

### The Waiting Game

Alexandra walked, oblivious to her surroundings, not realizing that I was watching. I had been observing her for the past month, following her to different locations which included numerous states, even different countries. She had recently traveled to the Mediterranean, in Greece and Italy, where I had followed her every day and recorded her every encounter and action unnoticed.

Her affiliations are what caused her to become a rich, young woman who received many opportunities related to her profession. She lived comfortably in various apartments ranging from the Upper East Side of New York to a luxury condo in Los Angeles. She was an old sport to the game. She had mastered every intricacy of it, her manipulation techniques allowing her to excel over her competitors.

I followed her to the supermarket where she had purchased groceries for the upcoming weekend in Los Angeles. Parking on the opposite side, I watched her depart from her black Ford Taurus and meander into the supermarket. Sitting in my matte black BMW with my air conditioning circulating throughout, making the leather seats cool to the touch, I flipped up the smooth silver metal top of my Mac and documented her car. Her vehicle was different this week; I had not seen this one before. Alexandra often drove a silver SUV but differentiated her vehicle preference about every sixteen days.

Alexandra lived an exclusive lifestyle and only could be contacted through her assistant, an elite banking tycoon who helped her manage all of her illegal investments. Her clients were naïve individuals. Her persuasive abilities allowed her to make investors believe that their assets would increase with her. She had managed to illegally earn \$2.78 billion as of last week. It was time to end her scheme before it became a Bernard Madoff situation. I recently eavesdropped on one of her conversations with a newlywed couple searching for reliable sources to invest with. "Investing with large banks increases the risk of damage with your large quantity investments," Alexis explained to the captivated couple. "If you invest with me, you can profit by more than twenty percent over a secure banking investment." The couple attempted to comprehend the situation, but her convincing calm tone inevitably persuaded them to invest with her.

\*\*\*

I had researched the area and made observations during the previous weeks to become familiar with the surroundings. The small town had exactly nineteen brick buildings and thirty-one houses in the area of eight square miles. Twelve of the nineteen buildings had been abandoned and most of the homes were run down. The population of the small town was three hundred and fifty-two and most of them were residents in a little neighborhood surrounding a grocery store and restaurant with a half lit neon sign that buzzed when someone strolled by. The vacant homes on the street were filled with vegetation and resembled a ghost town. The streets were rarely occupied. Occasionally, observers could hear a bus's air brakes sound and come to a halt at the single wooden bench tattered with age for exactly ten minutes, and no

more than three people boarded it. Across from the bench, an alley with walls three stories high was created by two tall worn down brick buildings parallel to each other. The discoloration of the red bricks transformed them into a dull brown and green. When the sun sets, the existing light doesn't reach the alley and it becomes a strip of complete darkness created by shadows of the building, an impeccable place for an illegal prearrangement.

\*\*\*

I patiently waited and traveled to the destination where the drop off would be made. Parking at the west entrance of the building, hidden from the alley, I heard the subtle click of my headlights as I quietly turned them off. Noticing the sudden transition of LED lights to total darkness, I sat in my black car that faded into the blackness of the lonely street. Focused and precisely, I ran a mental check and confirmed that all my equipment was accounted for. I had always kept a well-organized workspace and made sure that my equipment was top notch for the game. After quickly moving up in the FBI agency exploring important cases and becoming a proficient analyst, I had decided to pursue this specialty in my ninth year with the Bureau.

Looking into the darkness searching for any suspicions, I exited the car slowly. Quietly, I headed up to the building unseen and unheard and waited for the game to begin.

I gracefully sneaked up the faded cream wooden painted stairs and tiptoed up every step, making only subtle creaking noises that only anyone in the shallow vicinity could hear. The ambience of the building was somber and desolate. The cracked walls and ceilings illustrated that no one had occupied this particular building in ages. Gripping the handle of my black textured coated carrier case, I felt the smooth indents in the handle on my leather-gloved fingers. As I approached a room that reeked of dilapidation and abandonment, I heard the soft creak of the stairwell as it groaned underneath my feet.

Reaching the top of the stairs, the only noise that was audible now was the quiet buzzing of the flickering street light across the shadowed street through the open window. I carefully crossed the cracked tile floor and glanced up at the punctured drywall ceiling. The yellowed walls that surrounded me encased rotting window panes that contained smudged broken glass jutting from the frame. This sight and location was all too familiar for me. Deserted and run-down buildings were the perfect spots for a night game.

Peering out the window, I checked my watch and it read midnight exactly. I had been informed that the financial exchange would occur at zero dark thirty. Out the window, the street was barren and dark. The sidewalks glistened underneath the street light due to the downpour this afternoon. The only light was provided by the flickering street light overhanging a wooden bench as I prepared for the setup. Kneeling down to the floor, I set my black carbon fiber carrier case down as I unfastened the padlocked latches and gently lifted the cover, quietly placing it on the linoleum floor. I pulled out my tripod, steadied it behind the shattered window and I reached into the case, and felt the cold black steel. Taking out my most important equipment piece which allowed me to complete my missions so successfully, I screwed the silencer onto the smooth barrel of my rifle. Only a subtle grinding of metal was audible. Next

month will mark my thirteenth year in the game. This had been my most interesting profession. My reason to transfer jobs wasn't for the pay that this specific job offered, but rather the excitement and satisfaction of the game.

After I had successfully set up the tripod and adjusted the scope's focus, the rangefinder read one hundred sixteen yards. Shots like these were a walk in the park. The dark ambiance of the unoccupied building set the mood for a perfect assassination. The dim green glow of the night vision scope patiently waited for its victim. The cold steel made my nerves tingle and a wave of calm filled my mind and body. This feeling was the reason I loved the game.

I heard a distant noise of a car approaching as it drove over the wet pavement. Wrapping my hand around the black steel, my rested finger slid over the trigger. I felt its smooth curve as I waited for the woman to appear from the car. The crosshairs were focused on the woman exiting the car heading toward the black van as I peered through the scope. Steadily gripping the trigger harder, I applied subtle pressure and heard footsteps approaching up the stairs. Knowing that one more ounce of force applied from my finger would have engaged the silent explosion of my rifle, exposing my position, I slowly craned my neck around to identify the noise.

In the doorway stood Alexandra; her cunning appearance mesmerized me as I froze in bewilderment. Never would I have thought, in my years of participating in the game, that I would experience the impossible. I was the best of the best and made no mistakes or false judgments over my career in completing a new mission. The game had rewarded me well for all the waiting. Over the years, I had accumulated the ability to override what my brain commands my body to feel and I am able to calm my emotions when something traumatic or spontaneous occurs. A wave of humor washed over me and I smiled.

Our encounter consisted of us both grinning and looking each other in the eye across the room. The green glow of her eyes glimmered in the darkness and pierced through me. Our two games met face to face with a gun in each hand. Her leather-covered fingers, like mine were wrapped around the trigger and I heard her calm soothing voice mutter, "It's a wonderful night to play games."

I wondered how she knew about my location. Hired by an investor who was hers, I had performed a background check on him and followed him around tracking him to see if there was any affiliation, communication opportunities or a relationship with her other than investing, and there was not one. So, how could this happen? My answer would be there is a curveball thrown once in awhile during the game that determines the victor.

Now, the execution room had become completely dark and I could not see the flickering street light hovering over the wooden bench out the window anymore.