

The Saint Chapter 28 - Tips

There wasn't enough coffee on the planet to get Liam through this fvcking meeting. He'd still poured himself a vat of the stuff out of habit, of course. But it had gone basically untouched as he and Carmen had made their way to the precinct.

Her presence had been the only thing to steady his rattling nerves, her arms the only place he'd been able to think straight, and when he'd settled there in the wee hours of the morning, he'd finally known without a doubt what he needed to do.

Liam was going to face everything—Daniel, his past, this case, and every emotion that went with it—once and for all.

"You okay?" Carmen asked, then rolled her eyes at herself. "Right. That was a stupid question."

"Actually, not so stupid," he said, reaching for her hand over her car's center console. "If you're asking if I'm psyched about being in the same room as Daniel for the first time in eighteen years, then my answer is a hard no. But I'll have you there with me, so yeah. I'm as okay as I'm going to get. And it's way past time for me to face my anger rather than bury it."

Carmen nodded, her dark brown curls bouncing over her shoulders from their ponytail. "I'm really proud of you, you know."

"And I'm really in love with you, you know," Liam said, and God, how had he ever fought what felt so intuitive and right?

"Well, good. Because if Daniel gets crappy about any of this, I may need some bail money."

Laughter cracked out of him unexpectedly, easing the tension that had been brewing in his chest. "Noted. I guess we should get this over with, huh?"

"We should," Carmen agreed. They got out of the car, heading into the precinct as Liam had done thousands of times. Signing Carmen in took only minutes, and then they were headed up the steps, one foot in front of the other. Liam had texted Sinclair as soon as he'd woken up this morning, asking to talk to him privately ahead of the meeting. Sinclair's immediate response was further proof that the man would only sleep when he was dead, but he'd agreed to be here early.

Liam's heart moved into his throat as they approached the Intelligence office. But Carmen wound her fingers around his, squeezing just enough to let him know she was right there beside him, and okay, yeah. Yeah. He could do this.

The office was lit but quiet, with all desks empty, and Liam exhaled the breath that had been spackled to his lungs. “Isabella should be in soon,” he said, feeling a pang in his chest at the idea of leaving Carmen here alone.

Of course, she just shook her head and laughed. “I’ll be fine. Right here if you need me. Okay?”

“Yeah.” He resisted the urge to kiss her—work was work, after all, even if they were the only two here right now—and headed to Sinclair’s office. The door was ajar, but Liam knocked anyway, crossing the threshold after Sinclair’s gruff “come in” filtered through the crack in the door.

“You wanted to meet before this strategy session.”

It wasn’t a question, although Liam answered anyway. “Yes. I was...pretty upset last night, and you need to know why.”

Sinclair’s brows lifted, but he gave Liam room to get on with it, and fuck, here went nothing. “Daniel McGee is my father.”

In all of Liam’s years in the Intelligence Unit, he’d only seen Sinclair genuinely shocked a handful of times. This one took the crown. “Your father,” Sinclair repeated.

“Yes. I knew Daniel had been released from prison. The DA called me as a courtesy. But I haven’t seen or spoken to him in eighteen years, ever since he left my mother, my brother, and me. There was”—Liam paused, searching for the right words—“a lot of bad blood between us.”

“I remember that part.” Sinclair leaned back in his desk chair, shaking his head. “I take it Roman doesn’t know.”

“If he hasn’t called you about it yet, my guess is no,” Liam said. “But the truth is, Daniel might not even know, even if he’s been briefed. I changed my last name as soon as I turned eighteen, and he’s been gone from my life for decades. I’d be surprised if he even knows I’m his son.”

Sinclair exhaled, low and slow. “I’ll need to brief Roman, regardless. And we’ll need to let the unit know, too.”

“Understood,” Liam said. He’d expected as much.

“Hollister, you’ve always been a great cop.” The look in Sinclair’s eyes told Liam without a doubt that his boss meant it. “And no matter what happens with this case, you’re still going to be a great cop. But I need to know if you can do this op. No bullshit. No covering up. I need to know if I can put you in the field with Daniel McGee.”

Liam's feelings twisted, dread and fear and hurt becoming a tangled ball in his belly. But, for the first time ever, he wanted to start untangling them rather than shoving them down deep, so he said, "If you're asking whether or not I'll trust McGee with my life or Carmen's, the answer is no. I won't. He hasn't earned that, and he never will. But I trust the unit, and I know that Gannon and Astor have to be stopped. So, can I go into the field to take them down with Daniel on the op? Yes." Liam straightened. "As long as Roman keeps Daniel in line, I can do my job."

"And if that changes?" Sinclair asked

Liam didn't hesitate. "If that changes, you'll be the first to know so we can come up with another plan." He'd never risk an op, especially one involving Carmen.

"Okay," Sinclair said, and surprise rippled a path up Liam's spine.

"Okay," he repeated. "That's it?"

Sinclair nodded. "Yes, that's it. In the six years you've worked in my unit, I've never once had cause not to trust you. That's not going to change now. If you say you can do this op, then I believe you, and I'm damn sure going to back you up so we can take Gannon and Astor down. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've got to call Roman. I want to get all his bluster out of the way before we start this meeting with the team. We've got a long day ahead of us."

Liam walked back to the main office, partly stunned and partly relieved. He'd thought telling Sinclair—telling anyone—that Daniel was his father was going to dredge up a bunch of shitty emotions that would tank him. No, it hadn't been a party, but actually saying the words and getting them out into the open hadn't been nearly as bad as he'd expected.

Which was great, because now he had to do it again.

Everyone had arrived while he'd been talking to Sinclair. Isabella was talking quietly to Carmen over by her desk, showing her something (baby pictures, if he had to guess. His partner was a badass in the field, but good Lord, she was a softie for her husband and kid) on her phone and smiling.

Hale and Garza were arguing about the best kind of donut the Holy Roller made (her pick was frosted with sprinkles, while his was chocolate glazed. Unfortunately, they were both wrong. Crullers were the superior choice), and Maxwell and Capelli were both popping lids on their gigantic cups of coffee. Liam knew he had a small window, here, so with one last fuck it, he lifted his voice above the chatter.

"Hey, before we start, I have something I need to let you all know."

The room quieted instantly, all sets of eyes turning toward him. Carmen gave up a tiny nod of encouragement, and he clung to it like a life raft.

"I'm sure you all noticed I'm not thrilled about working with Roman's CI," Liam said, the nods from his fellow detectives confirming his words. "I have good reason for that, and it's something you should all know before we work this case." He took a deep breath, holding it for only a beat before saying, "Daniel McGee is my father."

Audible gasps and stark looks of WTF filled the room, but now that he'd uncorked the truth, he wanted to give them all of it. Liam gave up a broad strokes version of the story, telling them how Daniel had left when he was fourteen and that they hadn't stayed in touch. He didn't say anything about his mom or Jamie—honestly, that pain was still too raw to share with anyone other than Carmen, and it didn't have any bearing on the case. But Liam did outline Daniel's crimes, because the team deserved to have an accurate idea of who Daniel had been and likely still was. "So, that's it. Roman might believe Daniel is a changed man, but I don't. We're going to need to watch him as closely as we watch Gannon and Astor if we want to pull off a clean arrest."

"You still want to go through with this op?" Isabella asked.

"None of us would blame you if you don't," Maxwell added, and Liam's heart beat faster as everyone in the room nodded in agreement. "We're all good at compartmentalizing, but some sh!t is too big for a box, you know?"

"I do," Liam said. "But I'm good. Sinclair knows. Soon Roman will know. And Gannon and Astor have to pay for killing Axel and everything else they're doing to hurt people. I'm here to get the job done."

"And we're here to have your back," Garza said.

"Yeah, we are," Hale added with an enthusiastic nod, and Liam had no choice but to smile.

"Thanks, you guys."

He didn't get a chance to say anything else, though, before Roman appeared in the doorway, looking very serious and very pissed off.

"Hollister. A word in Sinclair's office?"

Ah, hell. The guy's normal setting was somewhere around DEFCON 3. Liam should have known he'd get all honked off about this. "Sure," he said, reaching for his calm.

That calm fvcking exploded the second he walked into Sinclair's office and saw Daniel sitting in the chair across from his sergeant's desk.

“Oh,” he managed, but yeah, that was all he could get past the knot of his pulse at his throat.

“Liam,” Daniel said, standing as if he meant to extend his hand, but stopped short. “It’s been a long time.”

Daniel looked exactly like the photo Capelli had put on the case board last night. He was graying at the temples, his eyes and mouth bracketed by the lines of someone who had seen hard times, and a pang of satisfaction moved through Liam at the realization. He still held that charming air of a con man, though, and Liam was going to have to nip this in the bud, right now.

“We’re not doing that,” Liam said, fighting to keep his voice neutral. “No reminiscing. Nothing personal. I don’t know you, and you don’t know me. As far as I’m concerned, I’m a detective working a case and you’re a convicted felon working with the FBI. We’re going undercover to bring down two people who deserve it. Once we do that, we’re done here. Got it?”

Daniel nodded, sitting back down. “Understood.”

Roman crossed his arms over his chest. “I need to know if this is going to be a problem, Detective Hollister. Because, I’ll be honest. Right now, I’m not feeling very good about sending my CI into the field with you.”

Liam opened his mouth to tell Roman to fuck off, but Sinclair beat him to it. “Whether or not Detective Hollister and Mr. McGee go into the field together isn’t your call. It’s mine. And, frankly, I’d like some assurances that Mr. McGee is going to do his part without incident.”

“Sinclair—” Roman started, but Daniel lifted a hand.

“If I may?” he asked, looking at Sinclair. At the sergeant’s nod, Daniel said, “I understand your concern, Sergeant. For a long time, I wasn’t a good man. But I am doing my best to be a good man now. We all have the same goal here.”

Turning to Liam, he continued, “You don’t have any reason to trust me. I did horrible things to you. Unforgivable things.” He paused. “As badly as I want to, I can’t change that. I can only choose to do the right thing now. Miranda Astor is dangerous. She doesn’t care who she hurts, and she needs to be stopped. I’ll do whatever is necessary to make that happen.”

For the tiniest breath of a second, Liam wanted to believe Daniel was telling the truth. Unlike all the fast talk and false sincerity he’d been used to, Daniel’s words now seemed genuine, and God, was it possible that Daniel really was a changed man?

No, shouted a voice from way down deep in his chest, crushing the thought into a thousand jagged pieces.

“Forgive me if I don’t believe a word that comes out of your mouth. I just want to work this case and get Gannon and Astor behind bars. After that, you’ll be just as dead to me as you’ve been for the past eighteen years. Now, can we get on with it? We only have three days, and every minute is going to count.”