Murals on the Run

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

Kellan Price stood back from the plaza at City Hall with his hands shoved deep in his jacket pockets, trying to look like someone waiting for a rideshare, or meeting a friend, or killing time. The same harmless nothing everyone performed in public now.

He wasn’t harmless tonight.

Above him, the façade of Austin City Hall was a calm slab of civic stone, solemn and unbothered. People took selfies in front of it. Families brought their kids to splash in the fountain during the day. Couples held hands under the building’s clean lines as if government was still something you could trust like weather.

Kellan’s throat tightened.

A few steps away, a man in a knit cap pretended to scroll. Two women stood shoulder to shoulder, laughing too loudly at something neither of them found funny. A group of three college-aged guys drifted as if they’d gotten lost on the way to a bar, their eyes cutting up to the building, down again, then up again.

More were arriving, not in a rush, not like a crowd—like a leak. A body here. A body there. Space filling quietly.

Reading sample — continued

Cairo Vale was nowhere visible. That was the point.

Kellan checked the time without raising his wrist, reading the reflection of his phone screen in the dark glass of a nearby kiosk. If his pulse had a sound, it would’ve been the click of a cursor over a “publish” button.

A police cruiser rolled past on the street behind the plaza, slow as a warning. Another sat idling at the edge of the block, headlights off, the shape of it a quiet threat. Austin had grown good at quiet threats. They were cheaper than loud ones, and they trained people better.

Kellan forced himself to breathe through his nose.

He felt watched. Not by the obvious eyes. Not even by the cameras. By the system—the invisible sense that every place had a memory now, and that memory didn’t belong to you.

He had been a podcaster for five years. That wasn’t a long time, but it was long enough to learn the most painful truth about attention: people didn’t want the whole story. They wanted a piece they could swallow fast, something that didn’t stick in their throats.