

"I'll kill the bitch!"

I took a steady breath and thumbed the A-R I held across my chest to single shot.

"There's no reason for that," I said calmly.

My back was against the wall, but I could almost see around the corner. They would be shaking - him with rage and her with fear. It'd be a tough shot.

"Walk away, Maxwell, and she'll walk away!"

"Let her go and we'll all walk away," I said calmly.

"Never happen!" he shouted back.

I shook my head and took another breath. Raising the rifle to my shoulder, I sighted through the night vision scope in the darkness. I ran through the rest in my head.

Step. Pivot. Sight. Fire.

Step. Pivot. Sight. Fire.

Step. Pivot. Sight. Fire.

"Last chance, let her go!" I called back.

The woman screamed.

I stepped, pivoted, sighted, and fired.

She screamed again, and I scanned the ground with the scope.

I saw a raised arm and squeezed off another shot.

She screamed again.

"Lights on!" A disembodied voice called from behind me.

My heart beat in my ears six more times before I managed a breath.

"Outstanding work, Cadet Maxwell," Sgt. Connelly, my tactics training instructor said as he approached. "Textbook execution."

I watched the guy in the hardsuit shake off the rubber bullet impacts and the woman collecting her gear from a nearby table.

Just another day at the academy...