

Chuck

March 1977, New Orleans, Royal Hotel, same day.

Chuck crawled back to check on Laura and Larry. “Hey, everything’s gonna be fine. We’re gonna get you two safely out of here and into protective custody. If someone wants to kill you this badly, you must either be very guilty or very innocent!”

“Innocent! Like I’ve been telling y’all!” Laura blurted in a panic, her voice cracking. Her face was pale and splotchy from shock and crying hysterically. She clutched her belly with shaking hands.

More gun shots swooshed through the air, making popping thuds wherever they hit. Larry shuffled closer, to sit half in front of Laura. He nodded grimly at Chuck, appearing quite calm under the circumstances.

Chuck slithered on the floor alongside the large desk, then made his way to the front entrance. The front doors of the hotel were all made of glass, which gave Vlad and his men great advantage as they could see everyone inside.

Chuck remembered that they all put on bulletproof vests under their plain clothes before heading out on this mission. He touched his chest to reassure himself that he was wearing it, then peeked outside. He saw Roy laying on the ground near the car with a bolt in his chest. Chuck sweated profusely and he pressed his lips into a line as he murmured, "A bolt? That's definitely the Impaler!"

He looked at the tall buildings around, hoping to spot where the bullets and bolts were coming from. No shots had been fired back because they didn't know where to shoot.

They waited tensely ...

Backup arrived in the form of the SWAT team and a helicopter to give the cops eyes in the sky. Chuck listened to his walkie talkie. The pilot reported, "Suspect is not in sight. That's a negative. Got some empty gun stands. No perps in sight."

The SWAT team swept the area and reported that there were at least two shooters, no confirmed sightings either.

Meanwhile some of the cops rushed into the lobby, guns drawn, speaking to the staff who were coming out of various hiding

places. Everyone heard the screeches of tires pulling up and the *wee-ow, wee-ow* sound of the ambulances that blocked the entrances. A flood of emergency workers arrived on the scene to attend to the wounded and the traumatized.

Laura and Larry were finally cleared to leave their hiding spots. Chuck made eye contact with Laura. He tried to give her a reassuring nod, but he couldn't tell if she accepted it or not. *She's in shock. Leave her be*, he thought.

"A crossbow," Jim said. "Who the fuck does this guy think he is? Dracula? Jesus Christ."

"Yep, a crossbow. Whoever clocked Roy must have hit him from a moving vehicle as it crossed paths with the scene of the crime," Chuck sighed. "I'm really ashamed to say I don't know if this clown was lying in wait for him or what. Everything just happened so fast."

Jim nodded, folding his arms. "Anything else you can tell me?"

"Yeah, as a matter of fact, there is," Chuck said. "The gun stands were military grade, nothing that a civilian would have. But

this... *this* had to have been full on Mafia. And that crossbow? Signature move of Vlad the Impaler. So yeah, chances are, he knows by now that you've found his stash of ID's and stuff, and he's making good on his threats.