

Bradford

Chapter 17 – Loose Ends

“PD489 ran twenty four seven, but like most government departments, the bulk of the work was done during office hours.”

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The work at PD498 didn't stop because of a good day and a few congratulations from the president. Maria was still working through the contents of Astrid Cerone's home and the personal belongings of her many sexual partners. Dysto-Guerra had been dealt a blow with the death of Samuel, but they were far from being beaten. Any piece of paper, any chance note in a diary, might lead to fresh arrests. There were interns to help, but they tended to go home the instant the clock said five thirty. Yasmine was digging through yet another box of grubby student clothing, watched by Gupta. Gillian had been helping, until Bobby Laszlo had taken her to view an apartment. It seemed that Bobby's usefulness went beyond procuring guns and electrical goods.

“Go home you two.” Said Maria. “I'm sure you've got plans for tonight.”

They weren't what most would view as a good pairing, though often those were the ones that lasted. Gupta was still walking very awkwardly, but he fell over things at the best of times. Yasmine had a movie star attitude and the looks to back it up. There was something though, about the way they looked at each other.

“Are you sure it's ok ?” Asked Yasmine. “There's still so much of it.”

“Yes, I'll be going in about half an hour. Just going to finish this box.”

Maria wasn't a voyeur, she just couldn't help watching them kiss as they waited for the elevator. Really kissing, eating face as the kids called it.

“Goodnight.” Shouted Gupta, as the elevator arrived.

“Goodnight.”

She liked them both, but Gupta was the vulnerable one. It was either going to work for them, or it would be a train wreck, with Gupta as the carcass left by the side of the tracks. Maria tended to keep her own dates well away from either of her jobs.

“Ok, let's see what we have here.” She muttered, opening the box.

Astrid had been a talented artist, her drawings were usually clear and the subjects easily recognised. Three large sketchpads were right at the top of the box and the first one had several drawings of Bradford. Samuel hated him, which meant that the whole Dysto group hated him. The drawings all showed him being killed or mutilated in horrific ways. Her descriptions often switched from Spanish to English and then back again, but the sentiment was always one of hate.

“I am so glad that I killed Samuel.” Maria muttered.

She put yellow tabs on the pages she wanted scanned, the interns could do those the next day. The next pad had more drawings of The Juniper Resort and several quick sketches of young men and women around the hotel. All of it was first class intelligence and might mean them rounding up many more suspects. More boxes of over ripe jeans to dig through!

The last sketch pad began with drawings of President Herbert and Astrid really hadn't liked him. There were some cartoons that were quite clever and well-drawn, but most of them were hate fuelled garbage. Towards the back were a few caricatures of someone else she recognised, Amoe's father. Astrid seemed to view Kealani Lee as some sort of devil, giving him horns and cloven hooves. It was a repeating theme of hers, Kealani Lee as Lucifer. One drawing had;

'The devil who wanted to be president,' beneath it.

'El diablo que quería ser president,' was repeated under the English title.

It worried Maria, though the drawings weren't dated. It might be that Dysto-Guerra had forgotten all about Amoe's father, or they might still have him high on their list of targets. It made sense for them to hate him, his fruit and vegetables really did travel cheaper than people. Maria called Bradford's extension and was answered by Roland.

"Is Bradford there?" She asked. "I have something I'd like him to see."

"No, he left." Said Roland. "Some sort of emergency with his cleaner."

Maria silently cursed Bradford. He was getting involved with Camila, she'd suspected him of it for quite a while. Amoe was perfect for him and he was going to blow it.

"Nothing serious I hope?"

"No, her daughter left a message. She sounded upset, but Bradford didn't seem overly concerned."

"Ok, I'm going home now. Goodnight Roland."

She didn't go straight away. Maria ran the hand scanner over the drawings of Kealani Lee and sent them to Bradford's PD489 mail box, for him to see in the morning. Something about the devil theme was troubling her, she just couldn't put her finger on why.

Maria left the office and like Bradford; she'd ignored the parking rules and left her electric runabout near to their building. She was sat in her car before becoming seriously worried about Bradford and his problems at home. It might have been a Mike Lakey problem. She checked under her seat and a backup blaster was where she'd left it. The holster was duct taped to the seat and she occasionally remembered to remove and recharge the blaster.

"Fifty six percent, it'll have to do." She muttered.

Supposing she rushed over there and it was a problem between him and a lover? She bounced the blaster about on her lap and then placed it on the passenger seat. She decided to call his home number and make up a silly excuse for the call, see what sort of mood Camila was in. She let the phone ring long enough for his answering device to grab it. She repeated the whole process another four times and became extremely worried. Maria went back into the PD489 building and came out with a high powered blaster, three grenades and a pair of night vision glasses.

"Goodnight Miss." Said the guy at the car park exit.

He was always polite, which was strange really, considering that she always ignored his instructions and parked where she liked. Up a ramp and it was left for Bradford's place or right to go home.

"Am I being a fool?" She mumbled.

She sat there for so long that the car park attendant left his booth and walked towards her. She gave him a quick wave and turned left and headed for Bradford's apartment.

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Bradford stopped his bike in the car park for Emily's level and pulled the machine onto its centre stand. The powerful bike had been truly a pleasure to ride across town and he hoped to survive long enough to enjoy a lot more trips on it. Emily was an oncologist at San Pablo's one and only cancer treatment centre. He didn't really know her past, but there never seemed to have been a husband or children. A loner he guessed, like him. Loners tended to gravitate towards each other and he thought of her as a friend. He banged on her door and then stepped back, allowing her to get a good view of him on her entry system.

"Bradford.... I knew something was wrong. What can I do?"

She was looking anxious and her voice was beginning to rise. They will definitely have people watching, perhaps even watching Emily.

"Can we go inside?" He asked.

"Yes, yes of course."

Her home is far better furnished than his, nothing that looked hand me down. She probably had a good salary, the big question was why she remained in 7 East Central. But then again he had no intention of moving either. Home is where you feel comfortable and like it or not, he now considered the east side on San Pablo to be his home.

"I just made coffee."

He had a usual chair he sat in, though it had been a while since he'd popped in to get the latest gossip.

"Did you hear about Lou?" She called from the kitchen.

"No. What happened?"

She came in with two huge mugs of coffee and a plate of homemade cookies.

"He was involved in all that trouble at the Destiny Mall." She said. "Actually had to run for his life." Bradford had to smile at the thought of Lou running anywhere. He even mopped the walkways at a leisurely pace.

"He's ok though?" He asked.

"Oh yes, he's fine."

He sipped his coffee and then nibbled at a cookie, all part of their routine. Emily wouldn't say a word until he'd said something about her cookies.

"Hmmm Emily, these are sensational."

Etiquette had been followed. He put his cup down and waited.

"It started with that van and the man trying to rape Camila." Said Emily. "The van is still there. Why didn't the cops take it away?"

It was all news to Bradford. The last thing he'd heard from Camila was the message about the van and men who'd been fiddling with something inside it. Attempted rape?! That just sounded bizarre.

"Tell me everything Emily?"

"There isn't much to tell, even the cop they sent was only here for about half an hour. Camila told me that a man connected with the van had tried to rape her and Sofia had shot him, shot him dead. Imagine that dear child actually killing anyone... it's not right."

Emily could go on for hours and normally he'd have sat back and let her go by the long route. Now though, he needed to know the short version.

"Sorry Emily. Can we get to today and why you think there's trouble?"

"Camila was supposed to come and see me, but she didn't show up. I haven't seen either of her children out on the walkways lately and two hours ago, I knocked on her apartment door."

She gave him an intense look, as though he should realise that Emily knocking on anyone's door was a serious event.

"Was she home when you called?" He asked.

"Well.... no one answered the door, but I'm sure that I heard someone talking." Said Emily. "Blinds closed tight and no one came to the door, but I'm certain there was someone in there."

"I'll go and take a look."

Bradford stood up and walked towards her apartment door.

"It all started with that damn van Bradford."

"Stay indoors and stay safe Emily. I'm going to start by looking inside the van."

There was no sign of anyone watching him, but it was dark and the outside lighting was poor to say the least. Bradford needed something to flush out anyone who might have been left on watch. He

removed a grenade from his pack and looked for something to use it on. Something close enough to the building to get their attention, but not too close.

Bradford decided on a builders rubbish skip, left just about as far as he could throw. He threw the grenade and then stepped into the near complete darkness of the emergency stairs. There should have been a light on every set of stairs, but half of them were dead or flickering. Landlords seemed to consider such things to be a needless expense and his landlord was one of the better ones. He ran down the stairs, missed a step and crashed into the wall. Shoulder aching like hell, Bradford had just reached the floor where the van was parked, as the grenade exploded. He opened the stairway door just enough to see the van. Almost immediately two men appeared out of the darkness.

“What was that ? You’d better call him, you know how he gets.”

“Yeah I do. I’m leaving once we get paid. He gives me the creeps.”

The skip was burning well and Bradford let the two men lean over the wall to watch it. He carefully crept up on them as one called in and reported the situation. It was Lakey in Camila’s apartment, he knew it when the guy ended the call with;

“..... sure thing Mike.”

Normally Bradford would have simply shot them both in the back, following his own advice about not giving warnings. The strange thing was that his conscience now troubled him about such things. It was like a muscle he’d hardly ever used, but now it was getting exercise and gaining strength. He walked to within a few feet of them, all their attention still on the burning skip.

“What’s in the van ?” He asked them.

They both spun and the one on the left tried to pull a blaster out of his belt. Bradford put a neat hole on the front of his face and then aimed at the second man.

“Hey, nothing personal.” Said the man. “I’m just doing this for the money. I don’t even like Lakey, the guy is a jerk.”

“So answer me then. What’s in the van ?”

“A dirty bomb. Lots of the usual polonium and caesium, but with plenty of the newer cobalt compounds..... really nasty. Everyone within two miles will die a slow and nasty death from radiation poisoning.”

It would destabilise San Pablo almost as well as the attack on the Destiny Mall would have done.

They’d achieved nothing in recovering the pathogen, unless he could disarm the dirty bomb.

“Give me the van keys. Throw them near me.” He said.

It was all so predictable. As he bent to pick up the keys, the man tried to draw his own blaster.

Bradford shot him twice in the chest. The bodies were now his next problem. Bradford looked over the wall and remembered that there was thick vegetation next to the car park. Another cost cutting exercise of the landlord, had been sacking the company who’d kept the weeds under control. He lifted the bodies up one at a time and dropped them into the bushes. There was just a small muffled thud as each one hit the ground.

Next the van and he quickly had the back doors open and was crouched next to the device in the middle of the van floor. A large metal sphere on a tripod base, with lots of wires going into a box with a flashing light. Bradford used his flashlight to examine the wires and they were all a uniform grey colour. Batteries he recognised, there were three of them connected in parallel. So, the device was independent of the van battery. It wasn’t much, but it was a start. He thought about calling

Roland, but his PA was almost certain to call in the military. No, Lakey was his!

“Come on Bradford, think.” He muttered.

No sign of a timer, Lakey probably wanted to set it off with a phone call. There was just the one external box, the one with the winking red light. He followed the grey wire that wasn't connected to the device and it ran along the van wall and into the battery box. It couldn't be that easy, could it? He loosened the cable and there was about three feet of it. Difficult to quickly replace, even if they came back to the van. Was he right though, or was he about to destroy two square miles of San Pablo.

"They built it quickly." He muttered. "Never thought about someone getting into the van."

He cut the wire at the battery box end and the flashing light went out. After a few seconds smiling inanely at the thought of still being alive, he cut the wire at the device end. He rolled up the wire and shoved it into his jacket pocket. A wooden screen had been put in between the van cargo area and the seats. It wasn't that strong, but it would make it a long and noisy job to get in from that way. Bradford left the van and locked the rear doors, breaking the key off in the lock. The dirty device was as sealed off from the world as he could make it in the time he had. The wire followed the men over the wall and into the bushes.

The skip was still burning and he could hear the sound of fire department sirens in the distance. Good, they'd add to general confusion and that suited him. He straightened his clothing and carried his bag of equipment over his shoulder. It was time to go to Camila's apartment and kill Mike Lakey.

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PD489 ran twenty four seven, but like most government departments, the bulk of the work was done during office hours. You couldn't have the president's office calling at four am and getting an answerphone, but just a skeleton staff worked through the night. Banging down doors, interviewing suspects, digging through endless boxes of evidence. All of it was best done during the day.

Roland was tired; it had not only been a busy few days, but also stressful ones. Bradford had gone from hero to public enemy and then back again, all in less than twenty four hours. They hadn't even really recovered from losing Schneider. Anson Schneider, who'd seemed indestructible and whose funeral was next week.

"Schneider's funeral is on Wednesday. The president will be attending."

He typed the message into his pad device and sent it to all PD489 operatives. No such presidential honour for Samuel. The government had decided that any grave would become a shrine to his followers, so there wouldn't be one. There wasn't a body anyway, just a pile of ashes that the mop up team had found on the island. Roland realised he was become nostalgic and brooding on the past, always a bad thing.

"At least the stores look better." He muttered.

Gone were the barrels of napalm and the useless rail guns. The bulk of their useless kit had gone, to be replaced by the latest high tech blasters and anti-personnel mines. There hadn't been a straight one for one swap, Bobby had to make a profit, he understood that. They did now have blasters that even the military found hard to acquire, so Roland wasn't complaining. There was space in the stores now and everything there was useful. Well, almost everything, there were still a few crates of useless tech. He had asked Bradford about the implications if they received an inventory audit.

"Amazing how much kit we used on Operation Janus." Bradford had said.

"And the paperwork?"

"Lost in the fire."

"What fire?"

Bradford had just winked at him and he'd understood. Roland said goodnight to the team looking after the stores until morning and headed towards the elevator. A night at home in front on the data

feed, watching old movies and eating microwaved pizza. It had been a long time since he'd enjoyed a quiet evening at home. Then he saw Bobby's man, Tony, walking down the ramp from the gate and he had someone with him. Were they letting anyone into the building now? True the people on the gates had seen a lot of Bobby and his people, but they should have at least called him.

"Roland." Said Tony. "Bobby sent me over with a gift."

The man who'd come with Tony had kept back a few yards and neither of them were carrying anything.

"I was just going home." Said Roland. "What gift?"

Tony nodded at the other man and Roland looked at him properly for the first time. He wasn't carrying anything, but he was good looking without being pretty. Dressed in a suit, but with a hint of stubble. Tall and dark, with just a hint of bad boy. Just the sort of fantasy figure Roland liked, when he hadn't been too busy to think of such things.

"There's a suite booked at the Dunes." Said Tony. "Champagne and unlimited room service and Gregor is the most expensive male escort in San Pablo."

Roland felt himself blushing.

"Oh I see." He said. "I'm not sure....."

Tony leant in a little closer and almost whispered.

"Bobby did a little research and he's good at organising these things. Trust him, Gregor will give you a night you'll never forget. No strings, no obligations. Everyone else has gained something from the stores swap and Bobby thought you deserved something."

Gregor was good looking and it had been a long time since he'd been with anyone. His sex life lately had mainly consisted of watching porn movies and reading magazines.

"There's a car outside." Added Tony. "Go and have some fun."

"Thank you."

Roland walked towards Gregor and the escort was even more attractive up close.

"Is your name really Gregor?"

"No, does that matter?"

At that moment, Roland decided to leave his control issues at the office for a night.

"No, not at all. I have to collect a few things from my office and then we can go."

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Bradford moved slowly towards Camila's apartment. He thought there would be more than just two of Lakey's guys watching the walkways. If anything, the skip seemed to be burning brighter and he saw someone leaning over the wall near her front door. A woman, might just be one of her neighbours. People tended to keep to inside their own places at night though. That was why the walkways weren't full of inquisitive people, gawping at the fire. Once again Bradford decided to call out to the woman, justifying the action to himself. She might be a harmless neighbour, but he knew she was Dysto-Guerra.

"Quite some fire." He said.

What women lacked in strength, they made up for in speed. She was quick and Bradford had to drop to the ground to avoid a blaster hole in the centre of his face. As it was, he smelt burning hair as the Ion trail barely missed the top of his head. Only one chance though and she'd done well, but no cigar, as the saying goes. Bradford shot her once in the chest and again in the head.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid." He muttered to himself.

His newly recovered conscience was going to get him killed. He'd just made the sort of mistake that gets first year trainees killed. Never give a warning, just shoot and when you do shoot..... shoot to kill.

Bradford left the body where it was. Picking it up would leave his back exposed to whoever might be watching from Camila's windows. He leant against the wall and struck her window six or seven times with the butt of his weapon. There was no reaction at all. Below him the fire department had arrived and they were busy pumping suppressant foam into the skip. Bradford decided to be bold and he still had a wild card that Mike Lakey was likely to have overlooked.

He took his last grenade out of his pack and held it in his hand. Then he banged hard on the apartment door and pressed the bell, keeping his finger on it.

"Fire department." He shouted. "We're evacuating the building."

The door opened so fast that Bradford jumped back a little. Because of the weapon being aimed at his face, he raised his hands and showed the guy in the doorway that the pin was still in the grenade. "Get him inside Nick." He heard Lakey call out.

Bradford stepped back another pace and Nick followed, keeping his blaster an inch away from Bradford's face.

"Stay where you are." Said Nick.

He nodded in the direction of the grenade.

"What were you going to do with that ?" He asked.

Muttering from inside the apartment and the sound of someone moving around.

"I told you to bring him in Nick !" Lakey shouted.

Nick doesn't like Lakey, Bradford can see it in the look he gives. Too many outbursts from a leader who's losing his slender touch with sanity. Nick turned slightly to reply and Bradford used the opportunity. He knew where the sensor was for the modified squib above Camila's door. It was only a few feet and Bradford had once been a keen softball player. His aim was good.

"Nick, I won't tell you again."

How right Lakey was. As he threw the grenade, Bradford jumped to his right and rolled and then jumped and rolled again. He still rolled himself up into a ball as he felt the heat hit him. He'd pepped up the squib with the contents of a thermite grenade. Bradford wasn't a skilled techie, but he had a pretty good idea what extra thermite would do. His elbows were being burnt, but he did his best to ignore the pain for the minute or so the device burned for.

By the time he opened his eyes, Nick was on fire and screaming. All of him was on fire and eventually he fell over the wall and crashed into the bushes below. There was the sound of shouting fire department guys, but he couldn't make out the words. It was fast become a very un-clandestine operation. They were still in there, Camila and her children. The walkway was still on fire, the contents of the squib still burning with a fierce intensity. As Bradford stood up and realised his legs were burnt too, Lakey came out of the door.

Mike Lakey had just a few tufts of burnt hair left and his face was very red. Bradford knew the pain would probably stop Lakey in his tracks eventually, but not until the adrenaline wore off. He fired twice in Bradford's general direction, but seemed to be more worried about getting away. There was nothing wrong with Lakey's legs, he was away and running down the walkway at quite a speed.

Bradford wanted to give chase, but there was Camila and her children to consider. He ran into the apartment, jumping over the burning remnants of a jacket that Lakey must have been wearing.

Camila and Sofia were bound and sat side by side at the rear of the lounge. Mateo was sat behind his

mother and crying. He too had been tied up with plastic ties, his hands bound so tightly that his fingers were losing their colour.

"Don't move, I'll cut you free." He said to Camila.

Camila first and then she could help her children, as long as her hands were working properly. Her fingers were almost pure white, as he slashed through the plastic ties. Next he pulled the duct tape off her mouth and Maria coughed and took several deep breaths.

"If I leave you the knife, can you untie your children?"

Camila was rubbing her fingers as he cut the ties round her ankles. They'd been brutal, her feet too were ashen from the lack of blood flow. Camila could just about grasp the knife in her right hand.

"It's so painful. Yes, I can untie them." She said.

"Good, I'm going after Lakey."

He kicked the burning jacket out onto the walkway and looked back at Camila.

"I'm sorry." He said.

"Don't be sorry Bradford. Kill the bastard."

Bradford was made to chase people down. He could run at a sprint all day, no one could outrun him. It seemed ironic that he was running after the CEO of Lakey Pharmaceuticals. They'd effectively made him what he was and he was using those alterations to run down their boss. He heard heavy breathing on the walkway below and knew it was Mike Lakey. Mike had needed to go the long way, right to the stairs and back. Bradford grabbed the handrail on the wall and jumped. As his legs swung in towards the walkway, he let go and dropped the fifteen feet. Easy, he hadn't even felt any discomfort and he could now see Lakey.

"You can't outrun me!" He shouted.

Lakey turned and Bradford had to duck into an elevator recess. Two blaster shots hit the wall not far from his head and then he was chasing Lakey again. He was making for the gate, the one Sofia had used for her night time trysts with Esteban. Bradford stopped and aimed his blaster at the gate, waiting for Lakey to open it. As he saw the gate move, Bradford fired three times and heard Lakey shout out. Bradford ran to the gate and found blood, but not enough. Lakey was injured, but still obviously able to run and the blood loss didn't look enough to prove fatal.

"You can't outrun me Lakey!"

Drops of blood to follow and Lakey seems to be running towards the Expressway ramp. Out of the corner of his eye, Bradford sees someone else joining the chase. Small and quick, almost like a shadow running after Mike Lakey. Camila was his first thought, but she'd never leave her kids in danger. The second runner fired at Lakey and then Lakey fired back. Who the hell was it?

Lakey ran over the exit ramp and caused a truck to screech to a halt. The driver was still screaming insults as Bradford ran past.

"Your friend is a real asshole!"

"Yep." Said Bradford. "I'll be sure to tell him."

Still the shadow ghosting him and running in the same direction. Just as he thinks Lakey is his, Bradford hears repeated blaster fire and a scream. They're at the rear of a burger place and Lakey is lying next to the bins with most of his head melted away.

"No Maria, it was my turn! Lakey was mine!"

Maria had been the ghost and she'd brought him down. Bradford was panting and Maria looked so fresh. It just wasn't fair. She was looking at what was left of Lakey's burnt face and the deep burns on his shoulders.

"What did you do to him Bradford?" She asked.

“One of my pepped up squibs. You should see his guy Nick.”

He hugged her and she hugged him back.

“He was behind it all.” Said Bradford. “Samuel and his gang of Dysto terrorists. Then the pathogen, he was behind all of it, or rather he was paid to be behind all of it.”

He kissed Maria’s cheek and began to walk back towards his apartment building.

“We need to get back there.” He said. “I’m not sure if Camila will be ok on her own.”

She followed him.

“Who do you think Lakey was working for ?” She asked.

“I don’t think we’ll ever know.”

They walked on in silence until they got to the gate. Bradford’s blaster fire had destroyed the lock, so they just pulled it closed.

“You owe me lunch tomorrow for killing Lakey.” He said.

“Me ! It’s your turn anyway. Sticky’s at about one pm.”

“Fine..... do you think you could work with Gillian ?”

“Yes, as long as I’m her boss.”

“That’s what I intended.”

The last walkway and they can see Camila helping Sofia out onto the walkway, while a cop is asking her questions. All the minor fires appear to have been dealt with.

“I take it employing Gillian is legit ?” Asked Maria.

“No, Bobby will get her a false ID.”

“Ohhhhh Bradford.”

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~Post Script~

A year later and life was good for Bradford and most of the others at PD489. Gupta would never have perfect movement of his wounded shoulder, but he still joined Bradford and Maria on missions against the various Dysto groups. Yasmine was still in his life and there had even been talk of finding an apartment together.

Dysto-Guerra might have been seriously damaged, but the subversive group still caused trouble in San Pablo. PD489 had been given permission to go after the various drug gangs and had recently cleared the skulls out of east San Pablo. The extra work meant many more full timers were needed and Maria and Gillian were both added to the full time staff.

Amoe hadn’t given up her own apartment, but she now lived with Bradford for most of the week.

The dust had settled remarkably quickly after the death of Mike Lakey and Bradford was once again in favour with President Herbert. As Herbert had just won the election for a record sixth term in office, having him as an ally had meant good days for Bradford and PD489.

Bradford had known who Mike Lakey had been reporting to for a long time. To him it was obvious and he was surprised that no one else at PD489 had ever voiced their suspicions to him. He had his own reasons for keeping quiet and the biggest was a lack of proof. It would mean a show trial and if he was acquitted... it would mean PD 489 being out of favour again. Bradford had no intention of making those kind of waves, until he had cast iron, incontrovertible proof. Then the note had arrived from Shereen and he’d decided to act.

Shereen was in New Borongan, working as a PA. She never mentioned exactly where in her letter, just that she was safe and had a new life. She’d given him the identity of Lakey’s controller in San Pablo and which of the New Nations he’d been working for. Everyone needed to be able to trust someone with the grunt work and Lakey had trusted Shereen. She’d taken messages, arranged

money transfers and kept a secret diary for him. She was the only person to know the truth, beside Lakey himself and he was now dead.

'Forgive my lack of courage.' She ended the letter with.

There was no return address, or he'd have written and reminded her about using her own body to shield the pathogen device at the Destiny Mall. Her letter wasn't the kind of proof a court would accept, but it was the catalyst he needed to act.

Bradford knew that it wasn't just a lack of proof that had made him sit on his hands for a year; it was fear of the consequences. Shereen had made him feel guilty, another emotion that he'd only newly discovered.

Bradford was alone and stood next to a battered old van that Bobby had acquired for him, no questions asked. Once the deed was done, the van would be left in a quiet place with a squib inside. There couldn't be the slightest chance of anyone finding DNA evidence. Bradford had decided to do what he did best. He was going to execute Mike Lakey's boss.

The cops would call it murder of course, but with luck, it would always remain a mystery disappearance. Seismic holes opened up all over the Badlands, no one really knew why. He dropped a rock down one and counted. Good it had to be around five hundred feet deep. It might remain open for a year or two, but eventually it would close again.

He walked the twenty yards or so to the ruined building where his prisoner waited in the basement. Bradford had needed a quiet moment before doing the deed. The building had been used by the subs, until PD489 had raided it, just two days before. The raid had been punitive and a lot of subs had died. It would be months until the subs or the homeless used it as a shelter again. The man taped to the chair hadn't moved, but he was taped to the chair fairly well. Bradford had taped his arms and legs to the chair with duct tape; he'd used a whole roll. He'd even put a double layer over the man's eyes.

"Who are you ? What do you want ?"

Bradford hadn't said a word to the man, the entire conversation since the kidnap, had been one side. There wasn't another chair, so Bradford dragged an empty crate over and sat in front of the man he intended to kill.

"Don't rock the chair about." Said Bradford. "I'll only pick you up so many times, then I'll leave you on the floor."

"Bradford ?! Is that you ? What the hell is going on ?"

Bradford got up and ripped the tape off his eyes, taking a good chunk of facial hair with it and making his prisoner yell. Then he calmly sat down again.

"I'm just doing my job Mr Lee." He said. "Pest control."

Kealani Lee was sat in front of him, Amoe's father. He looked angry, but he was also looking around the room and assessing the situation.

"Why bring me here ?" He asked. "You're obviously working alone. Gone rogue again have you Bradford ?"

"In a way, yes. I've decided that it's time for you to disappear."

Kealani Lee pulled and struggled, trying to free himself of the duct tape. The chair went over and he ended up with his face hitting the dirty concrete floor. Bradford sighed and picked him up, putting him and the chair upright again.

"I'm going to get bored with that really quickly." He said. "I might leave you on the ground and this place is infested with skin bugs. I've heard it can be painful if one of them decides to set up home in your eye socket..... Really painful."

"You're crazy Bradford. What is it that you think I've done?"

"So we get to it, the truth at last." Said Bradford. "You were giving Mike Lakey his orders. You even staged the kidnap of your own daughter, just to slow me down."

Lee was rocking his chair about, but then relaxed and sat still.

"Why Bradford.... Why would I do all that?"

"Because San Sebastian had promised to make you president of San Pablo, once they'd taken over. What was it going to be Mr Lee, a coup of some kind? A military take over and all for the good of the people."

Lee was quite still now, glaring at him.

"You're the terrorist Bradford." He said. "You kill my guards and drag me out of my home, to this bug infested cellar. You're the criminal!"

Bradford got himself comfortable on the crate, though he'd check himself carefully for skin bugs once he was home.

"Your men are unharmed." He said. "I've been a guest in your home many times. I didn't have to worry about leaving DNA and I know where your cameras are. As to your men..... they work to your routine and have coffee while you have yours in the garden."

He tried to look smug and hoped he succeeded.

"Your disappearance will be a mystery to everyone." He said. "Including your guards."

Lee thrashed around and the chair went over. His cheek hit the floor and it sounded as though he'd cracked a cheekbone. Bradford picked him up again, but ignored the bleeding wound on his cheek.

"No more." Said Bradford. "Next time I'll leave you there and you'll die with your face in the dirt."

"Proof Bradford. Even a maniac like you needs proof."

Bradford took Shereen's letter out of his pocket. The ramblings of a known terrorist a good defence lawyer would say, it wasn't even signed or dated. Bradford believed it though.

"Astrid knew you, though she might not have realised you were controlling Samuel. She called you the devil and wrote that on her drawings of you."

"Is that it? You're going to kill me over some drawing?"

"No. There's also Camila's story about a man who came see Samuel, while they were living together. She recognised the man Samuel reported to, the devil, el diablo. Your picture is in my apartment, the one with you and Amoe."

Lee was just glaring at him now.

"Lastly there is this letter from Shereen. It names you and those you're working for. It's probably useless for a court of law, but this isn't a court of law."

Bradford took his blaster out of its holster and let it rest in his lap.

"I have money." Said Lee. "Enough for you and my daughter to live in luxury, for the rest of your lives."

Bradford aimed the blaster at Lee's chest.

"Kill me and your relationship will be over.... You know that."

Bradford fired twice at Kealani Lee, hitting him in the chest and killing him instantly. He waited for a few minutes looking at the body and knowing that Lee might have been right. There are lots of secrets that couples keep from each other, but killing her father! It would eat at him if he let it, bothering him every time he woke up next to Amoe.

"The trick is not letting it get in." He muttered.

He grabbed the back of the chair and dragged Kealani Lee over the floor and up the stairs. Getting across the loose sand was more difficult, but he was quickly next to the seismic crack in the ground.

Bradford pushed the chair and watched as the body of his lover's father vanished from sight. Two loud bangs as it hit the sides on the way down and then a crash as it hit the bottom. The last loose end had been dealt with.

Bradford drove fast on the way home. Amoe was cooking something special, Maria was bringing a date to dinner. She rarely brought dates to anything, so he was looking forward to gently teasing her for most of the evening. He knew where he could pick up a few bottles of Devils Promise on the way, it was still Maria's favourite drink.

~ ~

~ The End ~

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