

The Saint Chapter 26 - Tips

Liam couldn't fucking breathe. All the residual adrenaline of the op had combined with the gut-punching dread of hearing Daniel's name to form a Molotov cocktail of emotion in his chest, swirling and churning and crushing his lungs into dust.

Daniel was an informant for the FBI. On the same case that he and Carmen were working. And now, Liam was not only going to have to come face to face with the man for the first time in eighteen years, but he was going to have to work with him in order to put Gannon away?

Yeah. There wasn't enough calm in the world to get him through this.

"I'm sorry, Daniel McGee is your CI?" Liam asked. There was no way—not one shred of a chance—that Daniel was legitimately working with the Feds. This was a man who probably had the phrase "what's in it for me?" tattooed somewhere on his body. There had to be a catch.

"He is," Roman said. "This is my case—one I've been working for months now, I'd like to add—which means you have a lot of explaining to do."

"I don't think we do, actually," Sinclair said, and under any other circumstances, Liam would be popping popcorn right now, sitting back to watch his boss verbally eviscerate the FBI agent. "This case dropped in our laps by way of a murder that happened in our jurisdiction, and it actively involves our most trusted CI. The way I see it, this one is ours. But why don't we start at the beginning? How is it that you're even here, Agent Roman?"

Roman paused. As much as Liam and every other detective in the Intelligence Unit had no love lost for Kai Roman, he was a good agent. Which meant that right now, he was measuring what to say and what to keep to himself. But if he wanted to know what Intelligence knew, he was going to have to answer Sinclair's question. A fact that he must have realized, because he responded with, "About six weeks ago, my office got a call from Daniel McGee."

Just when Liam thought he was fresh out of shock. "Daniel McGee called you? From prison?"

Roman nodded in a single lift of his chin. "He did. Said a man named Royce Gannon had come to visit him."

"Okay, wait," Carmen said, and even though the sound of her voice sliced through Liam, he slapped a lid over the sting. He needed to focus, and not on the way he'd nearly spilled every last one of his dangerous, horrible feelings when she'd asked him to let her in. "I'm missing something here. Who's Daniel McGee?"

Roman looked at her, recognition lighting in his dark eyes. “Carmen Desoto, right? Well, this is getting interesting.”

Carmen lifted her chin, her stare giving Roman no quarter. “And you know me how, exactly?”

Roman’s brows raised, only by a fraction, but Liam caught the guy’s surprise, and good. That would teach him not to fvck with her. “Surveillance,” Roman said. “But I’m getting ahead of myself, here. To answer your question, until very recently, Daniel McGee was a convict, doing a twenty-five year sentence for insurance fraud.”

Capelli had the monitors over his desk lit up with a few keystrokes, an image of Daniel flashing over the center screen with a few more. “Daniel McGee, fifty-six. Convicted of nineteen counts of fraud eleven years ago.”

The image, a recent one, hit Liam like a sucker punch. Daniel had aged, of course—it had been far too long for him not to. Liam had always favored his mother in the looks department, having gotten her auburn hair over Daniel’s light brown and most of her facial features, too. Liam’s eyes were the only giveaway, a shade greener than Daniel’s steel gray, but still close enough to bear a strong and unique resemblance. Sinclair was the only person who had ever known that Liam’s father was a convicted felon—escaping something like that in your background check when you were gunning to join the Intelligence Unit was a total no go. But they’d only spoken of it that one time, years ago, and even then, the conversation had been brief. Yes, they were related. No, Liam wasn’t in contact with him. Yes, that was how it was going to stay. If Sinclair remembered Daniel’s name and his tie to Liam, he wasn’t showing it now.

“I think I remember that case,” Garza said, trading hello glares with Roman. The two men were like gasoline and an open flame, and that was on a good day. “Insurance fraud, right?”

“Give the detective a gold star,” Roman said, with a bit more frost than the response necessitated. From the corner of his eye, Liam could see Carmen—God, he would never not be acutely aware of exactly where she stood when they were in the same room together—tilting her head as she looked at the screen more closely.

“Insurance fraud eleven years ago,” she murmured, so quietly that Liam had probably been the only one to hear her. Her expression belonged to a woman lost in thought, and his heart took off at a gallop, the rest of him begging the universe to not let her connect the dots.

The way her breath caught on a soft gasp a second later told him with gut-punching certainty that she had. Shi!. Shi!!

Her chin whipped toward him, her stare wide and loaded with shock. But if he looked at her right now, he wouldn't be strong enough to resist the urge to collapse in her arms, and he had to keep it together. He had to stuff this away and do his damned job.

Thankfully, Carmen didn't say anything, and the rest of the unit was so focused on the case in front of them that they didn't catch her surprise.

"So, Gannon reached out to McGee?" Isabella asked. "Why? Do they know each other?"

"No. McGee claimed he'd never met or even heard of Gannon before that day. Gannon told McGee he had a rather large, rather lucrative job opportunity for him, and that he could pull some strings that would get Daniel released if he was interested," Roman said.

"Pretty ballsy move," Maxwell said, and Roman huffed out a noise that, from anyone else, might've been close to a laugh.

"You've seen this guy, right? His ego is the size of an aircraft carrier. Anyway, McGee played it smart. He said he'd consider it and told him to be in touch. Then he immediately called his attorney, who called us at his request."

Okay, that was enough to distract Liam from his dread. "McGee came to you?" No fvcking way.

"He did," Roman confirmed. "He said he didn't want any part of whatever Gannon was up to, and offered to help us take him down."

"In exchange for being released from prison," Liam said. Of course. That was one hell of a catch.

But, here, Roman stunned him. "No. The release is fake. We let Gannon think he engineered it, of course, and the officials he bribed in order to make it happen will be arrested as soon as we take Gannon and Miranda Astor down."

"The release is fake?" Hale asked, the surprise on her face echoing the feeling in Liam's gut.

"The minute we have Gannon and Astor in custody, McGee goes back to prison. But we had to release him temporarily—and under heavy supervision, of course—to get the job done," Roman confirmed. "We did offer to move him to a minimum security facility after we realized the magnitude of the crimes he's going to help us uncover, but he declined."

Right. There had to be some other motivation, then. "Does he have some personal reason for wanting to take Gannon down? A vendetta of some kind?" Liam asked.

“No. We did an extensive check, but their paths have never crossed before now,” Roman said. “Apparently, Gannon turned McGee’s name up in his search for the perfect person to pull off a large scale job, and he was willing to do whatever it took to get him released from prison.”

“What about McGee?” Liam asked through his teeth. “What does he have to say about all of this?”

“That he spent far too long doing the wrong thing, and now he just wants to help,” Roman said. “He’s been a model prisoner for the past three years, so it doesn’t seem to be a recent or poorly motivated change of heart.”

Liam barely held back his snort. “And you believe him?”

Roman shrugged. “It doesn’t matter whether I believe him or not. He’s helping me take down a huge medical fraud ring. Hell, he can tell me he’s the damned Easter bunny if he wants to. As long as his intel is good and he’s a clean CI, both of which have been the case so far, then I’ve got no complaints.”

Sinclair took the opportunity for a segue and ran. “So, if Gannon recruited McGee and he’s also responsible for blackmailing Carmen and murdering Axel Franklin, along with running the drug ring he just agreed to let Hollister in on, how does Miranda Astor signify?”

“The entire operation is her brainchild, and Gannon is using McGee to double cross her and take all the money from the Davenport Clinic scams.”

Now that, Liam hadn’t seen coming. Nor had anyone else, if the looks of WTF they were all wearing were any indication.

Ever meticulous, Capelli said, “I assume you’ve got the intel to back that up.”

Roman looked insulted, while Garza looked ready to buy Capelli a beer. Or maybe a new car. “Aside from recordings of the conversations McGee has had with both of them, you mean?”

“You may have the recordings, but we’ve got an agent and a CI in with Gannon, so keep talking,” Sinclair said, matching Roman’s chilly attitude. Technically, the FBI could pull rank over the Intelligence Unit in most, if not all, cases. But, while Roman was a lot of things, a dumbass wasn’t one of them. Putting his handful of years as an agent up against Sinclair’s decades of badassery was a sh!tastic idea no matter how you spun it, so Roman backed down with a grumble.

“Suit yourself, boss man. I’ve got video of Astor outlining the entire plan for the Davenport Clinic database and implicating herself in other crimes involving the hospital’s database in the same manner, and let me tell you, this woman is ruthless.

There's no way Gannon is the brains of this thing. He's in it up to his neck with her, sure, but I've got good money on the fact that she engineered the whole thing. Not just for the clinic, but for the hospital scams, too."

"We can't really go on a hunch," Hale said, her doubt plain. "And, no offense, but if Gannon's planning to double cross her and take all the money, and we definitely know he's good for the other crimes, then maybe she's not such a mastermind."

"Does the fact that she met with McGee privately to position herself to cut Gannon out of the deal help change your mind?" Roman asked.

"Damn," Maxwell said. "They're going to double cross each other."

Roman nodded. "Exactly. Now it's just a matter of getting what we need to bring them both down. We're digging into the alleged fraud at the hospital—the Chief of Staff, Dr. Keith Langston, was more than willing to conduct an internal audit once we told him we suspected the possibility of widespread medical fraud."

"I know him," Carmen said, her stare widening slightly as all eyes landed on her. "I mean, I guess I know of him. He's a bigshot at Remington Mem. Has a reputation as a pretty big stickler for the rules."

"I definitely got that impression," Roman said. "He's been very cooperative, not to mention discreet, but audits of this magnitude take time. It'll be weeks before we can establish discrepancies, let alone trace them back to their origins. If Astor even left a trail, which is a big if."

"So, you don't have anywhere near what you need to take her down," Garza pointed out. "Or definitive proof that this whole operation is her doing and not Gannon's."

The truth of the statement didn't stop Roman from breaking out his best high-level frown. "Right now, I don't have enough to legally make charges stick to either of them, no. While we were able to place surveillance equipment in both of their offices thanks to Dr. Langston, neither of them has dropped anything that would get me a warrant."

"Smart," Isabella murmured. "Albeit just the teensiest bit paranoid."

"Well, one of them is smarter than the other," Roman said. "I've had both of them under surveillance for four weeks now, but Gannon is the only one I've been able to really get anything from. He's met with McGee several times, all without Astor, to talk about the plan for the clinic database."

"Which means nothing until he actually takes action," Sinclair pointed out.

Roman, being Roman, countered. "But it does give us solid intel on how and when to take him down. We knew he had a meet with Carmen tonight, because he told McGee

earlier, but we didn't know when or where. So, McGee tagged him with a micro-transmitter."

Capelli's brows shot toward the rims of his glasses. "Seriously?"

The poor guy had been trying to get the department to spring for new state-of-the-art micro-transmitters for months, but they'd balked because getting warrants for their use was notoriously tricky, not to mention the equipment was spendy as hell. FBI warrants, while still necessary for their use, were often easier to get, and their budget for surveillance equipment ate the Intelligence Unit's allotment for breakfast.

"Do I look like I'm kidding to you?" Roman asked. Given the guy's serious streak, Liam would bet Roman had never kidded anyone about anything in his life. "We've known about Carmen's involvement for some time, although it was a bit unclear how unwilling she was to participate."

"Very, I can assure you," she said tightly.

Roman nodded. "I assumed as much, since you're working undercover with these guys. Well played, by the way. Gannon doesn't suspect a thing. Not even after you dragged Hollister into the mix." He turned to look at Liam. "I have to admit, I honestly thought you'd gone rogue for a second there, man."

"That just goes to show how well you don't know him," Garza muttered.

"It was a compliment." Roman rolled his eyes. "Anyway, as of right now, we need to catch both Astor and Gannon red-handed."

"Which means we not only need to let them steal the clinic database," Maxwell said, and Hale finished his sentence.

"But we need to let them have McGee use the information for fraud in order to take them both down."

"Well," Sinclair said, his eyes moving from each of his detectives to the image of Daniel on the case board. "I guess the next thing we need to do is bring McGee in so we can form a new plan."

"What?" Liam and Roman asked, their voices crashing together.

Roman recovered first. "This is my case."

"Do you have anyone other than McGee on the inside?" Sinclair asked.

Roman's wince was nearly immeasurable, but it was there. "No. But McGee can get me enough for warrants."

“McGee is a convicted felon. He may be playing nicely with you, but that’s still going to be shaky once this goes to court,” Sinclair said, and damn it, he was right. “I’ve got a detective with an impeccable record and our most trusted CI in play. We work together with Intelligence taking point, we nail these two.”

“And who prosecutes?” Roman pressed.

Sinclair shrugged. “That’s for you to work out with the ADA.”

Roman paused, but no. Absolutely motherfvcking not. Liam was not going to work with Daniel on this case. But he couldn’t exactly pop off with the reason for that, right here in front of God and everybody in the room, so he went with, “I don’t think we should trust McGee.”

“Any particular reason for that?” Roman asked.

“Did you miss the part where he’s a convicted felon?” Liam shot back, but damn it, he needed to get control of his emotions to make his argument stick. “Look, all I’m saying is that McGee scammed a lot of people the exact same way Gannon and Astor want to, and you want me and Carmen to go undercover with the guy when we know Gannon is capable of murder? That’s a hell of an ask.”

Roman surprised him with, “You’re right, Hollister. It is a big ask. But McGee has played this one to the letter so far, and let’s not bullshit ourselves. This case is huge. Gannon and Astor are responsible for millions of dollars in fraud, and—as you pointed out—murder. They need to go down for that, and we can make it happen.”

“Or we could get ourselves killed,” Liam said. He knew he was reaching, and under any other circumstances, he’d probably take the risk, knowing he’d have the entire unit at his back. But he didn’t want to be within a nautical mile of Daniel, let alone have to trust the guy with his life and Carmen’s.

“Something tells me your unit isn’t going to let that happen,” Roman said, and Isabella took the opportunity to chime in.

“You’re damn right we won’t.”

“We’ve been working this case for weeks, and we have a vested interest in seeing Astor and Gannon pay for everything they’ve done,” Sinclair said, looking at Liam. “But there are risks, as Hollister has pointed out, and my people are the ones with their lives on the line.”

“I’m not arguing that,” Roman said.

Sinclair smiled, all teeth. “Good. Then you won’t have a problem letting me and my unit run the op. We’ll loop you in on all the planning,” he added, probably to keep Roman

from protesting before he could finish. "But McGee is your responsibility. He puts so much as a baby toe out of line and he's going to answer for it."

Roman paused, and Liam prayed the guy would balk. But Sinclair was right. They had been working the case for weeks, and now more than ever, Gannon and Astor needed to be held responsible for everyone they'd hurt. They needed to be stopped.

"Copy that," Roman said. "We'll need to bring him in on the strategy session, though. If he's going to do this, he needs to be up to speed."

"Tomorrow morning," Sinclair said, sending Liam's heart on a direct path to his boots. "First thing. And don't be late. We only have three days to get this right."

"We'll be here," Roman said.

Liam realized then that he had only two choices. He could either refuse and tank the case, or he could work with the one man who had been dead to him for the last eighteen years.

"Fine," Liam said. Then he turned and walked out the door before every last one of his emotions destroyed him on the spot.