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Photo #3 Prompt #2

Title: **IN MY SIGHTS**

Author: A.R. Moler

By AR Moler (written for the LiAW goodreads project)

“When will I see you again?” asked Ben Sullivan.

Under the spray of the shower, Tyler Czuba ran his hand down over his lover’s soap slicked chest. “I’m not sure.”

“Give me an estimate. Later this week? Next week?”

“End of the week, I think,” Tyler answered. Last night, in Ben’s apartment, had been one of the rare times they actually stayed together all the way until morning.

“If we lived in the same place, we’d see more of each other even when your schedule sucks.”

“Too risky.” A thread of worry tightened Tyler’s chest. They’d been seeing each for almost five years now, intermittently, secretly, guiltily... There shouldn’t be a reason for the guilt. Neither one of them was married or even dating anyone else. It was all about the job. If someone knew the SWAT team leader was fucking a guy? Tyler didn’t really want to consider the fall out.

“It’s hard being your dirty little secret. I feel like we’re living in the 1950’s.”

“Sorry,” Tyler murmured. He snuggled up to the wet heat of Ben’s back and nipped at Ben’s neck as he held him tight. “Maybe someday.” This was an old argument. In the beginning Ben didn’t seem to mind the sneaking around, the pretense of being nothing more than friends. Lately though... Tyler harbored an uneasy feeling that at some point Ben was going to ask him to make a choice, him or the job. He didn’t want to choose. He loved his job and he cared deeply about Ben too.

“Any chance you’re going to make it to the bike club shindig on Saturday?” asked Ben.

“Hopefully.” It was how the two of them had met. Tyler had intense memories of that first day they saw each other, of casting surreptitious peeks at the man with the blond hair and the magnificent ass. Their relationship may have started as a clandestine hook-up, but it had become an awful lot more.

Tyler gently spun Ben around and backed him up against the tiled wall, devouring his mouth. Ben’s hand slipped between them, curling around both of their cocks, stroking them slowly. Already half-hard, the slide of hot skin on skin filled his prick and he groaned into Ben’s mouth. Tyler closed his own hand around Ben’s and increased the speed. It only took a few more minutes before they were both splattering cum up their bellies.

“Mmm, definitely a good way to start the morning,” whispered Ben.

Watching Tyler dress, Ben admired the raven dark hair and olive skin. Who knew Slavic genes came in such a beautiful package. Ben cast a lustful glance at the hard ropy muscles of his lover. Ben was no slouch. He hit the gym twice a week and biked twelve to fifteen miles most weekends, but he was never going to have the absolutely ripped body of the SWAT team leader. For just a moment Ben allowed himself to loathe the job that made Ty hide their relationship. If ever there was a batch of guys with “testosterone poisoning” it was the SWAT team, but realistically, it was the twenty-first century. Ben thought the chances of Tyler losing his job over his sexual choices were pretty slim. If only he could get Tyler to agree.

“What’s your day look like?” asked Tyler.

“Hardware upgrades. They’re sending me out to one of the branches to work on their end of the network. It’s fairly routine stuff, even if it’s time consuming.” Ben worked for a big banking conglomerate doing IT. “How ‘bout you?”

“Unless there’s a call out we’re doing some rappelling drills.” Tyler pulled up his jeans.

“Yee-hah, dangling off the side of the building while carrying weapons; that always sounds like a recipe for disaster to me.”

“Which is why we *practice*,” Tyler teased as he tucked in his shirt.

A few minutes later Ty was heading for the door. Ben grabbed hold of Ty’s arm and stopped him for a moment. “Be safe.”

“Always.”

“I love you.”

Ty cupped his hands around Ben's face and kissed him slowly. "See you in a few days." Then he walked out the door.

Ben sighed. One of these days maybe he'd get Ty to actually say the words.

"Hey Zub, we need to requisition more 0.308 ammo," said Paul Whitson as he walked into Tyler's office.

Tyler looked up from his computer to gaze at the short compact sniper. "That's Captain Zub to you, squirt," he joked. Whitson was a recent addition to the team, nearly a decade younger than Tyler. The stress level was so high on actual operations that down time in between involved lots of teasing and messing around.

There was an eye roll from Whitson, followed by a snarky, "Sir, yes sir."

"Have you seen Siegel this afternoon? I need..." Tyler's sentence was cut off by the tiny sound of a siren at his hip. It was the text signal for a call out. He pulled the phone off his belt and read the message.

BANK ROBBERY IN PROGRESS. POSSIBLE HOSTAGES. BRIEFING IN 5.

Tyler glanced back up at Paul, who had sobered. "Gear up."

The entire team would assemble in the briefing room in the requisite time and unless there was a resolution in the next fifteen to twenty minutes they would head out to the scene.

It had all happened so damn fast. One minute Ben was having a casual conversation with a female teller that he knew slightly from a couple of other site visits, the next there was shouting and men with guns in the bank. One man dashed through the open room, spray paint can in hand, dousing all the visible camera mounts.

All the customers were quickly herded off to the windowless side of the room by two of the men as three others began shouting directions about putting money in bags at the tellers. Janine, the female teller that Ben had been talking to, tried to comply. She picked up the bag that was thrust at her and began to pull money from the drawer. Ben could see that her hands were shaking and he reached to help her, rationalizing the sooner the bank robbers got what they wanted, the sooner they would leave.

"Hands off! I want her doing it," the man in front of Janine shouted. He rammed the butt end of his shotgun through the counter opening. It smashed into Ben's face, catching him across one

eye and his nose. He stumbled backward, blinded by the pain and fell on his ass. Blood gushed from his nose as he lay sprawled on the floor.

There was another shout from across the room.

“Who the fuck tripped the alarm? There’s cops outside!”

“Shut the door! Now!”

Ben lost track of exactly what else was going on as he was dragged to his feet and shoved over in the direction of where the customers had been herded, a gun against his back. A hard push landed him back on the floor, blood still flowing from his nose. The vision in his left eye was kind of fuzzy too.

I’m gonna die, I gonna get killed by some fucking bank robber, Ben thought.

“How many are out there?” one of the men demanded of his buddy.

“I see two cop cars already and I hear more sirens. Fucking hell, SWAT’s probably next.”

The mention of SWAT made Ben think. Tyler was working today. That probably meant his team would get the call. *Please, oh please God, let Ty get me out of this alive,* Ben prayed.

When the SWAT van parked, Tyler immediately began giving orders to assess the situation. They needed access to whatever video feeds the bank had, as well as information from the officers who were first responders.

A uniform cop with a name tag that read Ives was sent to Tyler.

“What do we know?” asked Tyler.

“Roughly thirty minutes ago a silent alarm was triggered. My partner and I were less than two minutes away on another call. When we arrived there were shots exchanged and the one suspect we saw coming out the door immediately went back inside. About two minutes later, an older woman was shoved through the door. We got her safely to cover. She claims there are four suspects, all in plastic masks, all armed,” reported Ives.

“What about hostages? It is the middle of the day.”

“At least a handful. She couldn’t give a number. Only that there were a few customers in the bank and some staff.”

“Any idea why they let her go?”

“She was the messenger. They gave her a slip of paper saying they would kill the hostages if they weren’t allowed to go free.”

Tyler made a low a grunt of frustration. It wasn’t like this was something he hadn’t seen before, but it seldom made it any easier. “Just great. Thanks. Stay close I’ll probably have more questions.”

Ives nodded.

Ducking back into the van, Tyler went toward his communications officer, Caldwell. “We have eyes yet?”

“Only sort of. These guys had a game plan. They disabled all but one camera. Judging from the angle and the limited view, I suspect the lens is partly hidden by a light fixture housing. They probably didn’t know it was there.”

“Is Vodder on the roof yet?” Tyler asked.

“Yes. He looking for a place to drill through, but it’s an older building and there maybe be too many layers of ventilation and wiring to find a good spot.”

“Understood. Let me see what little we’ve got so far.”

The communications man spun the video monitor slightly so Tyler had a better view.

It was a sucky angle, but some information was better than none. Tyler counted seven people seated on the floor along the wall, five women and two men. He could only see two of the people well. A woman who looked to be in her forties had a hand on a blond man, whose head was bent forward, hands holding his face. It took a moment for Ty to puzzle out what was going on between those two, then he realized that there was blood all over the man’s hands and splattered down his shirt. Gunshot wound?

“We’re going to need a paramedic for that one,” said Tyler. The blond man raised his head and gave Tyler a decent view of his face. Tyler’s heart just about stopped. It was Ben. No. Oh fuck no. Tyler clenched his jaw, willing himself not to have a freak out. He thought back to the morning. Ben had said something about on-site computer work. Tyler cursed himself for not putting together the name of the bank and Ben’s job sooner. Ben usually spent most of his time in a corporate high-rise. Aw hell, why today? Why this bank? It didn’t matter how good Tyler and his team were, there were times when the hostages didn’t make it out alive. That thought just about broke Tyler’s iron control. Why the hell hadn’t he told Ben he loved him? Was he going to regret that omission forever?

“Captain?” said Caldwell.

“That’s a lot of hostages.” It was a mildly stupid comment but it was the only thing that Tyler could think of to cover his gut-knotting fear.

“Yeah, I know. The negotiator’s supposed to get here any minute now.”

“Good.” Tyler couldn’t take his eyes off the screen. He tried to analyze what he saw with some sort of rationality. One of Ben’s eyes was swollen and the blood seemed to be coming from his nose. The woman had a wad of tissues and appeared to be making an attempt to stop the bleeding. Tyler speculated that one of the gunmen must have struck Ben in the face.

There was a knock of the door of the van and Tyler straightened up from his crouch near the computer and opened it. A bearded man in his mid to late forties stood there. His temples were touched with gray and he leaned on a cane.

“Hey Griff, I’m glad to see you,” said Tyler. He knew Griff Rieckert from some previous cases. The ex-FBI man had transitioned to hostage negotiation for the local police department after being critically injured in the line of duty, and left with a permanent disability. Tyler beckoned Griff inside and quickly brought him up to speed.

“Anybody actually talk to these people yet?” asked Rieckert.

“No. That’s what you’re for.”

“Okay, see if you can get them to pick up a throw phone and let’s get this rolling.”

An hour crept by, then two. A little progress was made. One woman had been released in exchange for bottled water and sandwiches. When the suspect on the phone asked for a truck, Rieckert dawdled and asked numerous questions about type and size. It was all of course a delaying tactic. Vodder had no luck at installing a second video feed via the roof but instead found a way to thread a snake cam through the casing of a window after he rappelled over the edge of the roof and dangled upside down.

With the second set of images, Caldwell helped to confirm that there were indeed four gunmen. Two held assault shotguns and the other two had handguns. Another hour dragged by and one of the gunmen was seen groping one of the women. The second male hostage tried to object and a gun was shoved against his temple. With tempers and patience stretching thin, it was becoming probable that the situation wasn’t going to end peacefully, so Tyler briefed his men for a breach and containment. The plan was to launch flash-bang grenades through the front windows as a diversionary tactic, Whitson would drop the gunman who had been intermittently visible, then the team would breach through the rear door and hopefully take out all gunmen before any hostages got shot. It was risky, but choices were dwindling. The suspect who had pressed the gun to a hostage’s head was visibly agitated.

Fully geared up in tactical vests, helmets and safety glasses, weapons at the ready, the team lined up behind a tactical shield. They would use a hydraulic ram to break the rear entrance door open. Vodder would take point with Czuba right behind him. Caldwell, watching the camera feeds in the van, would give them information on changes to the situation.

“Do you have the solution?” Czuba asked over the coms.

“No solution yet,” answered Whitson.

Another couple of minutes dragged by, then Whitson said. “I have the solution.”

“You have the green light,” said Czuba.

The thud-crash of the grenade launch was followed by splintering scream of tearing metal as the door was torn open.

SWAT flooded into the bank, spreading out almost instantly. Tyler scanned to his left and squeezed off a shot at the gunman who was staggering in his direction. The man went down and Tyler strode forward putting a boot on the man’s chest, aiming his assault rifle at the perp. The man moaned faintly.

Around him, Tyler could hear the calls of “all clear.” He crooked a finger at Vodder to come handcuff the man on the floor. “This one’s still alive. You can let the EMT’s deal with him.”

“Yes, sir.”

As Tyler walked toward the far corner where the hostages were huddled, he stripped off his gloves. He could see Ben’s blond head bent forward, pressed to his knees, arms wrapped around his body, shaking.

Setting his rifle on the floor, Tyler knelt beside him and gently rubbed his hand along Ben’s shoulders. “Ben? Hon? It’s over.”

Slowly Ben lifted his head. He looked so terrorized it about broke Tyler’s heart. Right eye swollen nearly shut, dried blood smeared across the lower half of his face and all down the front of his shirt, Ben stared at Tyler. “T-ty?”

“You’re safe Ben.” Tyler sat, and hauled Ben into his lap, kissing him very carefully. “I love you Ben. Oh God, I thought I was gonna lose you.”

“Are they... is it...” Ben mumbled, tears running down his cheeks. He clung to Ty.

“It’s over babe, it’s really over.” Tyler pulled off his safety glasses and dropped them. As he rocked his lover, he kissed his way down the side of Ben’s face. The snuffling sobs were making Ben’s nose start to bleed again. “Are you hurt anywhere besides the black eye and the bloody nose?”

“No.”

“Good. How ‘bout we get out of here and let the EMT’s take a look at you to make sure?”

“Kay.”

Tyler gently eased Ben from his lap and helped him to stand. Ben was still shaking pretty hard.

“Need any help Captain?” asked Vodder.

It was a simple question, yet somehow not one Tyler was expecting. “No, I’ve got it.” Keeping a firm grip on Ben, Tyler led him out to the array of ambulances on the street.

Ben was laid on a stretcher in the back of the ambulance so the EMT could try to stop the nose bleed. Tyler held Ben’s hand as he was examined. “Is he all right?” he asked the medic.

“I’ve almost got the bleeding under control. He could probably use an X-ray, just to make sure there’s no break around the eye socket. I’m not sure about the nose either,” said the EMT. “Ben, you’re still shaking pretty hard. How ‘bout a blanket?”

Ben nodded. The EMT spread a blanket over top of him.

“I’m not letting you out of my sight for a while,” said Tyler.

Whitson stepped up into the ambulance. “The body count is two. The other two are en route to the hospital. No word yet on their condition.”

“Thanks for the update.”

“Is your partner gonna be okay?” Whitson asked.

“I think so.” It felt disturbingly weird not to deny the relationship.

“Are you going to the hospital with him?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay, I’ll pass the word.” Whitson turned and jumped down.

“Hey Paul, does it matter that... that my SO is a guy?”

“Zub, why the hell would I care who you sleep with? I’d be more worried about what the brass thinks that you didn’t stand down because you had a personal stake in one of the hostages.”

“There is that problem.”

“Go take care of your boyfriend. Worry about getting reamed a new one by the higher ups later.” Whitson stepped down out of the ambulance.”

“Let me help,” said Tyler. They were back in Ben’s apartment and Tyler was having a hard time comprehending that it had only been about ten hours since they had last been here. Ben was struggling to strip out of his heavily blood stained shirt. Tyler grabbed Ben’s hands and held them.

Ben looked at their hands. “I’ve still got blood all under my fingernails,”

Tyler hugged Ben’s hands to his chest. “It could have been so much worse.”

“How do you face stuff like that every day?”

“Training and I’m generally one of the guys with a big gun in my hand and six teammates watching my back.” Tyler slowly let go of Ben’s hands and finished unbuttoning Ben’s shirt for him, easing it off the rest of the way. There was dried blood on Ben’s chest where the blood had soaked through.

“Yeah, I guess there is that,” Ben said.

“How ‘bout we take a shower and get you cleaned up?”

Ben nodded.

In the bathroom, Ben stood looking in the mirror as the water in the shower warmed up. Tyler rested his chin on Ben’s shoulder from behind and wrapped both arms around Ben’s body. Ben touched his cheekbone. The swelling around his eye was developing into amazing shades of black-purple.

“I would have bet on my nose being broken,” Ben said.

“The doctor seemed to think your eye socket caught more of the blow, hence the hairline fracture there.” Tyler nuzzled into the side of Ben’s neck.

“I don’t guess you can put a cast on a broken face.”

“No, but if it was worse, you’d be having a plastic surgeon wire your bones back together.”

“Why does that sound like you know way too much about that?”

“It happened to one of the guys on the team. Come get in the shower.” Tyler guided Ben under the water. He gently helped wash the dried blood off the various parts of Ben’s body, watching red-brown stained water flow away. Every time Tyler touched his lover, it twisted the knot in his gut a little tighter. He’d been on ops where the hostages were critically injured. Tyler tilted his head and kissed Ben. “I love you. I love you and I should have told you a long time ago. I

thought I was scared, but I didn't understand what scared meant until I saw you in that bank today half covered in blood.”

“It was... bad,” Ben whispered.

Tyler stood holding him for a long number of minutes, before they finally got out.

Back in the bedroom, Ben sat on the bed and pulled on a clean pair of boxers. He glanced at Ty, who was coming back out of the bathroom after returning to hang up his towel. Ben still felt thoroughly rattled by the whole set of events and his face hurt. He wondered what his chances of convincing Ty to stay the night were.

Tyler sat down beside Ben. “Talk to me.”

“Isn't that usually my line?”

“Yeah, I guess it is. Still, talk to me.”

“I wish...” Ben hesitated. Ty had obviously been through a lot today too. What right did he have to beg for more?”

“If you're feeling pretty rocky right now, I get it. Most people only get that ‘am I gonna die?’ moment in the middle of a car accident, rather than from a gun to the head. I am right here. You and I are gonna be attached at the hip for the next couple of days until I'm sure you're going to be okay.”

“You're not going back to your place tonight?” Ben asked slowly.

“Hell no. There's no way I'm leaving you alone tonight.” Ty hugged Ben close. “I outted myself to the whole team and to my amazement, they really don't care much. I got my ass chewed by IA for not following protocol but even they were a lot gentler than they could have been. I got a three day suspension without pay. Like I give a fuck about that at this point. I love you Ben. I want to come home to you every night.”

Bio:

A.R. Moler is a chemistry professor at a community college, a homeschooling mom and an avid science fiction fan. She is a devotee of first hand research for her writing whenever possible and to this end has - learned to fire a handgun, been rappelling, ridden with both EMS and the police, flown a helicopter, bought a motorcycle and learned to ride it. She has traveled to nearly all the places where her stories are set and taken hundreds of photos for documentation. She has been writing since her high school years, but only recently has become published. Her website can be found at <http://armoler.com>

Her blog is www.playdohstoichiometry.blogspot.com and is entitled Playdoh, Legos and Stoichiometry. When asked why such a name for her blog, she commented that it reflects 3 of the many phases of her life. Her daughter is 8 years old and is an avid playdoh artist, her son is 12 and owns enough Legos to fill a 55-gallon drum and the stoichiometry--one of the most challenging topics to many chemistry students. Her husband's only contribution to chemistry is brewing beer.