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THOU SHALT NOT KILL.

Paul Rogan didn't consider himself a religious man, but that commandment played over and over in his head as he stepped into the lobby. As his wing tips clicked on the polished marble floor, those four words beat inside him.

As he'd done every weekday morning for eleven years—minus holidays, sick days, and vacations—he swiped his company ID at check-in.

Stu, manning security, gave him a nod. “Monday again, huh, Mr. Rogan.”

“Monday,” Rogan muttered and turned, as he did every Monday morning, to the elevator banks.

Behind his back, Stu smirked a little. It looked like Mr. Rogan had himself a big-ass Monday morning hangover.

Rogan stepped into an elevator along with a handful of other execs,

some admins, a couple of assistants. He wore a dark, pin-striped suit over an athletic frame, a crisp white shirt, and a blue-and-red chevron-pattern tie in a single Windsor knot.

Despite his cashmere topcoat, the cold seeped into his bones as he listened to the voice in his head.

Cecily. Melody.

The voice spoke the names, again and again even as four words pounded out a rhythm.

Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not kill.

And yet.

He stepped out on the thirty-second floor—executive level, Quantum Air. The logo, the silver whoosh of it, streaked over the wall behind the curve of the reception counter. Already the ’links and comps beeped and hummed. The waiting area, empty at this hour, sat quiet and plush. Another wall, all tinted glass, opened the room to New York, its sky and skyline.

Blue today that sky, so blue, he thought as he stared a moment. How could it be so blue, so clear?

He turned from it and, without his usual words for the trio at reception, walked to the double glass doors.

They opened, splitting the logo’s whoosh in two. He understood what it meant to be split in two.

Cecily. Melody.

Thou shalt not kill.

He passed assistants, admin stations, offices. Though it was still just shy of nine, men and women in sharp suits sat at desks, opened briefcases, sipped their fancy coffees while studying reports.

His own admin jumped up. So young, so bright, so earnest, Rogan thought. He’d been the same, just the same, once upon a time.

“Good morning, Mr. Rogan. I updated your tablet for the nine o’clock

conference. It's on your desk. If you're ready to go over some of the updates—”

“Not necessary. No calls, Rudy.”

Rudy opened his mouth to speak, but Rogan closed the door to his office. Though he frowned when he heard the *click* of the lock, Rudy decided his boss just needed a few before the big meeting.

Inside his office, Rogan begged, bargained, pleaded. The voice inside his head never changed in tone. Utterly calm, utterly cold. When another voice came through, desperate and terrified, he wept.

He trembled as he removed his topcoat. Once again he stared through a glass wall at the blue sky, as he stood in an office he'd worked diligently to earn.

It all ended today, as February dribbled into March 2061. Eleven years since he'd come aboard Quantum as a junior exec.

The voice gave him only two choices, so he had no choice at all.

Surrendering, he followed the instructions inside his head and opened his briefcase.

At eight-fifty-six, he stepped out of his office. Rudy popped up again.

“Mr. Rogan, I wanted to tell you I added a few more notes, some personal data on Ms. Karson. Just chat points.”

“All right, Rudy.” He paused a moment, looking into that young, earnest face. “You do good work. You've been an asset to me, and to Quantum Air.”

“Thanks.” Rudy brightened. “It's a big day.”

“Yes, a big day.”

Feeling the weight of it, Rogan walked to the conference room.

“Please stop,” he murmured as his heart beat like a brutal fist inside his chest.

Inside the conference room, the blue sky, the sweep of downtown Manhattan, the glint of the river gleamed through the tinted glass. On the wall, the screen held steady and silent with the silver logo.

On the long, polished table, silver trays held glossy pastries, perfectly ripened fruit, pitchers of water—sparkling or still. China cups waited for assistants to fill them with tea or coffee.

Reps from EconoLift—one male, one female—sat studying tablets with cups and glasses at their elbows. Two of Rogan’s associates did the same. Lawyers and accountants from each company filled more seats.

“There needs to be another way.”

At Rogan’s murmur, Sandy Plank—senior VP, accounting—gave him a quizzical glance.

But Rogan only heard the voice in his head.

At nine sharp, the doors opened again. Derrick Pearson, Quantum’s president and CEO, stood for a moment surveying the room. His black and silver mane flowing, he entered along with Willimina Karson.

In heeled boots, Karson—Econo’s president—stood six foot one inch. They made an imposing pair, Pearson in his severe black suit and silver tie, Karson in her straight-line red dress and short jacket.

Everyone around the table stood.

“Good morning, everyone,” Pearson said in his lion’s roar of a voice. “Let’s bring in Chicago, New L.A., Atlanta, London, Rome, and Paris.”

As he rattled off cities, the screen flashed into sections, those sections flashed with other conference rooms or offices, more people in suits.

The voice in Rogan’s head spoke incessantly, sharper and sharper. Then added screams.

Rogan took two staggering steps forward, interrupting Derrick’s opening greeting.

“Paul.” More surprised than annoyed, Pearson touched a hand to Karson’s arm. “Willimina, you’ve met Paul. Paul Rogan, our VP of marketing.”

“Derrick . . . I don’t have a choice. I’m sorry.”

Something in his voice, something in his eyes, had Karson stepping back even as Pearson stepped forward.

“Are you all right, Paul?” he asked, gripping Rogan’s arm.

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Rudy, dashing toward the conference room with the tablet Rogan had left on his desk, got within three strides of the doors before they blew.

Lieutenant Eve Dallas stood amid the carnage. The air stank of blood, charred flesh, piss, and vomit. Water from the sprinkler system soaked into the carpet so it squished underfoot. With her boots and hands already sealed, she studied the room.

The blast had blown off the doors, shattered most of the mega screen, blown chunks off the table, sent chairs and people flying—and some burning.

The thick carpet now bore a wide, blackened hole, and the walls as well as the floor carried spatter—blood, brains, other bodily fluids.

Lieutenant Lisbeth Salazar, heading up the Explosives and Bombs Unit, stood with her.

“Eleven dead, nine injured. The dead include the bomber. We’re picking up the pieces there . . .”

Both women watched the sweepers in their protective white suits, the boomer hounds in their thick gray, comb the room.

“But we’ve got some wits from the other side of the room, more shaken than stirred, who state Paul Rogan, VP of marketing, revealed a suicide vest seconds before he detonated it. I can tell you from the

extent of the damage, it was either designed for short-range effect, or it puffed and that's all he got. I'm estimating a range of twelve to fifteen feet."

"You're saying it could've been worse."

"Oh, a whole hell of a bunch worse." Salazar—an imposing woman with skin the color of well-steeped tea, eyes of flaming green—gestured. "He was facing away from the table, angled toward the door—toward Derrick Pearson, CEO. He blew Pearson with him, and the people at the front section of the table. It looks like some of the DBs took chunks of the table and the shrapnel as COD rather than the actual explosion.

"We've swept," Salazar added. "And we're sweeping again—the entire building. But I'm saying this was the only device, this was the only bomber."

Eve noted the spears of wood and metal impaled in the walls, the webbing cracks on the wall of glass. But the bulk of the damage, the radius of the blast? Yeah, around twelve feet.

"How'd he get it in the building?"

"Briefcase—lead-lined. He breezed right through the standards, and he's worked here nearly a dozen years. Security had no reason to wand or ray him. I did a run, the guy's got no record. Married going on fourteen years. An eight-year-old daughter."

"Where are they, the wife and kid?"

"I sent some uniforms to pick them up. You and the ME make the call, Dallas, but this looks like homicide to me. It's not terrorism, domestic or otherwise, on the face of it. Maybe the guy flipped out, who knows? Some big deal supposed to go down today—here. Maybe he didn't want it to go down. We'll pick up the pieces, and we'll tell you what kind of boomer."

Eve stood tall and lean in the long leather coat. Her hair, short,

choppy, and brown, haloed a face of angles, with a shallow dent in the chin. Her eyes, brown, sharp, and all cop, swept the room again.

“You handle your end, I’ll handle mine. Let’s see where we end up.”

“Works for me.” Salazar pulled out her signaling communicator. “Salazar.”

“Lieutenant, neither Cecily Greenspan nor Melody Rogan showed up at the school this morning where the kid attends and the mother is assistant principal. The mother texted in that the kid wasn’t feeling well. They don’t answer their ’links.”

Salazar’s brows lifted, and Eve gave her the nod.

“Officer, I’m passing you to the primary in charge. Lieutenant Dallas.”

Eve took the comm. “Get to the residence. If there’s no response, you have probable cause to enter.”

“‘Probable cause’?” Salazar said as Eve passed the comm back.

“Eleven dead, nine wounded, and a missing wife and daughter. That’s more than probable for me. I’ll let you get back to what you do. I’ll start doing what I do.”

Eve walked to the doorway. “Peabody!”

Her partner hustled down the ruined corridor in pink cowboy boots. “This is ours. Treat it as a homicide until it looks otherwise. Bomber, deceased, was Paul Rogan—do a run. Officers are en route to his residence to locate his wife and daughter—neither of which is where they should be this morning.”

“Devoted family man.” As she looked into the conference room, Peabody blew out a breath. “According to one of the wits who survived that. A Sandy Plank, another VP, minor injuries, treated on-site. Hard-working, loyal, smart, and crazy in love with his wife and daughter is how she describes Rogan.”

“The loyal don’t generally blow up their boss and coworkers,” Eve pointed out.

“Yeah. She’s a mess—Plank, I mean. She states he didn’t look well, and she heard him mumbling to himself. She thought he said: There needs to be or has to be another way. And when his boss and Willimina Karson—head of EconoLift—came into the meeting, Rogan walked over to them. Plank said she was watching Rogan because she thought he must have been feeling ill. She heard him say he didn’t have a choice. He said he was sorry. He was, according to her, crying. Then he opened his suit jacket. Boom.”

“Run him, and let’s find out what this meeting was about. Details. Any idea where his office is?”

“Down and left, second right. Salazar put a man on the door.”

“I’ll take it.” She started down, stopped. “Pearson, deceased, was top dog. Let’s find out who’s top dog now.”

Eve made her way to Rogan’s office, badged the officer on the door. Inside she closed the door, stood, scanned.

Big window due to VP status, she mused, and a refreshment station with AutoChef. Curious, she checked the AC for previous orders.

Nothing since Friday at 16:22. A tube of ginger ale.

The desk was angled, giving Rogan the window and the door view. A good desk chair, two sturdy visitors’ chairs, club style in a smooth coffee-brown leather. A sofa—navy-blue gel—with a long table. Walls, light brown, decorated with aeronautic art.

An evolution of air travel, she realized—from those early deals that made Eve wonder how anyone had had the balls to jump into them, up to sleek shuttles. With them, a child’s drawing in bright primary colors of a plane flying in a sky with white clouds and a yellow circle of sun.

The artist had signed it in careful block letters. MELODY.

The daughter. Devoted family man, Eve thought, who framed his kid’s drawing and hung it on his office wall.

On the desk, in addition to a top-grade data and communication cen-

ter, a brightly painted cup held a bouquet of paper flowers, all clearly handmade. Eve lifted the cup, looked at the bottom.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DADDY

LOVE,

MELODY

JANUARY 18, 2061

The desk held a triple frame, an attractive mixed-race female, late thirties, and a seriously beautiful girl—Melody, no doubt—with mad toffee-colored curls, laughing eyes of pale green, and a joyful smile that showed the gap where she'd lost a couple of baby teeth. They flanked one of the family, the child cuddled between Rogan and his wife.

The visual said happy, loving, attractive family.

If there'd been problems on the home front, it didn't show here.

She sat behind his desk.

“Computer, open ops.”

It fluttered on to a holding screen. **Password required . . .**

Ignoring that for now, she opened desk drawers. Standard office supplies, some file discs, some hard copy files. And a memo book.

She switched it on and, as it wasn't password protected, paged to the current date.

ECONO! Meeting/signing* 9:00. Final presentation and reveal. Don't sweat it!

Confirm cupcakes and champagne for department thank-you by 11:30. Send department memo for meeting (surprise party). Set for 4:15. Prepared remarks—brief.

Personal bonuses for Rudy and Kimmi for job amazingly well done.

Home by 6:00—stop for flowers for your amazing girls! Act surprised at the celebration dinner those amazing girls have been whispering about for a week. One hour post-dinner to resume Dragon Spear tourney with Mel—too long postponed. Tuck Mel into bed, and make love to your beautiful wife—way too long postponed.

Get some damn sleep!

Eve sat back, swiveled to look out the window. Why would a man so obviously looking forward to a day—business and personal—blow it all up, himself included?

She paged ahead, noted several appointments—again, business and personal—in that same easy stream-of-thought style. She paged back, found several weeks of an intense work schedule, much of which revolved around Econo strategy sessions, planning sessions, marketing campaigns—aside apologies to his amazing girls for missing dinner or dance practice.

Nothing to indicate depression, anger—frustration here and there, yes, but not anger. Nothing to indicate he'd bought or acquired explosives or had the knowledge to create a suicide vest.

“Doesn't fit,” she muttered, looking at the triple frame photos. “You don't fit.”

As she pulled out her comm, Peabody gave the door two knuckle raps, then poked in.

“Pearson—son and daughter—will probably cohead the company. Son was in London handling that area, and daughter in Rome when things went boom. Both are on their way back. As for Paul Rogan—”

“Clean as they come?” Eve finished.

“You got that. Financially secure—no signs of trouble there. Nothing to show any knowledge or interest in explosives, in political fringe

associations. Company man, in charge of marketing for the last three and a half years. Worked his way up with over eleven years in the company. The same goes for the wife. I ran her. Actually, she had an assault charge brought when she was in her twenties—dropped. And the guy who brought the charge was subsequently charged with spousal and child abuse.”

“Okay, it doesn’t add up.” Eve reached for her comm again, and it signaled in her hand. “Dallas.”

“Lieutenant, Officers Gregg and Vols. We’re at the Rogan/Greenspan residence. Greenspan’s been worked over, and was bound, locked in a basement storage room. The minor child’s unharmed except for some bruises and minor lacerations. We called the MTs for the woman. Both she and the kid claim home invasion.”

“That adds up. Secure the scene. If the MTs need to take Greenspan to a med center, one of you goes with her, one sits on the residence. I’m on my way.

“Peabody,” she said as she clicked off. “Inform Salazar of the situation, and contact EDD. I want all Rogan’s e’s—office and home—taken in. I want an e-man at the residence to go over security. I’ll seal this office and get a team in here. Move. Meet me at the car.”

She bagged the memo book, sealed and labeled it as she contacted her bullpen.

“Yo, LT,” Detective Baxter said.

“Are you and Trueheart clear?”

“Clear enough. What do you need?”

“I need you at Quantum Air, coordinating with Lieutenant Salazar.”

“On the boomer.”

She sealed the office as she barked out orders.

“Bring a couple of uniforms. Peabody started getting statements. You finish. Everybody, down to the cleaning service. Two honchos are

coming in—family of CEO. I'm going to want to talk to them as soon as possible."

"How many dead?" Baxter asked.

"Eleven, so far. Nine injured."

"It could've been worse. I'll contact Salazar, let her know we're coming in. Are you on scene?"

"I won't be. I've got a second crime scene. I'll brief you when I know more. Dallas, out."

It could've been worse. Baxter said it, she'd thought it. The thing was, when things could be worse, they usually got there.

Eve beat Peabody to the car, and peeled out of the slot the minute Peabody hopped in. She wove through the underground lot at a speed that had her partner gripping the chicken stick.

"You said it added up." Peabody's eyes, dark brown and widening at every swerve, closed to spare her brain the visual of a crash. "I'm putting some of the numbers in columns. Somebody broke into Rogan's house, threatened his wife and kid, and forced him to kill himself? I don't get the two-plus-two."

"Somebody says take this boom vest to work Monday morning, strap it on, and wear it to the meeting at nine. Blow it up. Do that, or we kill your amazing girls."

"His amazing girls?"

"That's what he called his wife and kid. In his memo book. I don't know why this guy, why this meeting, why this company, or why this method, but that part adds up."

"Wit statements say he was alone in his office, at least for a few minutes before the meeting. He doesn't call for help?"

"Could've had him wired. I would have. Let him hear the wife getting slapped around, or the kid crying for her daddy."

“That’s unbelievably cruel.”

“Nothing cruel’s unbelievable.” She arrowed out of the underground, zipped into traffic. “Why the marketing guy? They needed somebody who’d not only kill for his wife and kid, but die for them. But how did they know he would? We need to know more about this Quantum-Econo deal. Was the deal the thing? Was there something about it that made someone willing to kill—to use what appears to be an innocent man and his family as the weapon?”

“I use Econo a lot,” Peabody said. “Or did before I had a mag partner with a magalish husband who lets me use Roarke’s private shuttles.”

She’d used Econo herself, Eve thought, before Roarke. They were as bare as bare bones got, and therefore affordable if you had to use air travel. She wondered if Roarke had ever used them, before becoming one of the richest men in the known universe—and one who had his own transpo lines as well.

She’d tap that source, she thought, that expert consultant, civilian. If anybody knew the ins and outs of the QuantumAir-EconoLift deal outside of the particulars in the deal, it would be Roarke.

She swung in behind the mobile medical unit. Since it was already double-parked, horns and curses were already blasting anyway.

As she stepped out, the Rapid Cab driver behind her laid on his horn, stuck his head out the window. “Gimme a fucking break, girlie!”

Eve held up her badge, smiled with all the warmth of the early March wind. “Lieutenant Girlie. What would you like me to break?”

He steered around her, shooting her his middle finger on the way.

“You know Charles and Louise live just down the block,” Peabody commented.

“Yeah.” The doctor and the former licensed companion had an elegant brownstone within easy walking distance. “Nice neighborhood.”

Upper-class, Eve thought. Reasonably quiet and safe. Brownstones

and townhomes tucked back from the sidewalk, often with little front gardens or paved rear courtyards.

This one had a front garden—dormant now, but neat—with a walkway leading to a short set of stairs, a pair of bold blue double doors. One of the doors hung crookedly.

The house rose up three stories—decorative (and she'd wager effective) bars on the lower windows. All the privacy screens were engaged but for one on the second floor. Someone had broken that window. She noted the shards of glass and some sort of good-size ball, cracked, in shades of red and orange and brown.

"I think maybe that's Jupiter." Peabody frowned at the ball, tipping her head back to look up at the window.

Eve avoided the shards, studied the security as they approached the doors. "It's one of Roarke's systems, so it's good. Palm plate, voice ID, solid locks and alarm, double cameras."

The door opened. "Lieutenant. Officer Vols."

"Status."

"Sir. Officer Gregg and I arrived, rang and knocked. Automated security engaged. The comp said no one was currently in residence. Before we attempted a bypass, Gregg stepped down to check windows, go around to the back. And the ball back there? Planet Jupiter?"

"I knew it," Peabody said with quick triumph before Eve shut her down with a cold stare.

"Well, it nearly beamed Gregg. And the kid who managed to throw it through the window started screaming for help. Gregg called up to her, told her we were the police. She said she couldn't get out of her room.

"We couldn't get through security, LT, had to use the battering ram."

"Did the alarm go off?"

"No, sir, it didn't. Disengaged. We found the kid upstairs—holding on to herself pretty well. She said they'd hurt her mom, and had taken

her away. They'd taken her dad away. Then we heard the pipes. The mother managed to bang on the pipes in the basement room. We found her down there, beat up, tied up. The kid fell apart a little then."

A ripple of emotion ran over his stony cop's face. "She'd thought they'd killed her mom. Two men, they both state, broke into the house sometime in the early hours of Saturday after all three were in bed. From what the wife said, it sounds like they may have drugged the husband while he slept, taken him out that way, then they dragged the wife out of bed, smacked her around a little, tied her up, hauled the kid in. Tied her and the father up."

"Did you get a description?"

"Masks. Both say white, featureless masks. Hoods, gloves. They both say male going by voice and build, but they can't give us race, facial features, hair or eye color. I'll tell you, we didn't push too hard, Lieutenant. The mother needed medical attention, and the kid . . . She holds it together, like I said, but she's pretty shaken up. We haven't given Greenspan notification on Rogan. She and the kid asked about him, but we didn't want to step in it on that."

"Okay. You and Gregg stand by. I've got an e-man coming to evaluate the security breach and pick up all electronics. Where do you have them?"

"There's a family area in the back of the house, off the kitchen. Gregg's sitting on them."

The two MTs walked out from the rear of the house, equipment in hand. "She won't go to the hospital," one of them announced. "The adult female. The minor's mostly just shaken up, but the adult female could use the hospital."

"What's her status?"

"Two cracked ribs, bruised kidney, sprained wrist, deep lacerations on both wrists and ankles from fighting against the zip ties, broken

nose, severe facial and torso bruising, and lacerations from repeated blows. She was dehydrated, suffered a mild concussion.”

“We’ll see what we can do about getting her to agree to the hospital.”

The other MT shook his head. “Won’t budge. Wouldn’t take a tranq, either. We’ve got her splinted, wanded, stabilized, but she needs to go in.”

“Got it,” Eve said as the MTs walked out.

“She’s afraid to be a foot away from the kid,” Vols told Eve. “Like the kid’s afraid to be a foot away from the mom. You can’t blame them.”

“Yeah. I got that, too. Good work, Officer.”

With Peabody, Eve started back to tell a woman that her husband was dead, and a child that her father wouldn’t be coming home again.