

Almost

by Tiena Prater

The bright stream of light lit up a small section on the wall as it searched the long hallway, one section at a time. The light moved slow. The moon's glow came in through the nearby windows and gave light to the polished marble floors. Julian and Adam held their backs against the wall, out of sight, as if their lives depended on it. The ray of white light waved back and forth once again as it wandered the hall, slow and steady. They followed the light with their eyes, palms starting to sweat as the time passed. They didn't make a sound and they didn't move. They followed the light as if they were the prey, careful not to make any careless movements. Their foreheads were now damp.

Julian quickly looked over at Adam, causing Adam to hold up his hand and shake his head. A few more moments passed as the light headed down from the wall to the floor and then vanishing soon afterwards.

Adam waited a few more moments before he let out a breath. "We need to move faster," he said.

"We almost got caught!"

"We *will* get caught if you don't keep your voice down. So there are a few security guards. How is that any different than the others?"

"The *others* didn't shine a flashlight on me!"

"If there was a flashlight shone on you, then you wouldn't be standing here debating with me," said Adam. He leaned off the wall, peeked around the corner and headed the opposite direction of the security guards and away from Julian. "If he wants to get caught, he can do it by his damn self."

Adam headed to the very back of the museum, moving fast. Upon entering the room that the painting was housed in, he sent a picture of the painting to the buyer via text. He looked around for a place to set the phone down and decided to sit it in the middle of the exit to the current room.

Adam was joined by a now quiet, Julian, who had his target in hand. Adam watched as the painting started to slip out of his grip. He reached out his arms as fast as he could to save the painting from colliding with the ground, which would definitely result in two fatal mistakes. The destruction of the painting and their inevitable capture.

Adam let out yet another breath, successful in stopping the demise of a beautiful masterpiece.

“Two mistakes. That’s two more than last time. You’re getting sloppy. Don’t do it again,” said Adam.

“My bad!” said Julian.

Adam shoved the painting back up into his hands and stared him right in his eyes. As if understanding his intent immediately, Julian reclaimed his grip on his target.

Adam proceeded to the wall behind him and started to detach his target from its home on the wall, careful not to damage the painting in any way. He worked as his wrist started to vibrate. “She’s here,” he said as he made his way to the exit, checking for guards on the way.

Julian was the first out the door and Adam was following close behind. Julian sat the painting on the ground and opened the back doors to the unmarked van. They both loaded the targets into the van, careful not to decrease their profits.

“Good work boys,” Ella said from the driver’s side.

“Thieves!” said a voice from above.

Then there was muffled chattering on a two-way radio, nearby. A security guard forced himself out the door and stumbled to catch his balance. The door smashed into the wall behind it. The guard took a few moments to catch his breath. “South exit,”

Adam jumped in the passenger's side and shut the door.

Ella pressed on the gas and headed down the alleyway, looking in her rear-view mirror as she heard a squeal. "Is that Juls?" she asked.

"Hey!" said Julian, just as he was coming up from his crouching position on the ground.

Adam looked down and towards the rear-view mirror to see Julian running after the van. The owner of the squealing voice. "Let the idiot run," he said as he rolled his window up.

Ella laughed. "I thought I saw him get in! Was it *that* bad?" she asked.

"Three strikes and you're out. Maybe he won't be such a pain in my *ass* next time."

"He did a good job last time! Pops would be proud," she said.

"This *isn't* last time. Besides, I doubt they can catch him. No one has ever caught him. Keep driving."

"True... I mean he is resourceful. But Adam, you're mean," she said as she glanced over at him then directed her eyes back towards the road.

"Exactly. The better at it he gets, the better off we are. So, you both will get over it," Adam said as he looked at his wrist after another vibration from his watch. "Paid."