

## Bradford

### Chapter 3 - Subversives

**“On top of the usual body odour there was the perfume of hundred year old parmesan, topped with stale vomit. People always seemed to be coming up with new designer drugs, but they all made addicts smell like shit.”**

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Bradford ran his ID card over the scanner at San Pablo Police HQ. The officer behind the reception desk looked at the parcel he had under his arm, but didn't stop him. He was known in the building, a friendly face who everyone liked having around.

“Morning Bradford.”

“Morning.”

Eight am on Saturday and he had to queue for the lift down to where the secure lockups were, the place where you had to go to pick up your gun and two uniforms when you joined the police. He'd heard the stories of people just dumping everything back on the desk and vanishing. Poor devils who'd just had enough of being a cop and could no longer cope with the stress. Those stories had given him the idea. Wild Bill's letter had given him no clue about how to handle his resignation from the police force, so he was using his initiative, winging it as Maria would describe it.

“Yes Bradford, what do you need today ?”

“Dropping off I'm afraid.”

It was John behind the counter, someone he knew quite well. John wasn't far off retirement age and had seen just about everything the force could throw at you. Bradford ripped the brown paper apart and dropped his uniforms onto the counter.

“Christ ! Tell me you're joking !” Said John.

So many police uniforms had been used by criminals, that now it was a mandatory two year prison sentence for not returning it, a further five years for not returning his gun.

“I'm afraid it's no joke.” Said Bradford. “I have a letter confirming I'm leaving today. I assume you can make sure it gets to the right people ?”

John was just looking at him, a look of sadness rather than anger.

“I've seen so many good cops up and leave. Are you certain ?”

Bradford dropped his resignation letter onto the desk. ‘Personal reasons’ was all it really said, flowered up a bit to satisfy personnel. He pulled his holster from his belt and put his Henriksen 80 on the counter. He'd never actually fired it in the line of duty, or outside the line of duty.

“I'm certain. I'll need a receipt for this lot.”

He'd never actually shot anyone as a cop, which he found a little ironic. Dear sweet Amoe though, had shot and killed a mugger. It was before they started dating, but he remembered her crying in the corridor. John was calling over another officer.

“This needs to be official Bradford.” Said John. “I'll need your ID card too.”

“Yes, sorry. I'm so used to carrying it around.”

Bradford removed his cop ID from his wallet and put it and his resignation letter, next to his gun. It was all suddenly becoming very real, rather than just a plan he'd pondered in the early hours. More bored looking cops had drifted over, until Bradford had a fair sized audience for his departure.

“Last chance to change your mind.” Said John. “If you confirm that you’re leaving the police today. I’ll give you a receipt for everything you’ve returned. I’ll have to get you escorted from the building and it’s unlikely that personnel will pay any holidays owed.”

“Not another one going !” Said someone.

Bradford wasn’t worried about the holiday pay, he’d just been paid for the month and he’d saved quite a bit of the cash LabSinc4 gave him. Also, he’d just been given more than a month’s cop pay, for the refrigerated case he’d obtained. Bradford reached his hand out and John shook it.

“I’ll miss you all, but yes, I’m leaving the force today.”

“Crying fucking shame !” a cop shouted.

They were all patting him on the back as John wrote the receipt, all of them convinced the job had been too much for a young cop. Long hours, constant danger, poor pay, they’d seen a lot of colleagues walk away from the job. John handed him an official receipt, which he carefully folded and put in his wallet.

“Thank you.”

He had to be escorted out of the building, without an ID card on his person, none of the automatic doors would open. Like an admiring crowd, they all walked him out of the building. Most promising to keep in touch and saying what a shame it all was. Bradford was alone by the time he got back to his bike and he felt more relieved than upset. His father had been a good cop and he’d yet to meet a good cop who wouldn’t sympathise with the actions of PD489. Fancy lawyers put subs back on the street, often winning them compensation for wrongful arrest. It was madness and Bradford knew he could make a difference, but only by working full time for pest control. He started his bike and waited for the comms unit to revert to its factory settings.

‘Attaching user Bradford Scott to public network.’

He’d been expecting it, John would have already told the central computer that he was now an ex-cop. Bradford waited, he had faith in the efficiency of the IT guys at PD489. His GPS screen flashed and he was given the much more elaborate maps that very few had access to.

‘Welcome aboard Squad Leader. Where are we going ?’

The voice was slightly different to the voice on the cop system. Still female, but with a hint of petulance, though he might have been imagining it.

“Home.” He said.

He was given a route, which he’d ignore, he hated GPS systems.

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Bradford booked a cab as soon as he arrived home, it was probably going to be a wine and nibbles afternoon with Maria. He checked his fridge and there was nothing in there fit to take, he’d buy something in a store in 26 West. Unconsciously he opened his safe and realised he no longer had a cop gun to put in it. As he cursed his own stupidity, the main entertainment screen in the lounge came to life, showing a woman at his door.

“Bradford, it’s urgent.”

It was Gillian and on her own. She’d never been to his home before and people, who knew him, didn’t turn up uninvited. There were voice controlled entry systems on the market, but it was far too easy for the heuristics to get it wrong and open the door to a gang of home invaders. Bradford walked into the lounge and pressed the entry button. Gillian looked different in the scruffy jeans and grey jacket that were obviously her Saturday clothes.

“Come in, can I get you a coffee ? It’s the real stuff.” He asked.

“Yes, thank you. Sorry to bother you on a Saturday.”

"No problem. I just went in and resigned from the police. Did a letter to Captain Milner and I'm now officially an ex-cop."

"Wow, things are moving fast."

"Do you take milk ? I don't have sugar I'm afraid."

"Just a drop of milk."

She took off her jacket and sat on his sofa, examining his home. Bradford brought her a decent cup of real coffee and sat in a chair opposite her. He was aware of her looking at his things. The only decent bit of furniture was an antique desk that he'd been left by an aunt.

"I'll be able to buy some new furniture now." He said.

"It's fine for a guy living on his own," said Gillian, "most seem to end up living like a coyote with a sofa."

He chuckled and wondered how many single guys Gillian knew. He really didn't have a clue about her life away from LabSinc4.

"Did you get your money last night ?" She asked.

"Yes. Stefan wasn't around at 4am, didn't expect him to be. One of the security guys gave me an envelope when I dropped off the case."

She had her fingers clasped round her knee and he sensed she had something she needed to ask. As he wanted to shower and change, he helped the conversation along.

"Was the case ok, the contents viable ?" He asked.

"You were as efficient as you always are. It was us who messed up, you weren't given the right instructions."

She was fidgeting about and looking uncomfortable.

"The man with the case is someone who matters." Said Gillian. "If he's found there will be consequences. Will his body be found ?"

Bradford replayed the few seconds of violence in his head.

"He's in a ruined block of toilets near the Cathedral. Pastor Ivor's flock are likely to discover the body eventually, but they're unlikely to involve the police."

"What will they do with it ?" She asked.

"Nothing. They'll just avoid the place until the stink goes away."

Gillian put her coffee down and went rather pale.

"Sorry Gillian, but you did ask."

She was trembling, Bradford sat next to her on the sofa and put his hand on hers. It was his turn to reassure her.

"You knew him didn't you ?"

She was looking at him, her eyes wary.

"I'll never reveal our conversations to anyone Gillian."

"We knew each other years ago, at college. He was important to me then, but then his views diverged from mine. I thought he'd use someone to deliver the case. I had no idea he'd decide to take it in person."

She was crying, so he put his arm around her shoulders and held her as she sobbed.

"Were there any witnesses to his death ?"

"No, the building was deserted." He lied

"I need you to take care of it for me Bradford. I can arrange an extra payment, but I need the body disposed of."

He removed his arm and drank his own coffee.

"I never refuse cash." He said. "I'll do it late tonight, once the Cathedral flock have settled down for the night."

"How will you do it?"

She was far too curious, never a good sign. He knew the death of her ex-lover was ripping her apart and she'd always blame him for killing him. Even if it was at her orders.

"I'll use a squib."

"What?"

"Are you sure you really want to know?"

She was crying again, trying her best to control the sobbing.

"Yes, I have to know."

"It's a military device named after an old fashioned firework. It'll incinerate the area and leave nothing for anyone to find. It'll probably turn the whole building to a smoking ruin."

"Good."

She was on her feet and putting her jacket back on. She stopped at the door and gave him a brief kiss on the lips.

"Thank you Bradford, I won't forget this."

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He managed to shower and change and leave with enough time to buy a few nibbles.

"Fuckkking gangs." Said his cab driver. "I'd shoot the lot of em."

Bradford muttered something non-committal back and was rewarded by a getting the stink eye.

Great, the journey was likely to cost him twice the going rate. Everyone in San Pablo knew that you never pissed off a cab driver.

"The graffiti is everywhere." He said.

"Too fuckkking right."

A smile now, he hoped the fare might not empty his wallet.

"You have the Hyenas here in 7 East Central, right?" Asked the driver.

"Yeah. We get some drug related crime, but mostly they just spray their name over every spare wall in the district."

"Shoot em I say. It's really doing them a favour..... fuckkkkers!"

There were a few cops that Bradford knew, who shared the sentiment, though not in public. They arrested the gang members when they could, but there were always new kids wanting to join their district's gang. PD489 could have made a difference, but they weren't allowed to target the gangs. Wiping out subs was one thing, but parents made a lot of noise if their teenage son was found dead, even if he'd been a complete bastard.

"I need a market in 26 West, somewhere decent."

"I know a place." Answered the cab driver.

Bradford like the area Maria lived in, there were no gangs. Gangs were based on your district and 26 West was just too affluent. The cab dropped him off outside a store with a Chinese sign and '24 hour groceries and provisions,' repeated in English beneath it. The fare was reasonable, so he gave the cab driver a decent tip.

"Thank you. Watch out for those gangs..... fuckkkkers."

The store was small, but they had the fresh pastries he knew Maria liked and of course wine. Every store sold booze, it was all that kept most of them in business. Every corner had a shop selling cheap alcohol, no wonder half the crime in San Pablo was drink related. He chose a bottle of white wine

called Devils Promise. Foul stuff that was sweet tasting and came in litre bottles with a screw top lid. Maria loved the stuff though and he wanted her to enjoy the evening.

He walked the two blocks to Maria's apartment and pressed the entry button.

"You're early."

There was a lift, but he decided to walk up the three flights of stairs. She smiled when she saw the pastries and wine.

"I'll put these in the fridge." She said.

It was a nice apartment and he felt at home there. Maria put on some quiet music and he sprawled on the sofa.

"Make yourself useful. Look at my PC, while I get the meal ready."

Meal ?! He'd only been expecting things on sticks and bowls of peanuts. He sat at her computer and saw the screen she'd been working on. A translation of the ten or more languages used in the graffiti in the bunkers.

"They're forming a global movement." She shouted from the kitchen.

"So I see."

He read her translation and there were leaders in all of the new nations. Code names of course, one was called Jackal, another Turquoise. San Pablo had a leader called Samuel, the original graffiti had him drawn as some kind of super hero with a flaming sword. Samuel ! It had to be the same person, back in San Pablo. There was talk of armies of several thousand subs in some cities, over fifteen hundred in San Pablo alone. He heard Maria approach and stand behind him.

"It might be crap." He Said. "The usual hot air and wishful thinking to give the faithful a bit of extra morale."

"It might, but if half of it is fact..... It's huge !"

It was huge and there were all sorts of ways the information could be used. Bradford had one thought uppermost in his mind, to finally kill Samuel.

"How would you like to bring all this in house, investigate it as part of your PD489 duties ?" He asked.

"I'd love to, but can we do that ?"

"Wild Bill said I can run the department how I like. I can get the operatives in the field to report back anything that looks useful and then you can investigate it."

She noticed he had the crude drawing of Samuel up on the screen and her face dropped.

"You know what they say about seeking revenge Bradford." She said.

"I know, first dig two graves. I promise not to get obsessive about Samuel, but if he is back in San Pablo, I will go after him."

"Come on, the meal is ready. We can look at everything from the bunkers later."

Maria's nibbles had become homemade lasagne and green salad. They ate and drank ludicrous amounts of Devils Promise and then found an old movie to watch. He never did get round to asking her advice about his problems with Amoe.

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He'd slept for a few hours and taken an alcohol detox pill, but he still felt rough as he parked his bike two streets away from the Cathedral. Maria would be asleep and wake up feeling fresh, but he'd made a promise to Gillian. Why had he drunk so much of that awful wine ? Plus it was busy, 3am on Sunday morning and people were still partying from Saturday night, even the homeless members of the pastor's flock.

"Have a drink buddy."

The man was offering him a bottle wrapped in brown paper, which he refused with a smile. It seemed as though Pastor Ivor's frequent speeches on the value of temperance, weren't listened to by all his followers.

"I've been on Devil's Promise all day." Said Bradford.

"Oh, that shit !"

Bradford chuckled as he walked past the Cathedral and into the street next to it. He was going to enjoy telling Maria that even winos didn't like her choice of relaxing fluid. There were massive holes in the wall around the Cathedral gardens and he climbed over some rubble and saw the ruined bathhouse. Several of the homeless had lit a fire near the cathedral wall and seemed to be enjoying an impromptu BBQ. Bradford took the long way round to the bathhouse door and carefully opened the door and quietly closed it once he was inside. There was a slight sound from the far end of the building. Nothing much, probably a rat or another night prowler. Domestic cats were rare in 17 East, no one could afford to feed one, but he'd seen one or two feral cats in the past.

"Damn." He muttered.

He hadn't given himself long enough for his eyes to adjust to the darkness and he'd slammed his shin against a broken pipe. Something or someone had heard him and there was the sound of movement from the direction of the toilet cubicles. It was the damn wine and the useless detox pills that cost a fortune, but never worked. Bradford eased his gun out its holster and waited for a good two minutes. He was rewarded by hearing two clear and heavy footsteps in the next room.

He had the whole night if necessary, so he stepped really slowly and carefully along the hallway and waited outside the door to the toilets. He heard someone muttering to themselves and moving about. Bradford gently eased the door open just enough to squeeze through and saw a large man pulling at something in the cubicle where he'd left the body.

"..... useless....covered in blood, not worth a cent....."

Bradford walked to within feet of the man and noticed he had a white skull painted on the back of his jacket. The skulls were the gang from 20 East and the local gang would kill him instantly. No wonder the guy was being so cautious and stealing blood soaked coats from dead men.

"Found anything worth having ?" Asked Bradford.

The broken windows allowed enough light from the nearby fire to enter the room, for Bradford to see perfectly. The gang member didn't have surgically enhanced sight and he jumped backwards, peering at Bradford and hitting the cubicle wall.

"Stay back or I'll cut you real bad !" He screeched.

The guy was big, a good six foot two, but he had no muscle. He had the twitch too and there was the odour. On top of the usual body odour there was the perfume of hundred year old parmesan, topped with stale vomit. People always seemed to be coming up with new designer drugs, but they all made addicts smell like shit. Bradford raised his lon weapon and pointed it at his new friend.

"What are you on, Utopia 77 ?"

All designer drugs had fancy names, Dragon Fire, Utopia, Reality 88, there was a new drug for every day of the week.

"You a cop ?"

Bradford envied old time cops, who could cock the hammer on their gun to show they were serious. He had to step forward and place his weapon right against the man's forehead.

"Ok, ok. Can't afford Utopia. Got some Dragon Fire if you want it ?"

He had tried a few recreational drugs, cops were always picking up free samples. They made him puke though, so Bradford kept to cheap wine and beer.

“Was there a wallet ?” He asked.

“Hey please, I need dollars to eat.”

“And to score. Hand it over and I’ll let you keep the cash..... and I promise not to shoot you.”

The man dug about in his jacket pocket and pulled out a good quality leather wallet. His hand trembled as he handed it to Bradford. He took it with his left hand and shoved it in a pocket, noting that it was still bulky and full of paper money. No one else had found the body, the squib would clean everything up.

“Hey, you said the cash was mine !”

Bradford hit him hard, catching him at the top of the throat and shoving him backwards against the cubicle wall. He heard the man’s neck snap and knew that his new friend was dead. He’d kept his promise, he hadn’t shot him. The man had seen the wallet though, there was a slight chance that he might repeat the name somewhere. Now he had the time, he looked at the wallet and it contained a lot of cash, easily a thousand dollars. Credit cards too and an ID, which it was too dark to read.

“Who are you ?” he muttered at the body.

He almost dropped the wallet on the floor, but some remnant of his long lost curiosity surfaced. He had to know more about Gillian’s past. He put the wallet back in his pocket and then removed what looked like a spectacle case from his jacket. He lifted the hinged top of the MCA Corp, Anti-Personnel device 12.2. Better known to everyone on all sides of the law as a squib. He’d bought three from Bobby Laszlo, the most reliable shady arms dealer in San Pablo. In a profession full of dodgy characters, Bobby had never been known to sell anything that exploded in your face. Bradford had bought three and this was his last, they made great room sanitisers if you were concerned about leaving forensic evidence. Not that any cop was ever going to call forensics in to a dead body in 17 East. He knew how the small screen worked and he set the timer for five minutes and pressed the green button.

‘Are you sure ? (green yes, red no).’

It always made him furrow his brow, damned weapons getting dumbed down now. Not enough his computer, bike and apartment nagged at him. Now bloody weapons were doing it. He pressed the green button and watched the timer begin. He ripped the fabric off the self-adhesive strip and pushed the device against the cubicle wall, holding it there for a count of five. Now nothing could stop it, so he walked carefully, but quickly from the building. Turning away from the Cathedral, he clambered over more rubble and onto a wide street. A group of people were outside a building a hundred yards away on his right, so he turned left and quickly crossed the road.

‘A n D Le Corp – Quality fffice plies.’

Was all that was left of the sign above the door, the building looked to have ceased to be a company office a long time ago. It was just the right distance from his device though, he wanted to make sure it went off. The doors to the building had long gone, so he used a wall as cover and peered toward the Cathedral. At exactly five minutes the street outside was briefly lit up by a light brighter than the midday sun. It faded quickly, but the red glow of flames carried on, accompanied by the shrieks of scared people. He looked out and saw the bathhouse being reduced to nothing but a heap of red hot rubble. Bradford paused though and looked up, conscious of movement on the very edge of his vision. The Chimpanzee reaction time kicked in and he saw her there, watching the fire from a window two floors above him.

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He found her and the children in a room that still had windows with glass in. It felt quite comfortable, even secure if the door was wedged closed. None of them seemed worried about his

presence, even the children seemed to accept that he was no threat. She had two candles to light the place, both jammed into wine bottles.

“Are you ok ?” He asked. “I’m sorry for running you out of the bathhouse.”

“This place is better. It’s cleaner and there’s still running water in a kitchen downstairs.”

Her accent was thick and reminded him that she’d once blessed him in old world Spanish. He didn’t really know what to say to her.

“The children, they’re doing alright ?”

The girl child was stirring a pot on an old paraffin stove, the whole contraption looked unsafe.

“They have enough to eat, for now.”

He sat on the floor next to her and noticed the blaster on the floor nearby and the Subversive’s badge the boy child had pinned to his jumper. She watched him scan the room, yet never reached for the blaster.

“Yes I am your enemy.” She said. “That was my man you killed, yet I think you don’t mean to kill me and my children. If you did, you’d have done so by now.”

Her diction had the perfection that only a foreigner learning English ever seems to be able to attain.

“I mean you no harm.” He said.

The girl child turned off the stove and spooned the contents onto four plates, automatically giving some of their meagre rations to the stranger sat with them. He took the plate and a plastic spoon and ate the odd mixture of tinned food the girl had heated up. It was good and he enjoyed it, knowing that sharing their food was more than just symbolic, he was now obligated to them in some way.

“My name is Bradford.” He said.

“Camila.” She said pointing at herself. “My daughter Sofia and son Mateo.”

They cleaned the dishes and the woman made sure her kids had a quick wash in a basin of clean water. By the time Sofia and Mateo were under their blankets, the sun was just rising on Sunday morning. He wasn’t surprised by their odd bedtime, many of the homeless were active at night, it was safer. Camila came and sat next to him, actually holding his arm.

“I hate you for killing my husband.” She said. “But I love you for sparing my children.”

She looked him straight in the eyes.

“It is a predicament.” She said.

“It is.” He agreed.

Bradford took the dead man’s wallet from his pocket and gave the dollars to Camila, seeing her surprise at the amount of cash he was giving her.

“Thank you.”

“Do you intend to live here for a while ?” He asked.

“Yes, it’s a good place.”

“I’ll try and find you a better home.” He said. “One where you don’t need to wedge the door with bits of wood. I’ll be back in two or three days.”

He left, listening to her wedge the door as he went down the stairs. She had a decent blaster and money for food, they’d be safe for now. The street was deserted as he walked past the remains of the bathhouse, now just a knee high pile of burnt bricks.

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Bradford looked at the clock as he walked into his apartment and it was fifteen minutes past the time he usually got up on Sunday. He had to get some sleep though; even two hours would do the trick. He took his trousers off in the lounge and began to pull off the Kevlar body suit. Then he



noticed the skin bug and something inside him screamed. He'd known cops who'd cut six of the insects off their legs in the showers, making a joke of it, but Bradford considered them dreadful things. The public thought they were new super bed bugs or ticks, but a lab guy had told him they were something new, something that had adapted in the war.

"Ewww you disgusting thing." He muttered at the thing just above his waist.

They were a hazard of getting up close to junkies, who all seemed to be infested with skin bugs. He'd seem one gang member in lockup with two on his neck.

"If I cut em off, there'll be another two there tomorrow."

There was no official policy to torch gang houses, but a surprising number had been raised to the ground, it saved someone the job of clearing the infestation. Bradford touched the grey bump under his skin and felt it pull deeper into his flesh. He knew the routine, every cop had dealt with skin bugs, they were a hazard of the job. He took off his remaining clothes and felt through everything, every seam and behind every button. Then it all went in the laundry basket. The bugs were resistant to many standard pesticides, but all cops kept a CompZed spray in their bathroom. He took the spray and a pair of tweezers into the shower, now came the nasty part.

'Spray infected area and remove dead bug with tweezers.'

It said on the side of the spray tin. It sounded so easy, yet he'd known parents who'd taken their kids to the hospital to have the things removed. He sprayed the bump under his skin and it squirmed and then went still. Bradford dug the tweezers in, ignoring the blood and pain, getting a good grip on the dime sized bug. Pulling out a live one could leave some legs behind, but dead ones usually came out clean. Bradford held the tiny insect between thumb and forefinger and squished it, then washed the blood and grey gunk off his hand. He used vast amounts of shower gel, searching his body for any more skin bugs. When he was happy he wasn't carrying any other parasites, he turned off the shower and dried himself.

A dab of anti-bacterial ointment and a sticky bandage and he felt properly clean again. He put on a clean pair of boxer shorts and took the dead man's wallet from his jacket. He had to know who he'd killed, before getting a few hours sleep. Bradford spread everything over his kitchen table, credit cards, government ID, driver's license, medical cover card, etc. For a second his mind refused to accept what he was seeing, it had to be a mistake.

'Michael M Reece.' Was on everything, but it couldn't be him.

He thought back to the night in the Cathedral and the face of the man he'd followed up the stairs and into the ruined garden. For a fraction of a second he had seen his face clearly and it was the face on the government ID. The ID was for the large government facility out in Eagle Valley. Bradford had killed and incinerated the government's top bio-weapons guy.

'Michael M Reece – Operations Director.' The card said.

What the fuck had Gillian got him involved in ? He had to sleep though and spending the afternoon with Amoe was important to him. Gillian would have to wait, no one was going to find Michael Reece.

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He woke up with no clear idea of the time, which was unusual. Bradford looked to his left and there was the back of Amoe's head, her long hair spread across the pillow. He moved his head and saw the huge stuffed panda that lived on the trunk at the foot of her bed. It was only the fourth time they'd shared a bed, the first time at her apartment. He sniffed the air, taking in the atmosphere like a predator feeling out new territory.

"You look awful." She'd said

"I picked up a skin bug, they always freak me out."

"Me too. Show me."

He'd pulled his shirt to one side to show her the plaster covered hole and a few minutes later they'd been on her bed. The sex had been better than good, it had been sensational and they never had gone out for a walk. The sex had been as much a sticking plaster as the one on his belly, neither of them wanted the awkward conversation about him leaving the police. He slowly pulled back the sheet and sat on the edge of the bed. The room smelt of her very feminine perfume and the décor was pink and cream, he could almost feel his balls shrinking up. There was enough light coming from a lamp in the hall, for him to find where he'd left his phone. Naked he walked out onto her tenth floor balcony and sat at the table where she ate most of her meals.

"So this is what a two million dollar view looks like." He muttered.

Her father had made a fortune importing fresh food from the outlying regions and he'd given his daughter a small apartment in one of the new, 11 Ocean district developments. There was nothing between her block and the sea and even at night the view was magnificent, especially after a night dealing with a junkie gang member. Part of him loved Amoe and part of him resented her existence and her touchy feely morality, which only the wealthy could afford. No sub or gang member would ever question him on his career, they knew the reality of life in San Pablo. But of course, Amoe didn't understand because she didn't know. He picked up his phone, turning the volume right down and hitting Maria's face icon. It rang for quite a while, before her face was in front of him, looking sleepy and dishevelled.

"Bradford ! Do you know what time it is ?"

He didn't, sex always screwed up his internal clock.

"I bet you were up playing video games."

"No I wasn't ! It's Monday and I have a new boss to meet in a few hours."

He looked at the time on the phone and realised it was four forty five in the morning.

"Sorry Maria, but I really need your advice. I'm thinking of telling Amoe about what I really do for a living. It's a good idea isn't it ? Shows I trust her."

He watched his partner face plant her pillow and give a long drawn out sigh.

"Fuck no, partner ! How many times have you slept with this woman ?"

"I know how I feel about her Maria."

"Don't give me that soul mate crap at five am. How many times ?"

"Four."

She sighed again and pulled the hair out of her eyes.

"Are you listening to me Bradford. I don't want your glazed eye look, you need to really listen."

"Ok, I'm listening."

"You are not going to tell this poor woman about PD489. You don't tell a woman you've only slept with four times, something that could get her killed."

Once Maria said the obvious, he realised it was a bad idea. Why hadn't he spoken to her about it on Saturday ? Bradford had always found feelings a difficult subject.

"Yeah, ok Maria. I get it, bad idea."

"I'm tired Bradford, so I'm going to give you a bit of brutal honesty."

"Jeez Maria."

"You need to hear it. Amoe loves the false you, the Bradford who helps old ladies and rescues kittens from fires. She doesn't love the Bradford who bets how many subversives he can kill in one day. Tell her and you not only risk her life, you'll lose her for certain."

“So what do I do ?”

“Carry on with being the pretend you, for life if necessary. Lie through your teeth, tell her you needed the extra pay to open a donkey sanctuary, anything but the truth.”

She was staring at him now, her eyes fully awake and angry.

“That makes sense, thank Maria. I’ll let you get back to sleep.”

“I’ll buy you lunch later today..... Boss !”

She’d gone, ending the connection and leaving him with a blank screen. He went back to bed, leaning over Amoe and kissing her neck. She stirred and turned towards him, her eyes opening as she woke.

“HmMMM Bradford, you are insatiable.”

For the next hour all he thought about was how well their bodies fitted together and how he was going to survive on so little sleep.

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The guy at the barrier gave him an odd look and gave him new instructions.

“Oh, gone up in the world.” He said, “Sanitation Executive parking is on level 18, rows A to C.”

And of course Bradford ignored him and parked his bike in what had become his usual spot, outside the main doors of the sanitation department. He looked at the concrete building and hoped he never actually went inside the building. He took his usual route to building 47, hoping someone he knew was on the front desk.

“Morning.”

It was someone he didn’t know probably a part timer. It wasn’t that PD489 didn’t have the budget to employ full time staff, it was easier to disavow all knowledge of part timers.

“Morning.” He replied.

He took the lift up, hoping for a quiet half hour to get coffee and get to know the layout of his office, but Roland was waiting at his office door.

“Chris Dudley gave my ID card access to his office.” Said Roland.

“Morning Roland.” Answered Bradford.

Roland was his PA, runner, clerical helper and anything else the squad leader wanted him to be. Chris had let him virtually run things, but Bradford wasn’t like Chris. He pressed his ID card against the door plate and heard it click open. IT had obviously got their finger out, they always did for the boss.

“We need to discuss our working dynamic.” Said Roland.

Roland had been a nuisance, often getting between the operatives and Chris Dudley, often putting bureaucracy ahead of getting the job done. Bradford needed him though and he didn’t want the heaps of paperwork swamping him. Bradford sat in his large leather chair and pointed at the chair the other side of his desk.

“Come in and sit down.” He said.

Roland carried a tablet everywhere, even into the toilet, he called it his battle box. He placed it on Bradford’s desk and started tapping.

“We can cover your basic duties today at three.” He said. “And we can agree your timetable tomorrow at eleven.”

“No.” Said Bradford.

“No ?”

“Roland I want to know everything going through this office. No favourites, no blacklists either. If someone wants to see me, let me know. Otherwise I’ll be looking for a new PA.”

Roland went quite pale, but at least he was no longer tapping on his tablet.

"I need you Roland. I don't want to attend meetings about our expenditure on paperclips, or fill in our monthly stats. But I need to know what's going on. Really I want to be out there with the operatives and I'm hoping you can help me achieve that."

"I can, I really can."

Roland looked happy. Bradford noticed an envelope in the middle of his desk, marked private and strictly confidential. He opened it and read the note inside;

'Be ready for a call from President Herbert at ten this morning.'

It was genuine, who else could get into his office and leave presidential letter heads on his desk? He must have looked stunned, Roland noticed.

"Bad news?" He asked.

"No. The president is calling me at ten."

"Yes, very humorous. Was there anything else Sir?"

"Bradford, I'm Bradford to everyone. Was there anything interesting in the weekend's memos, bolos and general crap?"

Roland flicked through dozens of cop memos, general alerts and a few notices from other security departments.

"It will take me a while to learn what you considering interesting, but there's a missing government scientist."

"Show me."

Bradford looked at the picture of Michael M Reece, scientist, assumed victim of kidnapping. At least he could now ask Gillian direct questions about her ex-lover. A security alert made it all very public.

"That's the sort of thing Roland. Let me have a hard copy this morning."

Roland went and it was nine forty five before Maria put her head round his door.

"Want to come to the basement?" She asked. "Schneider confiscated a rail gun from the Diablos on Saturday and we're going to see how many concrete blocks it will go through."

"Love to, but I have the president calling at ten."

"Which president?"

"Our one."

He held up the paper with the rather gaudy gold lions in the crest.

"I'm impressed." She said. "How about I treat you to lunch?"

"Sticky's?"

"Where else?"

"Fine, see you at one."

She left, leaving him looking at his phone and wondering why president Herbert wanted to talk to him.

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