

# The Price of Peace

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## Kapitel 16: Caught In the Crossfire

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Chapter 15: Caught in the Crossfire

The next morning they are pulling up to Amanda's property. There are several trucks and a lot of people all around. Crime scene tape is blocking the entry and they are halted at the edge of the drive by a soldier with a gun, "This is a crime scene, miss. You need to leave."

"This is my property, sir," Amanda states.

Commander Eagle rolls down the back window and holds out his EBU, "I believe this will get us through, soldier."

The soldier looks over the EBU and stands at attention, "Sir! I apologize, I didn't know who you were."

"It's fine. You are doing your job." Commander Eagle replies. The soldier moves the tape and waves them through, "Thank you. Go ahead, Ms. Kelly."

Amanda nods and they continue up the drive, getting as close as they can to the charred remains of the house. "It's all...gone," she says barely a whisper as she fights to remain calm.

They get out of the car and a soldier approaches them, "We believe the fire began over this way " he says as he leads them towards the place where the garage once stood. "From what we have been able to determine, we believe that an accelerant was used to help the fire spread quickly from this building to the main house. If there was anyone in there, they most likely did not make it out."

"There shouldn't have been anyone here. I lived here alone and was away the past several days," Amanda says, looking around at the damage. "May I go through what's

left of the house?"

The soldier looks between her and Saber and the commander, "I'm not sure it's really safe for you to be doing, ma'am. You look a bit off balance, and I'm not sure you could find much in there anyways. Whatever they fueled the fire with, heated up extremely fast, so there isn't much left that's even recognizable."

"So you can verify that it was intentionally set?" she asks.

"Yes, ma'am. Of that much we are certain. We are working as fast as we can for any clues to find out who did this. We have a small pile over that way," he nods towards a small area that has been cleared, "of items we think you might be able to recognize. You're welcome to go through it."

"Thank you," she replies and starts to head towards the pile.

Saber reaches for her arm and misses, realizing she's already past him. He sighs, and struggles to make his way in the direction that he felt her turn in. He continues slowly, using the cane to steady himself and check for obstacles. After a minute or so, he hears Amanda crying and makes his way to her. He slowly manages to sit down on the ground beside her and places an arm on her shoulder. "I'm sorry," he says barely a whisper. He feels her sobs continue and sits there holding her, not sure what else to do.

Several minutes pass before Amanda calms down and looks up at him, "I'm sure you're rethinking wanting to be with me now."

Saber shakes his head, "Quite the opposite, actually. It reaffirms that I should be with you. In a way, I sort of feel responsible for this."

She looks up at him and shakes her head, "This is not your fault, Saber. I'm just glad that we weren't still here. Sure, I lost material things, and a lot of priceless memories, but I'm alive. I have no regrets. Except for losing the car," she adds with a smile.

He chuckles, "Understandable. Perhaps we can find you another car to work on. Once your shoulder heals, that is. Maybe you could teach me how to work on them. I've never had a reason to learn."

She smiles weakly, "Seems like a fair trade. You've taught me so much, I'd finally be able to teach you something."

"You have taught me things, Amanda. You gave me self confidence, something that I was lacking after I was injured. You taught me that losing my vision isn't the worst thing that could happen. You've taught me to live. For all of that I cannot repay you. I just wish you didn't have to go through this." She manages a small chuckle. "What?" he asks.

"I suppose I don't have to worry about cleaning out my dad's things now," she says bitterly as she sifts through the few items in the pile that are somewhat recognizable.

"I'm glad that I put those papers in the deposit box now."

"Yes. That was a good thing. Especially considering this," Saber says with a sigh.

"Hey, Saber, you there?" April's voice says over the com-link.

"Yes April, I'm here. What's going on?" Saber replies.

"I hadn't heard from anyone and I wanted to be sure you got there safely," April says.

"We're fine, all things considered," he replies.

"How bad is it?" she asks.

"There's really nothing to salvage," Amanda says aloud. "It's just a charred heap of trash now."

A long stunned silence on the other end. "I'm so sorry, Amanda," April finally says. "Are...are you guys coming home soon?"

"I don't see much reason to stay here," Amanda replies.

"We'll see you soon then," April replies and they end the call.

Commander Eagle walks over towards Saber and Amanda, "Would you two like to head on back to your place, Saber?"

Amanda nods and looks to Saber. "I don't see much reason to remain on the premises, sir," Saber replies.

"Then why don't you and Ms. Kelly go on back? The soldiers have found a few things I want to follow up on. I will catch a ride back with one of them. I don't think the two of you hanging out in the open like this is such a good idea. Can I trust you to go straight home?"

Saber fights the urge to smile, "I think we can behave for that long, sir. We will go straight back to the estate."

Commander Eagle nods, noting the tired look on Amanda's face, "Are you up to driving, Ms. Kelly? I could have a soldier drive the two of you back."

"You don't want me to drive, sir?" Saber says with a grin.

Amanda chuckles and shakes her head, "If you're driving, I'll stay here." She smiles and look up at the commander, "Perhaps you should ask someone to drive us. I'm not sure I'm up to it, sir."

Commander Eagle laughs, "I could not in good conscience allow you to drive, Captain Rider." He looks to Amanda and nods, "I'll find someone that we can spare for a

couple of hours to drive you back." He heads off.

"So, you're the infamous Captain Rider?" the soldier asks as they start back towards Saber's estate.

"I am sir," Saber replies.

"I've heard of your skills. Rumor has it that you're still good with a weapon, even without your vision," he states.

Saber shrugs, "That is a matter of opinion."

"Well, I heard you were injured trying to save civilians, that you and your team were actually."

"All of us have shown some improvement. They have all improved far more than I have. I am hopeful that they can return to active duty before too long."

"What will they do about you, sir?"

"That has yet to be determined. I know that I will never be recalled. I will not get my vision back. I have long since resigned myself to that fact. There is talk of allowing me to teach or something. I suppose I could manage that."

The soldier lets out a whistle, "You are taking this far better than I would be, sir. I probably would have ended my life after something like that."

"There was a time that I would have said the same thing."

"But now?"

"Now I know there is more to life than being a soldier."

"And who might you be, miss?" he asks glancing at Amanda in the rear view mirror.

"My name is Amanda Kelly, sir."

"Are you a friend of Captain Rider's, ma'am?"

"She is my fiance'," Saber replies. "The house you just left was hers."

"Oh. I'm sorry for your loss, ma'am."

"At least I have somewhere to go," Amanda says

"Being Captain Rider's fiance I can imagine," the soldier says as they drive away from Amanda's property. "So, tell me..." the soldier driving goes silent and the car starts to go off the road.

"What's going on?" Saber asks.

Amanda gasps, seeing the bullet hole in the windshield, "The driver's been shot!"

Saber without thinking pulls the soldier out of the driver seat and into the passenger seat and jumps into the front seat, wincing in pain as he does and stops the car. He quickly grabs the soldier's sidearm. "Get down!" he says and both he and Amanda do so right before a steady stream of bullets rip through the windshield.

"What's going on?" Amanda screams over the bullets.

"I would guess that Sean's lawyer found some thugs to deal with us," Saber says.

"What are we going to do?"

"Be glad that this is a solar car," Saber muses, "Otherwise we'd be blown up."

"Funny." Amanda says. "I meant long term."

"I thought of waiting until they ran out of bullets, I'm sure we happen to be just far enough from your property that the people there aren't going to hear any of this."

"Any idea where they are shooting from?"

"Let me stick my head up and look," he replies sarcastically.

"You don't have to be so cynical, I was just curious., Amanda snaps back.

"Sorry, it's been awhile since I've been shot at," he replies apologetically.

"Do you think you could get the car moving without them being able to hit you?" she asks.

"No. Damn thing, you have to be seated in order to start it, and when the car came to a stop it shut off from the pressure drop from me moving the soldier. I suppose if I'd been thinking I could've attempted to turn it around and head back toward your property, but at the time I was just thinking about stopping the car," he replies.

The bullets stop, "Are they out of ammo?" Amanda asks quietly.

"They're probably waiting to see if we're dead or not," Saber says, "I need a hat or something to hold up."

"Here," Amanda says. "It was the soldiers hat." She hands him a hat.

Saber carefully pulls out his sword, and gently places the hat on the tip, then lifts the hat over the steering wheel, as soon as he does a barrage of shoots are fired. "See?" he says quietly.

"So, now we just wait?" Amanda asks.

"Hold on," Saber presses the button to open up the passenger door and kicks the soldier's body out, more gunfire is heard, Saber pressed the button and the door closes. "Now, we wait." a few hours go by and more gunfire and a screech is heard.

"What was that?" Amanda asks.

"My guess would be the Commander," Saber replies.

"You don't think..." Amanda stops, as she unconsciously looks to slain soldier laying right outside the door.

"I certainly hope that's not the case," Saber replies grimly. "Now, try to rest, we have a couple more hours until nightfall, that'd be the best time to make our move."

"Saber, are you crazy?" Amanda says. "We'd be better off just staying here until help arrives, Fireball and April will come from the other direction first thing in the morning when we don't show."

"True," Saber says. "And we still have plenty of water."

Amanda chuckles slightly, "Leave it to us to get put in the car with the fold down seat that leads to the trunk and it be full of water and MRE's." They lapse into silence for a long time, "What about the Commander?" she asks quietly.

"We don't even know if it's him for certain. Or if it is, if he's alive. We'll just have to wait and see," Saber replies as he tries to find a semi-comfortable position.

Nightfall comes upon them quickly. "I need you to carefully look and see if you tell the condition of the other car," Saber says. "It's lights should come on automatically at night."

"Okay," Amanda says and moves herself so she's behind the driver's seat and carefully looks out the windshield. "The glare of the light makes it easy to see the car, but not in it."

"Good," Saber says. "That means that they probably can't see us either."

"That's odd," Amanda says. "The lights seem to be malfunctioning, they're going on and off."

Saber moves to where he can see the lights and chuckles, "The Commander's alive, and it turns out he's rather crafty."

"What do you mean?" Amanda asks curiously.

"That's Morse code," Saber says and starts reading the code, "Alive. Shot in arm, Eagle. It repeats." he stops, thinking for a moment. "I need a knife," Saber says and starts

feeling around on the floor and seats.

"I think I saw one fall out of the soldier's pocket before you pushed him out," Amanda replies.

"Got it," Saber says grabbing it and climbs into the back and worms his way into the trunk.

"What are you doing?" Amanda asks.

"Responding," he makes his way to the tail light and makes quick work of stripping the wire. "OK. Saber, Amanda, alive. Driver dead."

"The light's are flashing something different, I can tell that much," Amanda says trying to watch the other car.

"Remind me, when we get out of this to teach you Morse code," Saber says as he climbs out to read the message, "No word from April, Shinji, or Colt. Plan?" Saber sighs. "Damn, we don't have any backup coming."

"Come on Saber, you can think this through," Amanda says, trying to remain positive.

"Okay, I've got an idea." Saber says as he crawls back into the trunk. "Need a diversion, any ideas?" he climbs back out, "I'm really going to hurt when this is over, you know?"

"At least we'll be alive then," Amanda replies sympathetically,

"Good point." Saber replies and looks at the message. "Trunk full of grenades"

"What?" Amanda asks. "Do you people come to investigate a civilian fire and expect a full out war?"

"Well, we are in the middle of a war with the outriders, you can never be too prepared," he replies with a chuckle.

Amanda sighs, "Why'd I know you'd say something like that?"

Saber grins and climbs into the front of the car, "I can't see well enough, too many wires here."

"What are you trying to do?" Amanda asks trying to get close enough to see.

"Disable the pressure switch," he replies.

"Let me try," Amanda says and they switch places, "I do know a thing or two about cars."

"True," Saber admits.

"There, I got it," Amanda says.

"Get ready," Saber says and crawls to the trunk, "In 5, start throwing grenades opposite our direction, we'll take advantage and pass them, and double back." He crawls out and waits for the reply, "Acknowledged." Saber sighs, "Amanda, in 5 minutes start driving toward the gunfire."

"Great, we're insane," Amanda mutters under her breath, and right at the 5 minute mark she starts to drive, keeping her head down, the gunfire starts, but then the grenade goes off, and the gunfire moves to the other car, and she's able to look where she's going, after a minute of this there's a large bump, and then the car stops. "Battery's dead," she grumbles.

"We'll have to attempt to double back on foot," Saber says as another grenade goes off. "I hope Commander Eagle doesn't go through all the grenades." They get out of the car, and carefully head the way they came, when Saber trips.

"Saber?" Amanda asks concerned.

"Well," Saber says as he gets up "Judging from the weapon this person had on him, I'd say we have one less attacker," he grabs the person's weapon.

"Did I...With the..." Amanda asks in shock.

"Yes." Saber says, "I need you to stay with me here, we need to get through this." He goes to her and places a hand on her shoulder, "Amanda, I need you to help me, I can see well enough, but I need you to make sure I don't miss anything," he pauses to make sure she understands and she nods, "Now every time someone fires you should be able to see the flash of the barrel, look around and tell me if you see that." Another explosion and a round of gunfire.

"Twelve o'clock," Amanda says and they head in the direction of the gunfire.

They sneak up on the man, and Saber takes out his sword, "Lay down your weapon, or lay down your life." Saber says. The man puts down his weapon. "Good choice, now how many of you are there?" another explosion, and some more gunfire, then exactly 5 shots.

"There were seven of us starting out," the man confesses. "Please don't kill me."

"I have no intention of killing you." Saber says then hits the man with the back of his sword, knocking him out. Another grenade goes off, this time no gunfire. "Come on, we'd better try and get to the Commander," Saber says. They walk carefully towards the vehicle the Commander was in.

"Saber," Amanda says a few minutes later. "The grenades have stopped."

"Commander!" Saber says and they rush the best they can to get to the car.

Right as they get to the car they hear a familiar voice, "Well, look who decided to join the party."