

Little Church Scene From a Trouble Lurks Draft

Sure enough, the team is scoring the cemetery; having no idea what to do, I watch them. They take it on like a challenge, splitting up and reading every headstone, searching, I know, for a certain symbol: a dove.

I want to help them look, but I can't exactly let them see me. *Genius, what did you get us into?* I wonder, shaking my head. The twins are out of sight—I don't know where they went, but at least no one's noticed them.

Someone—Exploding Cherry—raises an arm into the air, and the rest of the agents swarm to her side.

It's all I can do not to jump up and run over. Did she find it?

Grizzled Fox and False Phantom pull out collapsible shovels from their packs and start digging at the base of the grave stone—the one on the opposite side as the body would be. *Why here, Dad? Really!*

But I suppose it makes sense, in the this-makes-absolutely-no-sense kind of way. After all, who would bury top-secret information in a *graveyard*?

I squint; the hole is getting larger. I wish I'd brought binoculars. Then Grizzled Fox is pulling out what looks like a metal box of some sort up from the ground and brushing the dirt off of it.

The sound of tires squealing on asphalt jerks my attention away from the scene. I turn to see a dark armored van speeding into the rural church's parking lot. I press myself into the SUV as it screeches to a stop and men in creepy-looking tactical suits leap out of the back, carrying guns.

My heart almost stops as a sickening wave of Deja Vu sweeps over me. Then my head clears, and I'm set into motion, running towards Grizzled Fox with all my might. "Watch out!" I yell. "It's the Suns of Liberty!"

"*Tirana?*" I hear Grizzled Fox say in a shocked voice as I reach them. "*What—!*"

"They're *here!*" I gasp out, gesturing wildly behind me.

But I'm too late.

Total chaos and havoc breaks out as yells and gunshots fill the air.

“Tirana! Behind the church! *Now!*” Grizzled Fox orders before jumping into the fray.

I run for the building at a dead sprint, crouching low to the ground, like a soldier dodging flying projectiles.

Then—safe! I crash to the ground behind the relative safety of the church, panting for breath, my heart pounding so hard my chest hurts. It’s a nightmare come to life. I squeeze my eyes shut for a second, trying to regain control of my breathing even as fear and panic rushes through me.

“What’s going on?” Aurora’s frightened voice makes me jump at least four inches.

“You! You’re here! Where’s Genius?”

“I... I don’t know!”

“It’s the Suns of Liberty,” I inform her, still panting for breath.

“And he’s going to have to play hero.” Aurora lifts anguished and terrified eyes to meet mine.

“Let’s go inside,” I reply helplessly, gesturing to the back door of the church.

“Maybe he’s there.”

It’s a long shot, and we both know, but it seems safer than out here, in the open. She nods and creeps towards the door. It’s unlocked and opens easily.

We exchange glances and step into the shadows of the church. I scan around, expecting more Suns of Liberty guys to ambush us, but everything is calm and serene—even as the yells and gunshots still provide an equally exciting background.

It reminds me, of all things, of the battle of Shiloh in the Civil War. A huge fight surrounding the little church—a picture of irony. But the fate of the church wasn’t the best, I recall—something about it getting shelled and canoned.

Not the most comforting mental image.

I bite my lip and look around. Dust slowly floats in the colored light streaming in through the tall stained glass window above the pulpit.

Two rows of dented wooden pews face the pulpit, enough seating for no more than twenty people.

I step forward cautiously, taking the lead. Behind the pulpit is a white, stone baptismal.

I nod my head towards it. “Hide in there?” Even my low whisper echoes in the dusty air of the church.

“I think I saw an office,” Aurora whispers back. “This way.”

I follow her to the back of the tiny church, where she points to a closed door with a dusty plaque reading “Pastor Office.”

I hold my breath as she closes her hand around the doorknob and slowly turns it, pushing the door open. With a quick peek inside, she slips in, me a second behind. It’s a dim room; the only light comes through a small, dirty window.

Aurora ducks behind the large oak desk, hunkering down out of sight of the door but I cross silently to the window and squint out past the haze of dirt. It looks out at the parking lot; at the SUV and the armored van.

Both are still there. I’m not sure if that’s good or bad. *Maybe I can tamper with their van. Mess up the brakes or the engine or something.* But I don’t know enough about the inner workings of vehicles.

Why, oh why, did we come?

And then I notice the silence. No more gunshots. No... *nothing*.

The lack of noise is overpowering.

I glance at Aurora; she’s still cowering behind the desk. I turn back to the window, alert for any movements.

There! A man—Suns of Liberty agent—is running towards the armed van. He throws open the back and climbs in, three more men right behind him.

The door slams closed and the van speeds away, much in the fashion as it appeared.

“They’re gone,” I hiss, but I don’t move.

After a minute, Aurora joins me at my post. “Is it... safe?”

“No clue.”

And no sign of Genius. I know Aurora is getting more worried by the second, and to be honest, I am, too.

“Let’s go,” Aurora whispers after a few long minutes. I nod and follow her, every sense on high alert, out of the office, through the sanctuary, and out the back door.

I blink in the sudden daylight, black spotting my vision as my eyes adjust, and then I see Grizzled Fox approaching.

Aurora shrinks back, ducking behind me as if she can hide there. I'd almost laugh if not for the expression on Grizzled Fox's face. *Ut oh... now we're going to get it.*

I can tell when he spots Aurora: his eyes widen for a second before his face sets into a hard scowl.

"What. Are. You. Two. *Doing*. Here?" he grinds out through gritted teeth.

I gulp and look down.

"We... uh..." Aurora trails off. "I'm sorry," she says in a tiny voice.

"You'd *better* be," Grizzled Fox says, his voice hard. "Where is Thomas?"

It takes me a moment to figure out he's referring to Genius. I might've felt triumphant, now that I know his real name, but all I feel is fear and anxiety.

"I don't know." Aurora's voice breaks. "He was with me, but then he wasn't."

I hadn't thought it was possible for Grizzled Fox to become more angry, but when I sneak a glance at his face, my stomach sinks further. He turns away from us and speaks into his walky-talk. "Agents, all hands on deck to find Thomas Harris. Now!"

Then he turns back to us, his eyes shooting dangers. "You two, go to the van. Now. And *stay* there."

Aurora nods mutely and all but scampers away, but I hesitate a second.

Grizzled Fox's icy eyes glare at me expectedly, and I shake my head and turn to follow Aurora.

"I expected better from you."

I turn back at the low voice and eye Grizzled Fox questionally. He just shakes his head and starts away, but not before I see the wariness on his face.

I trudge to the SUV and slide in next to Aurora, my mind spinning. Neither of us say a word.

I feel like a kid caught with my hand deep in the cookie jar... only a million times worse.

The time creeps by, as slow as frozen molasses.

Five minutes... ten minutes... fifteen minutes...

Where is Genius?