

## SHATTERED

She beats from a nearby rave blend with the rapid thumping of Meghan's heart as her feet carry her deeper into the heart of Seattle's SoDo district. The air is crisp and heavy, like a rainless thunderstorm. Her boots beat a steady staccato on the cement. She weaves around trash bags and broken pallets, and every breath burns.

A solitary streetlight bathes David's silhouette in a silver halo for a heartbeat, then the night swallows him once again.

Meghan wills herself to run faster. Her shirt sticks to her back underneath her jacket. The gun in her inner pocket digs into her ribs with every pounding step.

*Should've brought backup, damn it.*

The thought flickers through her mind as she vaults over a stack of rusted shipping crates barring the way. Her feet splash in a puddle of mud when she lands, and she nearly loses her footing. Her partner is leading her through a maze

of narrow alleys fenced in by bare brick walls and boarded-up windows. If she stops to dial the precinct, she'll lose him for sure.

In the harsh glare of a neon security light, Meghan sees David turn a corner just ahead. Cursing, she surges forward, putting the last of her reserves into the chase.

*He's getting tired, she thinks, wheezing. He's gotta be.*

She rounds the same corner a second later and nearly runs head-first into a chain-link fence. On the other side, David has already melded back into the shadows. There's no time to stop and reframe; she takes a few steps back, sprints forward, and jumps.

The harsh rattle of her boots hitting the chain-link rings through the alley. Her fingers catch the cold metal in a death grip, and then she hauls herself upward, gritting her teeth when her muscles strain so much it *hurts*. She brings up a leg, teeters on the narrow ledge for a second, then twists around and drops down on the other side. The impact reverberates up her calves and through her whole body. Heart hammering, she straightens up and keeps going.

There's a T-junction up ahead, and there's no telling which way David went. She strains to hear something, anything, past the blood pounding in her ears, turns her head this way and that. There's a faint echo of footsteps to her left. She breaks into a run without thinking. The alley stretches into the night, and she can just about make out something moving at the other end.

*Bingo.*

The sudden rumble of a train passing nearby makes the ground vibrate underneath her feet. When it's gone, the sudden silence feels like a vacuum. The sounds of the rave have faded somewhere behind them. She doesn't know where they are.

She rounds the next corner and finds that it's a dead end.

At first she can't see much of anything, but then a security light sears her vision. She stumbles back until she hits the nearest wall, afterimages flashing behind her closed eyelids.

David's voice cuts through the blood pounding in her ears. "I'm disappointed."

Squinting, she says, "That's my line, asshole. The fuck happened to 'serve and protect'?"

He rasps a chuckle but doesn't say anything. The light cuts off suddenly, plunging them both into darkness. She thinks he'll run again, but he stays where he is, specter-like in the thin sliver of moonlight trickling down from the waxing gibbous overhead.

Then she sees moonlight glinting on the barrel of a gun, and a single shot pierces the night.

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This is an excerpt from *To Bloom Again* by Keira North, coming soon.

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