

## Bradford

### Chapter 2 – A Promotion

**“There were over twelve million people in San Pablo and all the crazies seemed to end up in the 17 East district.”**

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“Officer Scott.”

Bradford sat alone on a row of six seats, outside his captain’s office. Not the captain for his official police job, he’d never met him. This was William Cottingham wanting to see him and see him urgently.

“Officer Scott !”

Known affectionately as ‘Wild Bill,’ his captain was a famous hero of the San Pablo police, he’s rid the city of several notorious gang leaders. Why on earth did Wild Bill want to see him ? Not for borrowing his car, more likely to discuss the way his recent mission had ended. Bradford realised the secretary had been calling his name.

“Sorry, yes that’s me.”

Of course it was him, there was no one else there.

“He’ll see you now.”

“Everyone normally just calls me Bradford.”

She was smiling and opening the door for him, an expensive looking door, made of real wood. No fibre board once you got above the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Building 47. She closed the door behind him and Wild Bill, his captain, the big boss of PD489 was approaching, his hand out to be shaken.

“Good to see you Officer Scott, or can I call you Bradford ?”

No shouting, no uniforms waiting to arrest him, maybe, just maybe, he wasn’t going to be spending the rest of his life in a cell.

“Yes please, Officer Scott always sounds like someone calling my father.”

“Yes, a good man from what I hear and well thought of. You must miss him a great deal.”

“He’s the reason I became a cop. He died doing the job, it’s what he would have wanted.”

Bill Cottingham was opening the door of his personal mini bar and pulling out two glasses and a few bottles. Bradford sat down without being asked to and relaxed. He’d never heard of anyone being given a drink, before being accused of treason.

“Are you on that bike of yours ?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Ok, so just fizzy water for you.”

A glass of water and ice was pushed over the desk towards him.

“Your childhood must have been tough ?”

“Not many luxuries Sir, but we had the essentials.”

Bill sat in his large and luxurious office chair and looked across the desk at him.

“They still promote the uniformed officers to the top posts you know ? I think it’s seen as some kind of compensation for all the years of danger and crap pay.”

“And twenty five years of wearing polyester Sir.”

Bill was laughing and sipping his drink, difficult to do at the same time.

“Oh yes, I remember the uniforms. I still have to put one on for the occasional official reception.”

Bradford doubted if Wild Bill wore polyester any more, but he drank his fizzy water and waited for his boss to get to the reason for him being there.

"I noticed that you took Gupta Saunders on your last mission. Good, the lad needs experience, though his medical bills might bankrupt the department. What is your opinion of Gupta?"

Bradford had seen Gupta over the two days since the mission and he'd have a scar for life, which seemed to please him.

"Brave sir and ready for anything. Definitely the sort of trainee we need."

"And Officer Maria Gonsalves, what do you think of her? I only ask because Gupta has said a few things about your recent mission."

Here it came! Why had he allowed a sub and her two children to leave the bunkers?

"May I know the nature of those comments Sir?"

Bill was looking awkward and fidgeting. Bradford noticed that he filled his leather chair rather too well, desk jobs had their drawbacks.

"Normally I'd never listen to gossip Bradford, but as I'm looking for a new squad leader. You know how it is surely? Gupta says something and then someone else adds their comment."

"Our record as a team speaks for itself Sir."

So it wasn't about the woman and the children, Bradford felt relieved and ready to defend Maria. So he'd lowered his weapon and walked away, a five foot tall female and two kids were hardly combatants. The woman had bothered him, she'd thanked him as he left and then blessed him. An old Spanish blessing, he'd had to look it up. That made him uncomfortable, it blurred the lines.

"Yes of course." Said Wild Bill.

He was jabbing his fingers at his computer and looking at their record.

"Every year, yes you and Maria have successfully completed all missions, that is a record. Part of the reason that I'd like to promote one of you."

Bill leant back in his chair and gave him a second to digest the information. So it had come to it, it was going to be either Maria or him who got the promotion and the big pay rise.

"Maria is a first rate operative of PD489 and I feel lucky to have her as a partner."

"Gupta has mentioned her going off mission, though he praised your ability to follow mission parameters. A few others have talked of her going, how was it put? Yes, 'off-piste,' on occasions. You're with her on these missions Bradford. What is your opinion?"

City West and Seafront needed a new squad leader, had done since the last one had left to have a baby. All he had to do was agree with the comments about Maria and the job could be his. All that extra money, he could even buy a new bike. It wasn't even lying, Maria could be a pain to keep focused. It almost amazed him to hear his own voice;

"I have never noticed Maria deviating from our orders. As far as I'm concerned, she's a first rate operative."

"Even if that answer costs you the promotion?"

"Yes Sir."

Bill picked up a piece of paper and handed it to Bradford. It was an internal memo to the office of the President from Wild Bill. Cleared for top security rated personnel only, but Bill had just given it to him to read.

'I am unsure if day to day grunt work is our best use of Maria Gonsalves. Long term I see her as running either our Intelligence Department or the Office of Data Retrieval and Analysis.'

There were a few more lines, most of them complimenting Maria and effectively saying she was too good to be Bradford's partner.

"You seem to actually love the grunt work Bradford." Said Bill.

"I do Sir and I really want this promotion. I also agree that Maria would be an ideal person to head up intelligence."

"That memo is our secret Bradford, I know I can rely on you. I'd quite like you to start as squad leader on Monday if possible. Can you do that for me?"

Monday was insane, he'd never even met most of the City Central crew, even though they were only one floor down.

"I will if it's important, but I have no idea how City Central operate. Ideally I'd need a week or so just sitting in with whoever is covering the job." Said Bradford.

Again Wild Bill said nothing and just gave him a letter, addressed to Bradford Scott. It offered him the role of Squad Leader for City East and Badlands. Badlands had been added almost as a joke, to cover the desert and scrub east of the airport. No one who'd ever carried out a mission in the area thought it was a joke.

"But this is my current squad sir?"

"Read on, the salary might interest you."

There were the standard terms and condition, except that the new job was full time and he'd be given a cover story for friends and family.

'Only a marital partner may be told about your employment with PD489 and then only after security clearance.'

That usually meant never. There were people who'd been married for years and their partners thought they worked long hours for someone in parking control. The salary though was the real shock, three times what he currently earned. It did leave the question of where Chris Dudley, the current squad leader was going? Odd name for a guy who looked as Japanese as Sumo and Saki, but San Pablo was a melting pot for all sorts.

"Thank you Sir, I won't let you down. I'm not a desk job person though, I'll be out there with my team every day."

"That is what I want you to do. Chris is a nice guy, but he never met half his people and most feel they have no direction at all. People like you and Maria are left to organise yourselves, even borrowing my car."

Bradford felt the room chill a little, but Wild Bill was still smiling.

"You'll have three hundred and twenty people to look after Bradford and most of them are going to be feeling unappreciated. Get out there with them and turn them into a team."

"I will Sir."

"I need to see Chris, he's probably waiting outside. My secretary has an envelope full of papers for you and she'll need your signature on a few things."

That was it, he'd been given the opportunity of a life time and now he had to get on with it.

"I'd like to let Maria know, before anyone else tells her. If that is ok?" He asked.

"Yes of course, the official internal memo will be going out in an hour or so."

They shook hands at the door and Bradford now commanded a team of over three hundred. True most of them were part timers, but it was still quite an impressive force. Chris Dudley was on the same row of chairs that he'd been sat on and they exchanged a smile and a nod. It was awkward, Chris had arranged the party after Bradford became a member of the squad. Chris was a decent guy, but Wild Bill was right, he was useless as a boss.

"A contract to sign, your medical cover and of course your waiver of any right to workplace privacy."

It sounded so routine, but Bradford was effectively signing away all his rights as a citizen of San Pablo. He didn't even read the documents, few did. He signed and was given a thick A4 envelope. "Congratulation Squad Leader." Said the secretary.

"Thank you."

He opened the envelope in the lift. First document was a letter with the Presidential Seal on it. Bradford Scott was employed by internal security and was to receive complete co-operation from all other government departments and it was illegal to incarcerate him, without presidential approval. It was his get out of jail card and would go in his safe at home. There had been rare incidences where the police had misunderstood the nature of an incident, but the letter was to be used as a last resort. Then there was his medical insurance, which was now unlimited and covered up to four family members or designated persons. He was putting his leg over his bike, as he got to the last document, his new cover story.

"Fucking Sanitation !"

Two passing secretaries jumped at his outburst and the laughter which followed. Bradford was now a senior executive of the Sanitation Department of San Pablo. He'd quite liked being a cop and Maria was a teacher most days, but Sanitation !? He laughed as he realised he was now officially in the garbage and pest clearing business. His sister would love it of course, a proper senior job with decent prospects. He used his phone instead of starting his bike.

"Maria, we need to talk. It's half twelve now, so how about lunch ?"

"Perfect timing, I've been teaching forty stropky kids all morning. There are days when being a supply teacher isn't fun."

"Good, how about Sticky's and I'll pay ?"

"Wow ! Ok, see you there at one."

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Sticky's was a diner known to all the cops in San Pablo. The sign above the door said Ace Diner, but everyone knew it as Sticky's. It was in a bad area of the city, one known to have a bit of a gang problem. There were always at least three or four police vehicles outside Sticky's, so Bradford happily parked his bike right outside. Maria already had a window table and was frantically waving at him. It was a good diner, the food was fantastic for the price, but the neighbourhood put the general public off. Then there was the owner's attitude to general maintenance and hygiene. The large windows had a patina that gave everything viewed through them a hazy look. In one corner there was a bullet hole. So old it had long been forgotten if the protagonist was firing out or firing in. At one point in time, someone had blocked the hole up with putty. Likewise the table weren't cleaned that well and elbows had been known to get stuck to the plastic table coverings. That is how every cop in the City knew the place as Sticky's.

"Are you really paying ?" Asked Maria.

"Yes, I've had some good news."

"Damn, I should have made you take me to somewhere decent. So, the clinic gave you an all clear on the dick rash then ?"

The comment was typical Maria and delivered with enough volume to make half the customers chuckle. Maria didn't look herself though, for one thing she was in a dress. He rarely saw her in her teaching clothes and it was an eye opener.

"Nice legs Maria." He countered.

She blushed and sat down, putting the objects mentioned under the table and well away from his gaze. They ordered and had barely sipped their drinks before the food arrived.

"I like having my lunch paid for, but you must have a reason for wanting to meet up?" Asked Maria.

"Hmmm you'd pay a fortune for food this good in the best parts of town."

She was looking at him and waiting. Bradford realised the problem with having a smart partner, was that there was no evasion and little small talk.

"I've been promoted to squad leader Maria, I start on Monday. Wild Bill is sending out the official memos today."

"So you'll be moving over to City Central?"

"No, Bill has decided to use me to replace Chris Dudley."

She looked happy and Bradford felt relieved.

"Good, Chris was becoming a liability. Does this mean I get a new partner?"

"Actually I still want to go out with you on most missions and I was hoping you might consider coming in on more days."

"Really? I was beginning to get the impression that a few people didn't like my style."

She was giving him her usual grin, but it was obvious that the office gossip about her being 'off-piste,' had reached her.

"Come on Maria, we both know that you'll be Director of something or other, while I'm still digging subs out of bunkers and slums."

"I found something in all that graffiti Bradford, something that could be important."

On any other day he'd have cringed a little. It was Friday though and he was taking Amoe somewhere nice for dinner later. Besides, he was the squad leader now, so he could give Maria a bit of freedom to pursue her ideas.

"What did you find?" He asked.

"I need to show you on my computer. Come over to my place tonight."

He liked her apartment, the condo had a pool. It had been the unofficial squad recreation area for a while, until her neighbours had complained.

"I can't tonight, I'm taking Amoe out to dinner. How about Saturday afternoon?"

"Saturday afternoon it is, bring some nibbles. How are things with Amoe? You seem to see quite a bit of her."

Bradford always felt weird talking about his love life, especially to Maria, who would definitely use it to tease him.

"We're doing alright," he said, "nothing heavy, just enjoying each other's company. Of course, it helps that she's another cop."

"Not any more sunshine! What is your workplace cover story?"

Outside in the street, one cop was trying to ram another cop's face into a wall, it wasn't an unusual occurrence. Bradford was grateful, Maria was distracted for a few seconds. Amoe! He hadn't thought about what to tell her. She was now dating the guy who made sure public toilets were efficiently cleaned. He reached into the now crumpled A4 envelope and gave his cover script to Maria, ignoring all the dire warnings about how confidential it was supposed to be.

"Jeezz Bradford, no one deserves this!"

She was laughing and from the expression on her face, he knew he'd be hearing a lot more from her about his new official occupation.

"I know. My sister will see it as a good sensible job, but I was hoping for something like Professor of English Lit at San Pablo University, but....."

"No, not you Bradford, but neither is this! Just be thankful you never have to actually go into the building, let alone work there."

“The conversation with Amoe tonight is going to be difficult.” He said.

“Tell her you took the job for better pay, everyone can relate to that. I take it you did get a pretty good wage rise?”

He was tempted to tell her, but knew she’d never, ever pay for lunch again.

“I did ok, the money will be useful.”

“Are you taking the afternoon off to celebrate?”

“Actually I have a doctor’s appointment for some tests that were booked months ago.”

“Never mind I’ll get a decent bottle of something for Saturday, you need to celebrate this Bradford.”

Yes he did, he was determined to enjoy the money, perhaps a move to a better area. To hell with the expense, he’d take Amoe to somewhere really expensive.

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Although a doctor’s appointment was technically true, it didn’t really cover the afternoon of testing and tinkering that Bradford knew he was in for. He both dreaded and loved his time at LabSinc4, the people who had transformed his life and some of his body.

‘LabSinc4 – Tomorrow’s Pharmaceuticals Today.’ Said the sign.

Bradford parked his bike right under the sign and headed for the door he knew so well, he’d even been given the door code. Once inside he went through the back of the reception area, making sure he gave Tamara a wave as he passed. Left and he was in a long corridor, room 17c was almost at the end.

“Good afternoon Bradford, right on time as usual.”

“Hi Gillian, another six monthly set of test. Oh joy !”

Gillian McBride was Frankenstein to his monster, though she’d have been furious to hear him actually say that out loud. He had no idea what her qualification were, but large corporation didn’t usually let fools run multi-billion dollar facilities. In the early days he’d called her Doctor, but she’d quickly asked him to call her Gillian. Bradford sat in his usual chair, one of several diagnostic stations in the room. He’d never seen anything like it in the San Pablo Medical Centre, but he’d never seen half the devices Gillian had used on him.

“Lean back Bradford and we’ll do the usual quick scan to see if there are any problems.”

The chair gently lowered his torso, as his feet were brought up. Several bright beams of violet light began to run over his body, as the diagnostics looked for anything amiss. The chair was just the start, there would be blood work and quite a bit of probing and prodding to come. If he was really lucky, Gillian would get him on the treadmill for an hour or so. As usual the scanner made his hip and knee joints tingle. It was something to do with the alterations to give him more strength and he was used to the odd sensation.

“Superficially no problems.” Said Gillian, “Let’s look a little deeper, this might sting a bit Bradford.”

He liked her honesty, it had made him trust her. If Gillian said it would sting, then it would sting. If she said it would hurt like hell, then it hurt like hell. The scanner lights became orange and it felt like someone was scraping his bones with a needle. None of this was official of course, PD489 had just sent him to see the medical people to get some drugs.

“Something to help your stamina and strength.” Chris Dudley had told him. “Just like the stuff athletes aren’t supposed to use.”

It hadn’t stopped there though, Gillian had asked him to allow them to alter a few of his muscles and joints, then there had been surgery to the motor centres of his brain. It all helped him become a more efficient operative and that was all Bradford had been interested in. He’d now lost count of the

individual procedures, all carried out on the pretext of drug trials and using up his own vacation time.

"Just between us." Gillian had told him. "LabSinc4 can make you almost unstoppable, in return for a few favours."

He winced as a pain in his left leg went well beyond just stinging.

"You've suffered trauma to the left tibia recently, we can repair that today." She said

"I almost came in to see you." Said Bradford. "A sub got me with a wrench, hurt like hell for days."

The scanner carried on, reaching his neck and head. As with Maria, he decided to simply break his good news with no preamble.

"I received a promotion today, quite a large pay increase and more responsibility."

He had her attention, she even paused the slow progress of the scanning beams.

"Really ! What is your new role ?"

"Squad leader for City East and Badlands. Over three hundred operatives, though most are only part timers."

There was only one other person in the room, a nurse who usually had little to do with his routine tests. Gillian looked up and nodded towards the door and the nurse left.

"Quite a promotion Bradford. Do you see this helping you carry out favours for us, or hindering ?"

The favours, they had become much more than a few simple tasks to thank them for his alterations. Sometimes he'd been given envelopes full of cash for acquiring certain items, cash that helped him survive on basic cop pay.

"Help definitely ! I'll be working there full time and in charge of my own time."

She smiled and started the scanner moving again.

"Good, I hope LabSinc4 can help you get even further in your career."

He'd met quite a few people at LabSinc4, but Gillian was the soothing voice and the kind touch. She had to be in her fifties and he knew he was being manipulated, but he couldn't help being drawn to her. Then a lightning strike hit the back of his head and he screamed.

"Oh Bradford, you've been hit on the back of your head again. You must try to stop doing that."

They both laughed and she set the scanner to identify the bones that needed attention. She had her hand on his arm, usually that meant something painful was on the way.

"You've a slight fracture of the tibia and a hairline skull fracture Bradford." She Said. "Any normal person would have been put in hospital be either of those. Now you have control of your work time, I'd like you to come in for monthly tests. Can you do that for me ?"

"Yes, if you think it's necessary."

"And I'm afraid it's the treadmill next, I want to look at your tolerance to strenuous exercise."

He sighed and waited for the chair to be lowered, but Gillian was looking at a screen he couldn't quite see.

"Any problems lately Bradford ?" Gillian asked. "Anything unusual or causing you stress ? Some of your readings are a little off."

He hesitated to tell her about the problem on his recent mission, he had no idea how she might react.

"Your alterations to my brain. Have any of them changed my personality ?" He asked.

She reached for him, holding his hand.

"No Bradford never ! A few alterations to the places that control reaction times. Did you know a chimp can react fifty times faster than a human ? It took us years to work out how to mimic that in people."

“So you’ve made me more chimp like ?”

They both smiled and she was leaning over him to touch the back of his head.

“And the visual cortex to give you better night vision and visual acuity. But nothing to do with your personality.”

She was looking at him intently and he could see a vein in her neck pulsing much too fast.

“The personality is a strange beast Bradford.” She said. “Damage the part of the brain where it is and it will move elsewhere, often hiding where it has no right to be. I couldn’t alter your personality if I wanted to. Tell me what’s worrying you ?”

“It was something that I did on my last mission, it was out of character.”

“You can tell me Bradford. I don’t work directly for PD489 and I certainly never voted for President Herbert.”

“I let a woman and her two children escape, all of them subversives.”

“And that worries you ?”

He held her hand, crushing her fingers.

“Yes of course, it was against my orders. I could be executed for it !”

“Calm Bradford, calm yourself.”

She was gently smoothing his hair with her hand and Bradford wondered if she had any family, he knew nothing about her life.

“Could it be the alterations ?” He asked.

“No, you’re just changing with age and experience. Would you like my opinion ?”

“Yes, very much.”

“You’re very good at your job and you’ll continue to be a good squad leader for PD489. There are worse things than showing a little mercy and you shouldn’t think of it as a weakness. Now, we really need to get you on that treadmill.”

The chair lowered and he was almost on his feet.

“Before you go see Stefan, he has a little task for you.”

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Bradford wasn’t used to eating in fancy restaurants, so he’d failed to understand the need to book well in advance. He’d called a few places and finally managed to get a table at Zelda’s, but only because he’d gone to school with the head waiter.

“I like it here; the Tacos are the best in San Pablo.” Said Amoe.

He didn’t tell her he’d tried several other restaurants, but they’d all been fully booked. Zelda’s was incredibly popular among the youngish office crowd. They served a mix of old world Mexican and Italian food and were famous for Tacos and Zabaglione. Such mixtures weren’t unusual in the city; a Chinese restaurant sold more cherry pie than noodles.

“It had to be somewhere nice; I’ve got a bit of good news to tell you.”

Bradford had never been good with small talk, tact or preamble. His sister had tried to convince him that beating around the bush could sometimes be a good thing, but it was just waffle to Bradford.

The waiter took their order and Amoe was looking at him, waiting for him to continue.

“I’ve been interviewing to find a new job lately.” He lied.

“But you love being a cop; you constantly go on about it.”

“The pay is crap though and the hours. I don’t want to be helping old ladies across the street for the rest of my life.”

He gave her his best grin, the one he saved for special occasions. It wasn’t working though, she looked horrified.



“But..... you’ve always said that serving the people made you happy !”

It wasn’t going as he’d planned, she wasn’t happy or pleased about it. Her eyes looked sad and she was fiddling with the cutlery.

“The new job pays three times as much as my cop salary. I can move, buy some furniture that wasn’t a hand me down from friends and family.”

“I’ve never heard you talk about money before. I had no idea it was so important to you.”

Damn, that had been his ace and it hadn’t worked. Of course money wasn’t important to him, but he could hardly tell her about his pride in finding and destroying subversives. Their starter arrived and Amoe picked at it, as though it was leftovers.

“So what is this new job, what are you doing ?” She asked.

“It’s a senior executive role, I’ll have quite a few staff to supervise.”

“Who is it with ?”

Here it came. Amoe’s family had their origins in Hawaii, before the world went crazy. She had the long fine hair, the ready smile and the large dark eyes of her ancestors. Now though, those dark eyes looked sad and wary.

“From Monday I will be working for the San Pablo Department of Sanitation.”

She actually dropped her fork and called over a waiter.

“Could you call a cab for me please, to go to 11 Ocean ?”

“Yes of course.”

A few of the other customers were watching now, aware that something dramatic was occurring.

“I can take you home, if you want to leave.” He said

Hell ! She was crying. What had he done ?

“I just..... don’t feel I know you anymore.”

She stood and walked towards the entrance. He almost went after her, but instead he just watched her until the cab came to collect her. He slammed his fist down onto the table.

“Fuck !” He shouted.

Now he had the attention of everyone in the restaurant, so he looked around and quietly apologised to anyone and everyone.

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Bradford watched an old movie until about two am and then removed the memory cube from the player, carefully dusted it and put it back in its box. He’d been worried about explaining to Amoe why he needed to go out in the middle of the night, but now there was no need for any explanations. He’d even bought a rose for her, a single bloom, it was still in its box on the kitchen table. How had he got it so wrong ? He had to get ready, but he decided to send her a message on his phone. He walked into the kitchen where the light was best and aimed his phone at himself.

“Amoe I’m sorry. Can we talk ? How about going for a walk on Sunday afternoon ?”

He played it back and half his head was missing, but he sent it anyway. Everything he used at PD489 was carefully checked in and out and had to be accounted for. Being a cop though had meant he knew where to get hold of almost anything. In a case under his bed, he had his very own Ion hand weapon, just as accurate and reliable as any government issue. LabSinc4 had helped him acquire a Kevlar and carbon fibre body suit and it was way better than anything he could have bought. Jeans and a floppy jumper next and then a loose fitting jacket and he was ready. In the early days he’d come perilously close to going out looking like a comic book character, but now he just looked..... ordinary. As he picked up his wallet and keys, his phone vibrated.

‘Sunday is fine, we can talk then. My place about one.’

She'd turned off the camera and just sent voice, she sounded upset. At least he'd have a second chance to get it right, he'd have a long talk with Maria before Sunday, she'd understand women, she was one after all.

"See you Sunday at one." He sent back.

Bradford headed east on his bike, not out to the Badlands, but somewhere almost as unpleasant. There were over twelve million people in San Pablo and all the crazies seemed to end up in the 17 East district. Not that anyone had ever done a proper census of San Pablo. People lied to the police, they even lied to the school where they took their kids. Everyone was paranoid ! No one trusted the government and the result was that San Pablo might have twenty million people crammed into it. The homeless crammed into 17 East, there were plenty of abandoned building and the cops left them alone. Bradford had nothing against the homeless, unless they joined the subs.

"The person you're interested in will be carrying a refrigerated case, not easy to disguise." Stefan had told him. "We need the case and contents intact and the man killed."

He'd been given a description and told that the case had a 'Bio-Hazardous' content.

"If the case breaks open, run like the devil himself is after you." Stefan had said.

Stefan was usually taciturn, so such a warning deserved respect. The man he was looking for knew someone was after him and had joined the anonymity of the homeless. He'd gone to join Pastor Ivor and his flock at the Cathedral. Pastor Ivor was a black man with a shock of white hair and a booming voice. He was regularly on the news, blasting President Herbert and demanding donations for his community of homeless and destitute. The media loved him and the donations rolled in, few if any of his flock ever went hungry.

"It'll be crowded, but we know he's in there. Go at night, most of them will be asleep." Stefan had suggested.

It was almost three in the morning when Bradford got off his bike and walked towards the old Cathedral of Santa Maria del..... something or other. It had been deserted for fifty years before Pastor Ivor had claimed it as a base and now everyone knew it simply as the Cathedral. He walked through the door, carefully stepping over and round the people sleeping in the entrance hallway. There were hundreds of them, all under piles of identical blankets. It was going to be a tough assignment, finding the guy with the case. The case was his weakness, it was big and he'd want it with him.

"Large briefcase Bradford, about two feet square and there's a small screen on it that he'll need to monitor quite regularly." He'd been told.

So piece of cake. Find the guy who'll be staring at an oversize briefcase, among a crowd of about two or three hundred sleeping people.

"Sorry."

He'd almost stepped on an elderly couple. There were entire families there, sleeping under charity issue blankets. Part of him wondered how fast they'd be able to run if the case was broken open. He put the thought from his mind, he had to focus on the task at hand.

"There are spaces downstairs brother."

It was a woman in some kind of robe and she was pointing at a door to the rear of the building.

"Thank you." He said.

The lighting was low and seemed dimmer as he walked through the piles of humanity. Eventually he reached the door and found a stone spiral staircase, leading down. His prey wouldn't want to have been upstairs, he'd have wanted to hide himself in the lower floors.

"All are welcome and porridge is served at seven."

It was Pastor Ivor himself, whispering a greeting, before quickly vanishing into the dark. Bradford walked towards the empty floor space and saw a green glow. He carefully eased his weapon out of its holder and held it under his jacket, no need to start a panic among the pastor's flock. He moved slowly and might have had an easy end to his task, if he hadn't stepped on the old guy's hand.

"What the fuck?! Mind where you're going asshole!"

There were more insults and a few threats and his man was up and away with the case in his hand. His prey was military trained, he woke up too fast and moved like a trained operative. Bradford had better sight than his target, Gillian had given him far better visual acuity than any normal human. He saw the man run and followed, knocking someone over in the dark, causing another torrent of abuse. He doubted that Pastor Ivor would be offering him breakfast again.

"Hey, what the hell!?"

Bradford dodged past another angry member of the flock and headed for the door he'd just seen swing closed. He was out of the Cathedral and into what had once been a garden of some kind. Now it was full of the usual garbage that any bad part of town seems to collect. There was even an old car on its roof, it looked to have been burned out. No one else would have seen it, but Bradford saw a slight movement at the door of an outbuilding.

"Got you!" He muttered.

Bradford ran and entered the building, making sure the door closed silently behind him. It looked like a combined shower and lavatory building, long disused. He waited in the dark, giving his eyes a chance to get used to the almost total darkness. Either side of him were old shower cubicles, now broken apart, the pipework long ago taken away and sold. Past the showers and he saw a slight glow at the end of a corridor. He hurried, but tried not to be heard. Ion weapon up and ready, he entered another room and she was there, a candle jammed into a bottle, held in her hand.

He almost spoke to her, it was the same woman from the old bunkers. The room was a row of old style toilet cubicles and sinks. She'd put her children to bed under the sinks, covered in Pastor Ivor's nice clean blankets. He lowered his gun and just stared at her. She was actually smiling at him and pointing. Only a few of the toilet cubicles had doors and she was pointing at the second from the end. Bradford nodded his thanks at her and walked to the end of the room and kicked the door in. If the man had gone for a head shot, Bradford would have been just another corpse in 17 East. As it was, his target fired three lead bullets straight at his Kevlar protected chest.

"You lose." Said Bradford.

He fired twice into the man's face and watched him collapse onto the toilet basin. Bradford had a moment of curiosity, who would send their agent out with an antique hand gun? He easily pushed the thought away, he was rarely curious about anything for long. He picked the case up and put it on the still warm body of his unnamed enemy. He looked at the glowing green screen on the top of the case.

'-198 Viable Hazard Level 7'

Good, they'd told him anything under -196 would render the contents useless. He picked up the case and went to thank the woman. She'd gone, woken her kids and gone into the night, leaving nothing behind. He'd have gone to look for her, but LabSinc4 were expecting delivery of the case.

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