



# **CATAPULT**

by  
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*For Lena*  
*For your constant encouragement*





## CHAPTER | 01

*WHAM!*

Kingston's motorcycle slid to an abrupt stop on the pavement. His head snapped up to view an accident still in progress. It happened in seconds even though it felt like slow motion. He watched as a sedan slammed into the front of a van. The car rotated four times in the center of the road, hopped the curb, and rammed directly into a streetlight, sending sparks in all directions. The van rolled sluggishly forward then halted on the opposite side of the road. All was quiet until Kingston commanded his Bluetooth-enabled helmet to dial 911. He parked and hopped off his bike in one smooth movement. His chest tightened as he walked over to the sedan.

A woman's voice clucked through the built-in speaker in his helmet. "Nine-one-one, what's your emergency?"

He shivered. The December night was colder than normal around the outskirts of downtown Oakland. He reluctantly flipped up the visor on his helmet and checked the street signs. "There's been an accident on Seventh and Adeline."

"Were you involved in it, sir?"

"No," said Kingston as he approached the first car.

"Can you describe the vehicles that were involved?"

"A silver sedan and a white van."

“Is anybody hurt, sir?”

“Not sure. Let me check.”

As Kingston reached the first car, he found a frail elderly woman with white-blue hair who looked as though she could barely see over the steering wheel. The engine was whining, so Kingston got into the passenger side and turned off the car. She was unconscious, breathing and leaning forward on an airbag. A small trickle of blood was coming out of her nose. She was probably around his grandfather Papa Juan’s age, early seventies. She had a nice face just like his Nana. At least that’s what his five-year-old memory of his grandmother told him.

“Sir, are you still on the line?”

“Yeah, an older lady is hurt pretty bad. Want me to get her out?”

Kingston exited the passenger side and walked to the driver’s side, but the operator’s voice stopped his hand before he reached the driver’s-side door. “Is the car smoking or on fire?”

“No,” he replied.

“Then wait for the paramedics to arrive. What about the other vehicle?”

“Hold on, checking...”

Kingston strode across the cold, damp street to find no driver for the windowless van. The keys were still in the ignition, slightly swinging back and forth.

“Not sure where the driver is.”

“Ambulance is en route. Should arrive in five minutes,” said the operator. “Sir, can you stay with the vehicles until the police arrive?”

“Yeah,” said Kingston, even though his answer should’ve been no since he was going to be late again to his graveyard shift as a part-time security officer at the Port of Oakland.

“Your name, please?”

“Kingston Rais.”

After the operator hung up, Kingston stepped to the front of the van and leaned on the hood then commanded his phone to dial his coworker Rustic. “Hey. You want the good news or the bad news?”

“Wild guess, you’re gonna be late, again,” Rustic said.

“Yeah, a little. Could you cover?”

“Probably. Everything okay?”

“Yep, I’m fine. But this old lady isn’t. Not sure if she should’ve been driv—”

*CLANG!*

Kingston’s breath quickened. He stood up and walked around the vehicle to see the back of a large, beefy man with a gun in his hand. Kingston quickly took cover and flattened himself against the side of the van. He heard the man huffing loudly and rattling off expletives as he stomped across the street to the sedan.

He crouched down by the bumper and caught a glimpse of the red-faced man using the barrel of the gun to move the head of the lady.

“Oh boy,” Kingston wheezed out.

“What?” Rustic asked.

“I found the other driver. Gotta go.”

“King—”

Kingston hung up. His thoughts went wild. Adrenaline rushed through his body like a wildfire. What could he do? How could he save this lady? He pushed down a cough. He didn’t have time for an asthma attack. He ripped the inhaler out of his pocket and sucked in the medicated air ferociously.

Kingston then realized, as he stuffed his inhaler back in his pocket, he did have something. He made his way around to the driver's side of the van and quietly opened the door, then he slid into the driver's seat. He turned on the ignition, yanked the gearshift into drive, and slammed his foot down on the accelerator. The van lurched forward, sputtered, and picked up speed. It was no Lamborghini, but it was moving.

The driver of the van yelled and clumsily started running after it. There was no way that he would catch the van on foot. The man lost steam and started shooting at the van. A bullet whizzed and clanked against the back door. Kingston ducked down and kept the steering wheel straight, popping up only to make sure he wasn't going to hit anything. Sirens wailed in the distance, sending the message that help was on the way. Kingston glanced at the rearview mirror and caught a glimpse of the guy running away, down another block.

"Call Rustic," Kingston commanded his phone.

The line barely rang once before Rustic answered. "What is—"

Kingston cut him off. "Hey, sorry. Had to deal with the other driver."

"You trying to give me a full-blown heart attack?" Rustic grumbled out.

"I'll tell you the whole story when I get to work."

Rustic let out a slow sigh and said, "Fine. Hurry it up."

"All right. See you in a few," Kingston said as he parked the van behind the lady's car and hopped out just as the police and paramedics arrived.

Kingston pulled off his helmet and rattled off all the details to the police. He was good at seeing the details. "He was a heavy man, two hundred eighty pounds or so," Kingston said.



“And wore a white, ripped T-shirt and black jeans. He had a mustache and short-cropped hair. The man took off running down Magnolia and couldn’t have made it too far. Looks like the van is full of stolen electronics.”

Once he’d made his statement and the elderly lady was loaded into the ambulance, Kingston put on his helmet and hopped back onto his motorcycle.

By the time Kingston rolled into the Port of Oakland, he was fifty minutes late. He parked next to a covered container that served as the security office. The hum of thirty-five different screens marking every angle of the port greeted his eyes.

Rustic appeared in his line of sight by stretching his wiry arms up. His dark uniform was always baggy and wrinkled. His salt-and-pepper hair was pressed down on his head where he normally wore his lucky ball cap. He always had a mischievous grin on his face. Rustic may not look like much, but he was fast and could outmaneuver anyone. He’d been working security at the port for over twenty years, right after he finished his active duty with the military as a member of a special ops team inside the Navy SEALs.

He wished he could follow in Rustic’s footsteps. Unfortunately, his “condition” disqualified him. However, Rustic had trained Kingston how to think on his feet and use his strengths to his advantage.

“It’s about time your butt got here,” said Rustic.

Kingston half smiled as he pushed his hand back through his dark, thick hair, shoving a lock behind his ear. He spilled out a quick version of what happened and ended with “Can you believe that he was stupid enough to shoot at his own van?”

“I don’t remember you being bulletproof. Trust me, it hurts

to get shot. Headline: YOU COULD DIE. You gotta be more careful,” exclaimed Rustic.

“I can’t help it. I can’t just pass by. I’d regret it.”

“Regret is better than being in the grave. What’s wrong with you, son? It’s like you got some sort of inner radar that leads you to every person on the planet who’s in distress,” poked Rustic.

Kingston shrugged and said, “At least it’s exciting.”

Rustic smiled and wagged his finger. “Death’s not that exciting.”

Kingston smirked as he scanned his key card into the computer indicating that he had begun his evening shift. “That would be more entertaining than watching containers just sit there.”

Rustic reached over and squeezed Kingston’s shoulder then lit up a cigarette as he burst out the door. “Have a great night, King Rais!”

“Not sure if you know this, but those things cause cancer,” Kingston replied, pointing at the cigarette.

“You know, nowadays everything does. I want to enjoy my life, not follow their rules,” Rustic chuckled.

Kingston watched as a legend in his own right walked away. He would never say it out loud, but Rustic was a better dad to him than his own.

Kingston sighed and picked up a rubber band from the pile on the desk. He stretched it out and aimed it at one of the monitors. The rubber band sailed across and hit the screen smack dab in the middle. His old friend, boredom, entered the room. When he was a kid, he didn’t think that this would be his future. He always thought he would do something meaningful with his life. But here he was, package delivery boy by day and security guard by night. His dad made it explicitly clear that if he didn’t do well in school, then he’d have no future. As hard as he tried,

school was never his thing. Truthfully, he had no idea what his thing was. In fact, the only reason that he had this job was because his dad was high up in the port authority. He was fulfilling his dad's unspoken prediction of what a nothing he would become. Nothing his dad was proud of.

The screens flickered. Kingston came back to reality. He grabbed a pair of night-vision goggles and a horse tranquilizer gun that had been left behind from a previous shipment of horses; it'd be the perfect weapon if he needed one. This was his only break from the monotony of the night. Making rounds wasn't really necessary since the entire port was wired with alarms and cameras, but he liked to turn it into a game of sorts. If the head of security or his dad, the director of maritime at the Port of Oakland, caught wind of the fact that he had turned this lame security job into a race against the clock, then he might be in serious trouble. Thankfully, containers don't speak, and Kingston knew exactly when to walk through the security camera feed. At least he could pretend that his life was exciting he thought as he pushed out into the chilly air.

