or did the leader of a gang of kidnapers use Men's Rouge. A cologne that cost upwards of seven thousand pounds, and smelled oddly familiar...so oddly familiar.

"How do I know you haven't hurt her or buried her in some shallow grave? I need proof that she's alive and unhurt."

The leader was strong but Luke was stronger. He finally let go of the bag and stepped back.

"You want proof. Okay. Here's proof."

He shoved his phone into Luke's face, momentarily blinding

him with the brightness. It took Luke a few seconds to understand what he was watching and when he did, his heart nearly stopped beating.

The video showed Nina slumped over a chair, completely still. One of the men walked into the room and grabbed her by the hair, lifting her head towards the camera. Her eyes were completely bloodshot. She did not look okay. Not at all.

She looked high...high on very dangerous substances.

Luke did not realise when he snapped.


He let the bag drop to the ground and leaped on the leader in a blur, tightening his fingers over the man's neck with one hand and persistently punching him with the other.

"What have you done to her, you stupid bastard? What did you fucking give her?" He delivered three more punches while the man behind him tried to pry him off the nearly unconscious leader.

But Luke could not be controlled. His rage was blinding... venomous.

"What on earth did you give her? She's too fragile for all of that shit. What did you do?!"

When it was apparent that Luke could not be stopped, the second kidnapper whistled twice. Luke didn't pay him any attention until more of the gang members began appearing from the shadows.



Within minutes, Luke was grabbed and wrenched off the struggling leader. He bucked and fought and kicked, but he was held down by three men and about a dozen guns were pointed in his face.

Meanwhile, the police officers were silently watching the entire debacle, hungry to interfere but limited by orders from Luke's Grandfather that there should not be interference of any sort until Nina was recovered from the kidnapper's den.

Luke was pulled up and held upright by the men while their gang leader struggled to get up.

"Get to your feet and fight me like a man, you bastard!" Luke growled fearlessly. "Stop hiding behind your men like a pussy. Let's fight it out right here, right now..."

Luke barely completed his sentence when he received a resounding blow to the chin, a blow that left him completely disoriented. He barely recovered when more blows started coming in from all angles.

He was hit everywhere; his head, chin, stomach, back...

When it was obvious that he was completely tamped out, they threw him to the floor and left him there, spitting blood and writhing in pain.

He heard the sounds of footsteps once more as they came to a stop before him.

"Did you honestly think that you could come into my turf, lay

your filthy, worthless hands on me and go scotfree?" The leader bent on his haunches and pressed two fingers into the bleeding wound on Luke's shoulder, causing him to groan in pain.

"Get the bag and scan it for bugs." He ordered.

Luke went completely still as the bag was retrieved and the men proceeded to use some device to scan every nook and cranny of the bag's surface.

He shut his eyes and prayed fervently that the trackers should not be discovered. If those trackers were found, they were toast.

"All clear, sir."

What?

"Good." The leader confirmed and relief flowed like a stream through Luke's blood.

"Nina would've been delivered to you this night, but because of your high handedness and stupidity, she will be spending two more days with us."

"What? That was not the deal." Luke protested.

"The deal wasn't for you to nearly choke me to death either." The leader sneered.

He got to his feet and walked back towards the shadows, saying over his shoulder.



"I'll send you her location within twenty four hours.
Remember that you are solely responsible for whatever
state you find her.

I was ready for a quiet, peaceful trade but you decided to
mess things up.

Will she be dead or alive? Guess you'll find out in forty eight
hours."



SURPRISE GIFT: 50 BONUS FREE FOR YOU

GET IT