

Bradford II – Badlands

Chapter 10 - Dimitri

“I’d prefer it if you came alone.”

“And I’d like to have a foot long dick.... I guess we’ve both got to learn to live with our disappointment. I’ll bang on your door at about nine.”

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Bradford walked out of his apartment and thought one of the watchers was there again, until he recognised the woman sat on the wall. He was just pleased that she hadn’t wanted to meet in the communal garden again.

“You should have come in for coffee.” He said.

“I don’t have long and I’m probably one of the last people Amoe wants sat in her kitchen first thing in the morning.” Said Maria.

“Why do you say that ?”

“Because she’ll be feeling huge and unattractive and she’ll know we almost had a thing once. Trust me, we women are born being able to sense stuff like that. Amoe will be going through your photos, worrying about which ex you might be seeing, now that your sex life is crap.”

He felt awkward, Maria could always make him feel like that, often with a single sentence.

“Our sex life is alright.” He replied. “Did we almost have a thing ?”

“Oh yes, there was that long kiss in the Joyce’s Green tunnels. If we hadn’t been worrying about the place collapsing..... Who knows.”

“Really ? That counts as almost having a thing ?” He asked.

“Sure does, I’ve got a line about it in my journal.”

She was grinning at him and part of his mind was running memories of the times they had been close to more than just a kiss. Now he had Amoe and Rosa on the way. Besides, Maria could often be too damned intimidating.

“We need to talk Bradford and not in that awful garden.”

Roland had insisted on adding a second car to his morning pickup routine, one with four armed operatives inside it. He hated having that much security, but Amoe liked it.

“Five minutes guys and I’ll be ready.” He told his mini convoy.

They fanned out across the car park, it was what they did. Weapons up and ready, just in case another group of assassins fancied their chances. Bradford led Maria to the stairs, one of the few private places in the block.

“This will do, no one uses the stairs.” He said.

There was a slight smell of stale urine, but it was still better than the communal garden. They sat next to each other on the stairs.

“Yasmine sent me the Chapman recordings Bradford. They’re dynamite, you have to report it all to President Herbert, especially after the attack on Dimitri.”

“Dimitri is alive and well.” He said. “He’s scared though and wants to meet me tonight.”

“And when were you going to tell me ? More secrets Bradford.”

“Give me a break, he called the public number for PD489 and left a message. Roland only told me about it as I was finishing my breakfast.”

“Fine, you’re forgiven.”

Would he ever be truly forgiven for keeping things from her ? He was no expert on women, but they did seem to hold grudges for longer than an extremist religious cult.

"I didn't think you knew him that well ?" She asked.

"I don't, not really..... I know everyone, but medicine smuggling isn't exactly an offence to get anyone on the most wanted list. My guess is that Dimtri's fellow conspirators have turned on him and he's looking for protection in return for information."

His men were getting restless, he could see them pacing about the car park.

"I need to go." He said. "Another few minutes and my guys will begin trying to arrest any passers-by, just to alleviate the boredom."

"Allison Chapman links Chris Dudley to Dimitri and Jason Cetrone." Said Maria. "I know none of her story has been corroborated, but she's convincing. There's simply too much detail for her to have made it all up. You need to tell Otis today. If nothing else it'll give him a culprit for the murder of Douglas DeFreitas and get him off your back for a while."

"I'll get Roland to arrange a meeting with Otis today." He said. "Once he agrees, I'll have Jason brought in for questioning."

"He might have run and gone to ground by then."

"I know, but I can't arrest the president's personal aid, without his approval."

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Hector Pérez felt sorry for Jim. It was the fault of the Badlands of course, for killing off good men and creating so many widows. Jim was quite keen on one middle aged widow and his feelings were obviously reciprocated. They hadn't seen much of him while in Pile o' Bones and he hadn't been keen to leave so soon. Roxy had put him straight about his priorities.

"The widow Curtis will be there when we get back." She'd told him. "Probably waiting to do wonderful things to your dick."

Jim was taciturn anyway, though Hector considered that a major plus to having him around. Add in moody and missing his oats and Jim was unlikely to say much to anyone, for several days. Maggie seemed happy though, actually up and ready to leave, as dawn lit up the Badlands.

"There's enough light so that we won't trip over anything." Said Hector. "Time to get moving."

If only they'd had horses or even mules, they'd have made a better exit from Pile o' Bones. A few of the locals came to see them off, including the widow Curtis. It wasn't the same though, four people trudging across the barren landscape, all carrying heavy packs. Horses would have looked far cooler, but no one owned horses anymore.

"We'll keep the sun to our right until we get to the top of Baker Hill." He said. "Then we'll rest up for a while and look at the map."

"Keep both eyes open." Added Roxy. "We're heading further in and the Badlands only ever get worse, never better."

It would be midday before they reached Baker Hill, just about the only reliable landmark for miles. They had maps, but they were precious and hand drawn on flimsy paper. The maps would only be consulted out of the wind while they were stopped somewhere.

"Does anyone still have horses ?" He asked Roxy. "It would all be so much easier on horseback."

"They ate all the horses after the troubles." Said Jim.

"I've never seen a real horse." Said Maggie. "Only pictures in books."

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Camila was having a bit of a surreal day. Everyone in San Pablo knew she ran the Hyenas, yet they all chose to ignore it. If an entire city could be said to be pragmatic, then San Pablo had decided to turn a blind eye to her illegal affairs.

"I only ever see people with an appointment." She said.

"But you never agree to appointments with the media."

If it had been the usual hack from one of the seemingly endless number of media organisations in San Pablo, she'd have sent the woman on her way, with instructions never to come back. She'd once sent Cruz to see a journalist to his car and they'd been left alone for months after that. Nothing violent of course, just Cruz being his lovable intimidating self.

"Things are just so busy today..... Pauline."

She had to look at the business card to remember the woman's name. Pauline Narvas was a senior feature editor with San Pablo Vogue. Not 'the' Vogue of course, just the local habit of recycling names which had meant something in the old days, the times before the troubles. The woman sat in front of Camila's desk had obviously spent a lot to look street trashy.

"Please Camila..... I have the best photographer in San Pablo outside. Just getting him out of bed today cost a small fortune." Said Pauline. "Just a few questions about a woman with a thriving business in San Pablo and a few pictures. It'll be good for your business."

Pauline had a pleasant grin and there had been a few unofficial articles, with some quite unflattering photographs. She'd slept well the night before and hadn't had a row with her daughter that morning, almost a record. For some reason Camila found herself agreeing to the article.

"I'll want to know the questions in advance and no pictures that make me look like a refugee, fresh off the boat."

"No, that wasn't our aim at all..... I have the questions."

A neat list handwritten on a page out of a notebook, with a few questions crossed through. Ten questions left, all about her cleaning business and all fairly plain vanilla. There was one question about the pressures of being a single mother in the New Nations. She was in a good mood and decided to leave that question on the list.

"Fine, bring in your expensive photographer." She said.

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Bradford knew Jason had run, Roland had informed him, just before he'd entered the presidential palace. There was a uniformed military type fussing about, taking his coat and bringing him a cup of the famously good coffee. Jason Cetrone had been good at that kind of fussing, making everyone feel relaxed. Jason had run though, probably hoping to start a new life in one of the other New Nations.

"Can I get you anything else ?" Asked the man in uniform.

"No I'm fine."

He looked to be a colonel by the marks on his sleeve, someone with a high enough rank to be trusted. The key thing for Bradford, even if it was a bit selfish, was what sort of mood Otis would be in. A phone gave two warbles and was answered by the colonel.

"He's ready for you now..... I'm sure you know the way Mr Scott."

Jason had always walked with him, exchanging small talk about all sorts of trivia. Bradford knew how to talk a lot but say almost nothing. Had others been as wise ? He began to wonder what Jason might have picked up from his friendly little chats. The usual door guard, opened the door for him and he was inside the holy of holies, the president's office. There was a certain amount of disarray, pictures taken off the wall, rugs rolled up, a sofa turned on its side.

“Bradford, welcome.” Said Otis Herbert. “Sorry for the mess, the bug hunters have been busy. I asked them to leave, while we have our meeting.”

Not just paranoia, Jason might well have planted a few listening devices before running.

“Did they find anything?” He asked.

“Nothing at all, though they’re still working on my desk. We’ll sit in the window area, which has already been scanned and declared clean.”

They’d have been thorough of course, everyone knew how ruthless Otis could be to those who let him down. Bradford sat in one of the comfy leather chairs by the window and noticed coffee and flapjacks on the table. Flapjacks ! It looked like his career wasn’t over, Otis must have asked Roland what he liked to eat.

“You can pour the coffee Bradford, plenty of milk in mine.”

Coffee with President Herbert could be like spending time with a friend or complete hell. It looked like it was going to be a coffee with a friend day.

“I have to be honest Bradford, you disappointed me. Allowing an unvetted member of staff to be a member of my inner circle for so long. I know you inherited the role in difficult times, but I will be honest..... I was quite close to having you replaced.”

“I do realise that sir. I’m really sorry it happened.”

Otis was still grinning at him, which didn’t match his words. Otis Herbert began to chuckle, which was a rarer experience than finding unicorn poo.

“Oh, that Yasmine Bradford..... I could do with her during my next election campaign. You redeemed yourself by sending the right people to vet Jason. It’s a pity he ran, but at least he’s no longer a threat to national security. I do need to ask you a favour though, which is really an unofficial order.”

“Anything sir, just ask.”

Oh, why had he said that ? As the words left his mouth, he knew he’d just offered to do anything, for a president who could be completely ruthless. It was just so hard to say no to him though, or even insert a few caveats into the conversation. Still, if the request looked too dodgy, he could always hire Bobby Laszlo to carry it out.

“The ports were informed quickly, so Jason is likely to still be in San Pablo. At least that’s what Maria thinks and her intelligence is usually reliable.” Said Otis. “Jason knows too much to be interrogated Bradford, I’m sure you understand what I mean by that ?”

“Yes sir, I do.”

“I see no problem if he’s caught in San Pablo and dies while resisting arrest. If he has made it to one of the other New Nations, I’m relying on you to organise a covert operation of some kind. He can’t be allowed to talk Bradford.... Again, do you understand.”

“Yes sir, I do. Trust me, Jason is certain to resist arrest or have a tragic accident.”

It wasn’t even troubling the small amount of conscience he’d been trying to cultivate. Jason Cetrone had probably sent the thug to threaten Amoe. He deserved to have a fatal accident.

“There is something else though sir, the reason I asked to see you.”

“Of course, yes..... What did you want to see me about ?”

Strangely it all seemed so trivial now, after agreeing to be the president’s assassin.

“Jason appears to have been working with others on a property scam.” Said Bradford. “Chris Dudley is involved and the infamous Dimitri. There are others too, Maria has the list and details about their future intentions. They were behind the Tucker’s Town bombing.”

“Dimitri indeed..... For some reason that doesn’t surprise me.”

Otis did his thing, looking at the ceiling while concentrating. It could sometimes take him several minutes to ponder on something, which left some people as nervous wrecks. Bradford was now used to the president's eccentricities and used the time to eat a flapjack.

"Did you know about Jason, before asking about vetting him?"

Asked Otis, while still looking at his office ceiling.

"Yes sir."

Again that chuckle.

"I hope you never decide to go into politics Bradford..... I might finally lose an election. Do you have solid evidence about this conspiracy?"

"Enough to be certain sir."

It took a further eight minutes, before President Herbert was facing him again. He looked older for some reason and very tired.

"We can't have bombs going off in San Pablo Bradford, it will destabilise our already fragile democracy. No one is above the law, not even property developers."

Bradford finished his flapjack, as Otis Herbert smiled and poured him some more coffee. Crap! The president filling his coffee cup.... He had to be about to ask for a really fuck off size favour.

"Do you miss the days when PD489 was a clandestine organisation." Asked Otis.

"I do sir, I really do."

"Ideally we need justice to be seen to be done." Said Otis. "Gather evidence and bring these people to justice if you can. It would be nice to see their faces on the news and the public love to see property developers behind bars. Wealth can often buy a way out though."

"It can sir and has done so in the past."

Gone was the smile, as Otis gave him a very serious look. Did he suspect that Bradford might have used a little street justice when dealing with Amoe's father? If he did, he'd never ever hinted at it.

"If you can't bring them to the courts Bradford..... You can bring them to justice. Spend what you need to, just don't involve me directly in your plans."

"I understand sir."

"Just try your best to do it the right way first."

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Roxy felt hot and tired. Her pack seemed to get heavier with every mile they walked. The Badlands seemed especially bad too, with little in the way of scrub or trees to shelter them a little from the sun.

"Chip told me that no one comes out this way." Said Maggie. "It's not on the way to anywhere and there's no water for miles."

"That's probably why the bunker has been left alone." Said Roxy.

"We're heading further in..... It always gets worse as you head towards the centre." Added Hector. Hector, Crowman or Jared? That was causing a few problems, with young Maggie calling him by all three names in the same conversation. She'd decided that he needed to be honest with the good folk of Pile o' Bones, even if it meant some of them hating him. The problem was going to be convincing Hector that honesty was the best policy.

"The bunker can't be out here." Said Jim. "There's nothing, no buildings at all."

"We're talking about a military bunker Jim." Said Hector. "A few fences around it and a couple of wooden huts on the surface. All long gone, so we'll need to search for it."

"Muriel said she'd been told the entrance is at the end of small valley." Said Maggie

They found a small valley, only it wasn't the right one, no door to the bunker they were looking for. It did give them a chance to rest, away from the hot wind and a chance look at the map again.

"There, there is the front entrance, we must be really close." Said Hector.

"That can't be right, I said so at the meeting." Said Jim. "A back door two miles from the front door. The map has to be wrong."

"Unless its two different bunkers." Said Maggie.

"I've seen large bunkers before." Said Roxy. "Everything spread out, just in case a part of it gets destroyed. If the worst happens, they can close a few internal doors and carry on living down there. There will be more than two entrances anyway. They only seal everything up if the nukes drop. There will be water pipes going in and out and huge ventilation fans. Most of the time, bunkers are just underground settlements, with all the usual amenities. Those pipes and ventilation ducts all need places to come out."

"An underground settlement with lots of goodies..... Hopefully." Said Hector.

Jim found the right valley, by falling down the side of it. Once they had him on his feet, it was Maggie who spotted the large metal door. There was no opening it of course, not a door designed to keep the nuclear apocalypse outside.

"You can never get in through the front door, ever." Said Hector. "At least we found it though, we know the people of Pile o' Bones weren't telling us a pile of crap."

"They want clean water." Said Jim.

Roxy couldn't resist looking closely at the huge steel door, putting her hands on it. She'd seen one which had been left open once, at least four feet of solid hardened steel. They hinged outward, like bank vault doors. There were scratches, where someone had tried to open it, probably with a pry bar. Was that a positive sign of human optimism, or evidence of mindless stupidity?

"We've still got a few hours of daylight." Said Hector. "We need to pair up and begin a search for a way inside."

They were her people and Hector had deserted her and vanished one night, without even saying goodbye. She'd forgiven him for that, but she wasn't going to let him order her people about.

"You can take Maggie and go east Hector." She said. "I'll take Jim and go west. Make a noise if you need help, otherwise we'll meet back here just before dark."

Jim had an old revolver in his belt, one with cordite in the bullets and Maggie had Desperation's one and only working flare gun. Both pairs should have ways of making enough noise to fetch help, just so long as the old tech worked of course. Modern blasters just didn't make loud bangs, which was a huge part of their appeal. Jim found a snake to have an argument with, but they hadn't found anything useful, before it was time to turn around.

"Hey look, that thing actually worked." Said Jim.

There was a loud popping sound and a bright orange flare in the sky. A smoke trail gave the point where the flare had been fired from and Roxy moved up her pace a little, though the heat didn't encourage sprinting. She was panting hard by the time they found the others and Jim couldn't get enough air into his lungs to speak.

"We found it !" Yelled Maggie. "We found the way in."

"The back door was just like the front door, then we found this." Said Hector.

The military were good at doing groundwork and she was sure a squad of engineers had looked over the area and found a geologically stable place to build the bunker. That had all been a long time ago though and a lot of high winds had eroded the ground and probably quite a bit of rain too. There was a small metal inspection door, with a large fan next to it. A fan a good eight feet across, covered

by a grill made out of some kind of shiny military alloy. All still impassable, if it hadn't been for the boulder, which had broken through the grill.

"We'll need to shove the boulder out of the way." Said Maggie.

"That's doable....I think we found our way in." Said Roxy.

Hector had to clamber up the grill and get his feet onto the boulder, while they pushed from the sides and tried to control where the boulder went.

"If it ends up against the door we're fucked." She said. "It has to go anywhere but in the direction of the door."

The boulder had to weigh half a ton, maybe more. It wanted to move, actually wobbling about as Hector straightened his knees and pushed from above. Dangerous work though, as the boulder came loose and brushed Maggie to one side as it fell. Maggie end up on her back and there was a lot of swearing, as the huge rock rolled away a little, before coming to rest about five yards away.

"See, easy." Said Hector, clambering off the grill.

Roxy got to the hole in the grill first. The boulder had done what they'd never have achieved. Two spokes had been broken off the fan and part of the ducting had been bent back. Not much of a gap, but it gave access to the inside.

"A small gap.....Only one of us can get in there." She said.

"Oh Maggie, I bet you're glad you came." Said Hector.

"I don't mind, I'll do it."

"It's almost dark, if you're going to do it....." Said Roxy.

No one wanted to stay outside, when there was a nice safe bunker to sleep in. Roxy didn't want to push Maggie, but the girl was a volunteer.

"No problem, I'll do it. The worst I'll see is bones or bugs and I've seen plenty of both."

"Don't get snagged on the edges of the grill." Said Jim.

"Probably just two bolts on the door and we're in." Added Hector.

They all helped Maggie, lifting her up, making sure the ragged edges of the grill, didn't rub against her skin. Once inside, she was on her own in the gloom, muttering and moaning about the dust.

They heard a noise and there was the sound of a cry.

"Are you alright Maggie ?" Asked Roxy.

"Yeah..... Tripped over my own feet....I'm at the door."

There was a lot of clanking, before the small inspection door swung open. A very dusty Maggie had to duck, to look at them.

"Welcome to Maggie Kelly bunker." She said. "I was first in, so I get to name it."

"Sounds fair to me." Said Roxy. "Who had the lamps in their pack ?"

"I've got one." Answered Jim.

They waited for the lamp to give off its yellow light, before closing the door and pushing the bolts home. There was still the hole in the grill, but as Jim remarked;

"This place probably needs a bit of fresh air."

"I'm sleeping in the first room we come to." Said Maggie.

The first room was a small guard room, complete with a gun rack on the wall. Hector snatched one of the old assault rifles from the rack, using his sleeve to wipe off the dust.

"Clean them up and you'd get a lot of Herbert's for those." Said Roxy.

"And this is just the first room....." Said Hector.

"It's small, but I'll sleep here if you want me to." Said Maggie.

Hector put the rifle back on the rack.

"I'm sorry Maggie Kelly, bunker raider extraordinaire." He said. "We will look for somewhere to sleep, but hopefully something larger than a guard room."

The next room was a mess hall, judging by the trestle tables covered in stainless steel mess tins and neat rows of cutlery. There was space for three times their number to sleep and Maggie sighed, before unrolling her bedroll.

"This is all so clean." Said Roxy. "It looks like nothing has been in here, even the damn bugs."

There was a serving hatch, which Jim briefly pushed the lamp through.

"A large kitchen, all sparkling stainless steel and huge ovens." He said. "This place is amazing."

"We should still take it in turns to stay awake." Said Roxy.

"Oh, not tonight....I need to sleep for hours." Said Maggie.

"Come on Roxy, nothing has been in here since before the bad times." Said Hector.

"Fine, but leave the lamp on low, we brought plenty of oil."

There was something about sleeping somewhere strange, without setting a proper watch. Roxy slept poorly, to be awoken by something large snuffling the ground next to her. Wild eyes, a monster's eyes, until Roxy was completely awake.

"Oh, Maggie.... Where did you get that lamp ?"

"The kitchen, it's a lot better than ours, there was even a can of oil. This place is full of so much really cool stuff."

"Maggie, can't it all wait until morning ? Go to sleep."

"I did sleep.... For a while. I'm not sleepy now."

There was something about Maggie, her hair was wet. Roxy pulled her closer and sniffed.

"Hey... That's rude."

"You're clean..... How did you do that ?"

"There's a toilet that flushes, it must get water from a tank somewhere. Best of all..... There's a shower Roxy..... A real shower. Cold water, but it's sort of lukewarm."

"You found a shower ?"

"Yes, come on, I'll show you."

Roxy got up and followed Maggie towards the most priceless thing in the entire Badlands, a working shower.

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The phrase 'come alone,' didn't only exist in bad movies. Bradford had heard the phrase a few times, usually spoken by low lives he was hoping to arrest. He always ignored it and he had actually laughed, when Dimitri had used it. Dimitri might have been in serious trouble, but he still had bags of style and plenty of money. His chosen meeting place didn't surprise Bradford.

"I'm booked into The Dunes Hotel, under the name of Gaston Leroux."

Did Dimitri realise he'd stolen the name of a long dead author ? Bradford decided he probably didn't and had just heard the name somewhere. It happened when people needed an alias, names popped into their heads, from school, books and old films. He really had arrested a guy once who swore his name was Snake Plissken.

"What room number ?" Bradford had asked.

"I'm in the presidential suite."

Good old Dimitri, of course he'd booked the best suite in the hotel.

"Come at about nine tonight and come alone."

It was at that point when Bradford had laughed. It always sounded so corny and no one in their right mind ever went to meet desperate crooks on their own.

“Yeah right Dimitri.....There was a lot of blood in your APC and I’m guessing some of it was yours ?”

“I’m alright, money still talks Bradford and some of my guys are still loyal. I was hit, but I’m patched up and mending.”

“I’ll bring two operative with me. One is a field medic, who can check you over.... Make sure you’re not about to die of blood poisoning or anything.”

“I’d prefer it if you came alone.”

“And I’d like to have a foot long dick.... I guess we’ve both got to learn to live with our disappointment. I’ll bang on your door at about nine.”

That had been a call during the afternoon and now Bradford was walking into the hotel with Yasmine and Chet. He owed them, especially Yasmine, who’d earned him a pat on the back from Otis Herbert. They’d done the legwork, so it was right to let them be there for the meeting. Yasmine wasn’t an official field medic, but she had patched up a few people during her years with PD489. Their faces were now known of course, seen on the news quite a few times. They skulked like villains, keeping to the quiet side of the hotel lounge, their faces turned to the wall. Bradford only relaxed when they were all in the elevator, without any PD489 fans yelling out to them.

“We’ll need to get them to unlock the top floor.” Said Yasmine. “If we’re going all the way up ?”

“Press the button for two floors from the top.” Said Bradford.

There’d be a lock on the door to the stairs, but it wouldn’t be hard to open. At least Dimitri wouldn’t get the warning of a beep as the elevator arrived. Dimitri might need help, but he just might decide that killing the head of PD489 was too good an opportunity to miss. They left the elevator and ran up the two flights of stairs, stopping at a locked door.

“This lock is almost an insult.” Said Chet.

“Always the same.” Said Yasmine. “Six digit pin on the elevator and a five dollar lock on the stairs.”

Fifteen second later they were heading up again, but slower and being very quiet. Bradford looked through an unlocked door, into the entrance for the presidential suite. No welcoming committee with blasters, no sign of anyone at all. He opened the door, the others two following him into the scene of utter chaos.

“Christ ! Why aren’t alarms going off ?” Asked Chet.

“You pay for the presidential suite, you get privacy..... And perfect sound proofing.” Said Yasmine.

“And blaster resistant windows.” Added Bradford.

It was carnage in the room, at least six dead guards, with Dimitri lying on his stomach next to a coffee table. It had to have been a heavy fire fight, very little of the furniture had been left undamaged and there was a small trail of smoke, rising up from the mini-bar.

“Some of the dead might be the attackers.” Said Bradford. “Check them all for signs of life and any ID. I’ll look at the late Dimitri.”

He didn’t need to ask Yasmine if she’d brought evidence bags, of course she had. There was probably a change of underwear and two spare blasters in the scene of crime bag, which she carried everywhere. Bradford turned over Dimitri and didn’t require a medical examiner, to tell him the seller of illicit meds, had been killed by blaster shots to the chest. There were four neat holes in the front of his shirt, yet all must have missed his heart. Dimitri had bled a lot before dying, his hadn’t been a quick death.

“Anyone bring spare gloves ?” He asked.

At one time his pockets had been full of surgical gloves, but now he rarely got to dig through an active crime scene. Yasmine threw a few rolled up pairs at him. The last thing the lab needed, was his DNA and prints showing up on every piece of evidence. Once gloved up, he ignored the pool of

congealing blood and dug through Dimitri's pockets. He found just a wallet, with two credit cards in it and about three thousand Herbets in cash. At one time the cash would have gone in his back pocket, but now he was paid enough to be able to afford honesty. There was a note in the wallet, written in a language he didn't know. He did recognise his name though, he'd seen it written in old world Russian before.

"He's got a note to me in his wallet." He said. "In old world Russian."

"Really ? No one speaks that now, apart from a few academics." Said Yasmine.

"I'm sure.... I recognise my name..... Long story."

There were a few people descended from Russians in San Pablo, though their families had left tales of horrendous journeys through the ruins of Asia. A girl he'd dated in college had once written his name in Russian and the pattern of the letters had stuck in his memory for some reason. Yasmine ran her camera over the note and sent it to Roland.

"Roland will know what it says, he knows everything." Said Chet.

Bradford helped Yasmine collect blood samples. It looked like blood in at least three places, had nothing to do with the dead guards.

"The blood spatter is all wrong." Yasmine told him. "Whoever it was took their dead and wounded with them. That sounds like military trained operatives to me."

The San Pablo cops would probably take over the case, but there was a certain departmental pride in doing the forensics right. It was over an hour, before Roland called and Yasmine was still taking three dimensional pictures of everything.

"That note was to you Bradford, in a version of Russian no one speaks anymore."

"I guessed that Roland, what does it say ?"

"It gives your name, before saying 'Tell Allison that she will always be my one true Babushka.' I'm guessing it's some kind of code."

"Or a weird pet name..... Are we still guarding Allison Chapman ?"

"Yes, two inside her building and two in a car outside."

"Humour a paranoid boss Roland and call them."

"They checked in an hour ago."

"Please Roland.... Call them."

It took a minute or two, before Roland called back.

"They're fine Bradford, though Sequel seemed worried and he's never usually worried, even when he should be. There have been the same two cars, going past Allison's building at regular intervals." Crap ! If they got Allison, he'd never find out what Dimitri was so keen to tell him about.

"Send a full squad Roland, sirens blazing, the works. We're leaving now and will meet them at Allison's address."

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