

## Bradford II – Badlands

### Chapter 4 - Jared

**“Don’t complain about the graffiti, it’s the only source of genuine news in San Pablo.”**  
**Her father had once told her and he would have known. He’d been one of the corrupt politicians, paying to have awkward stories kept out of the press.**

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Hector Pérez, once known as Crowman, now wanting to become known as Raven, was sat in an elderly electric car, listening to Camila give a long monologue about how to stay safe in the Badlands, mixed with lots of general instructions. He knew it all and he was tired, sore and eager to get away from her and Bradford. It was like an end of term exam, taken at two in the morning, while still in pain from the physical alterations to his appearance.

“Is it too late to change my mind and get on the next bus out of town ?” He asked.

Camila looked angry and about to add insubordination onto her long list of do’s and don’ts. Bradford was grinning at him, though he didn’t seem in the mood to stop Camila chewing him out.

“I know all this stuff.” Said Hector. “Probably better..... No not better than you two, but just as well as you. I ache all over and just want to go and say hi to the nearest subs. With luck they’ll find a grubby blanket I can asleep on.”

“The surgeons did a good job, your own mother wouldn’t recognise you.” Said Camila.

His mother was dead, but Hector decided not to push the point. He felt his face, something the doctors had told him to avoid doing. They’d told him it would hurt and it did.

“You look healed up.” Said Bradford.

“Bones take a while to heal up properly, or so the doctors told me.” Said Hector. “They removed two moles that might have been recognised and altered a few tattoos. The new ink hurts worse than my face, though I’m still happy to be out of the PD489 building..... No offence.”

“None taken, there are days when I hate the place.” Said Bradford.

“You’ll need to invent a new name for yourself.” Said Camila. “And don’t forget that you can’t go up to people you recognise.”

For fuck sake, she was driving him crazy. He didn’t want to upset her though. Getting out of jail with no record and a pile of cash, was too good an opportunity to miss. He settled for glaring at her and giving her his best ‘whatever,’ face. Of course it might not work with his new face.

“I’m not an idiot.” He replied. “I’m going to call myself Jared, I’ve always liked Jared. No second name or ID of course. Anyone with a legit San Pablo ID has no real reason to be in the Badlands.”

“Jared.... Old biblical name.” Said Camila. “It means flower.”

Bitch, he really wanted to punch her in the face, but she would probably win a fight with him.

“Jared sounds fine.” Said Bradford. “It would have been nice to load you up with high tech weapons, but if they were noticed.... Best if you just carry an old Henriksen 75.”

“I don’t mind, it’s a good weapon.”

Camila seemed to soften, handing him a grubby wallet, with a few Herberts sticking out of it. They looked to be hundreds and there were a fair number of them.

“This should help you get by.” She said. “ Just..... No, you’re not an idiot Hector. Look after yourself and make the rendezvous in seven days, or I’ll come looking for you.”

“Good, my hide might depend on it.”

“Be careful about hooking up with old flames.” She added. “Us women can always recognise a dick we’ve enjoyed.”

Bradford was laughing, as Hector left the car and began walking into the night. He rehearsed the cover story he’d gone through with the intelligence people at PD489.

“Keep it simple and as close to the truth as possible.” They’d told him.

No one was going to ask him too much about his past, but he couldn’t arrive without some kind of story. One of the tattoos added to his back, was a prison tattoo from San Sebastian, one of the other New Nations. It gave him credibility if required and as there was no passing of information between the constantly feuding nations, it couldn’t be disproved. Jared was a renegade, a subversive who found the San Sebastian cops on his trail and decided to get on the first freight ship to San Pablo. Best of all, he had the street skills to back the story up and make himself useful.

“Give them a week and they’ll love me.” He muttered.

The Badlands could be cold in the hours before dawn, but the air felt colder than he was expecting. He felt stiff and awkward from the cold, before he saw the small settlement of Desperation, in the moonlight. No lights showing of course and the town hadn’t always been called Desperation. The name was typical of the humour of those who lived on the edges of San Pablo society, its original name forgotten.

Even PD489 rarely ventured as deep into the Badlands as Desperation, so the settlement of twenty or so buildings had been left in peace. Ruined buildings of course and one well that gave out water with a strange yellow tint, but Desperation was paradise compared to most places in the Badlands. Hector crept carefully up to a door in one particular building, hoping the phrase to get in hadn’t changed in the last two or three years. He wrapped his knuckles on the door and waited.

“Keep still; at least four blasters are aimed right at your head.”

All a lie, he’d once lived in Desperation for a while and knew it would be one half asleep guy, on the other side of the door.

“I have a gift for Manuel.” Said Hector.

People wandered around the Badlands for years, often spending some time in prison. Passwords and phrases were rarely changed and old ones were remembered. The door opened a crack, an oil lamp used to look him over.

“Come in slowly, no funny business.”

Hector didn’t underestimate the old guy aiming a blaster at his chest. Reaching old age in the Badlands was an achievement managed by few. He stepped into the room, keeping his hands well away from his sides.

“You got a name ?”

“Jared.”

“What brings you to this shit hole ?”

A teenage girl was lying under blankets on the other side of the room, her eyes open and alert. One old guy and a kid didn’t seem much of a guard, but Hector knew better than to get cocky.

“I did some time in San Sebastian and a friend of a friend told me how to find this place.” Said Hector. “They said it was a good place to get a bed for a night, maybe longer if I made myself useful.”

“Useful huh ? What are you carrying ?”

He slowly moved his coat to one side, to reveal the Henriksen 75, shoved down the gap between trousers and shirt.

“You can’t beat the classics. Is it a 70 ?”

"No a 75."

"Good weapon. There is no price of admission, but we share here."

"What you got to share?" Asked the girl under the blanket.

They seemed to accept him now, no concern showed as he removed his backpack and rummaged through it. There was half a packet of chocolate chip cookies, lovingly double wrapped like something precious. Hector handed it to the old guy, as though he was giving him a holy relic.

"Fine, I'm Bob and that's Maggie in the corner. I'll show you where you can sleep."

Along a corridor that didn't smell too bad. They'd obviously fixed the ventilation a little since he'd last been there. Then down a ramp, before a flight of steps. Down though, always down. Subversives were like mole people, always digging, creating a bunker if there wasn't one there already. All the places where they ate, slept and lived would be deep down, with several emergency exits.

Eventually Bob stopped in front of two doors, with crude drawings to represent gender scribbled on them.

"The toilets and they work, though don't expect them to flush."

Bob grinned at what was obviously one of his new standard jokes for new arrivals. Water was scarce, clean water even scarcer. Hector knew that the toilets were holes in a board, above a deep and smelly hole in the ground. He grinned back at Bob.

"Don't use the ladies.... It's not funny and might get you cut."

Through a set of flappy rubber doors and they were into a large room, which Hector knew was the main living area. Sleeping space was in the various side rooms, on whatever you could find to make yourself more comfortable.

"Home sweet home." Said Bob. "I'll show you were to get a blanket. We had a bug problem a while back. Everything is cleaned and sprayed now. You won't wake up with any new friends sharing you bedding."

Bob chuckled again, as he showed him a loose bundle of blankets on a table. Hector shook one out and threw it over his shoulder.

"I'll make sure you get the full tour of the place in the morning Jared. Just mind your own business and you'll get on fine here."

"I'm sure I will Bob."

Bob didn't want to go though and had the look of a man with an unpleasant task to perform.

"Sorry Jared, but I have to warn you not to steal anyone's stuff."

"I won't."

"And don't pester any of the women who don't want to be pestered, or things can get really bad, really quickly."

"No problem, you won't know I'm here."

Bob slapped him on the shoulder and left. Hector knew the layout of the place and where to avoid sleeping. Nowhere near the large ventilation fan, that made a hell of a racket when it started up. Well away from the kitchen area too. No matter what Bob said about spraying, the kitchen always seemed to attract roaches. Hector had decided on where to sleep, when he saw a woman's face, half hidden under a blanket. Crap, it was Roxy.

Roxy ran the subversive group in Desperation and he'd gone through a little period of mourning, after hearing of her death. Only Roxy wasn't dead, she was asleep only a few feet away from him. Hector remembered the warning about things getting really bad, really quickly. Staring at the Subs leader, was likely to cause trouble. He went to a room on the far side of the living area, choosing a spot that looked dry and reasonably clean.

“Crap, Roxy alive and I can’t let her know it’s me.” He muttered.

Warm enough to sleep on his blanket, rather than under it. Hector wondered if he’d be able to get to sleep. About three seconds later, he was into a deep untroubled sleep.

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Bradford genuinely liked Pastor Ivor. The large black priest wasn’t getting any younger, but he still firmly controlled his flock. Every year Pastor Ivor was given enough money to refurbish the old cathedral and every year he used it to feed and clothe the poor. Wealthy sponsors understood his motives and turned a blind eye to some of the shady characters, who hid among the Pastor’s flock. President Herbert had once asked Bradford for a feasibility study.

“The likely outcomes from Pastor Ivor being removed, dying from an unfortunate accident.”

Bradford and Maria had prepared an honest report, both putting aside their good feelings about the elderly priest. There was a certain level of social disruption centred on the cathedral, but it was likely to be worse if the flock were left leaderless. Bradford was never officially given any feedback on his report, though he assumed Pastor Ivor was safe, for now. If there ever was a presidential order to quietly rid San Pablo of the turbulent priest, Bradford knew he’d get the job of doing it.

“I remember you, nice bike. We’ll watch it for you.”

He’d used his motorcycle, pleased to have a chance to use it again. The gang of kids outside the cathedral had looked after it before, though there was always a price. Genuine protection or a protection racket ? Bradford wasn’t sure, but he always paid up and his bike was always there when he left. The rate might have gone up a bit, he hadn’t visited the cathedral for a while.

“How much ?”

“Five Herberts.”

“Each.” One of them added.

“There’s four of you..... That’s a bit expensive guys.”

One was a girl, but guy seemed to cover everyone these days. They muttered and the eldest mentioned him being a friend of the Pastor.

“Five will do and we’ll look after it really well.”

He paid the five with a promise of another five when he returned. Ten was quite a lot of cash for what was probably a shakedown, but he loved his motorcycle. Bradford walked across the street, wearing his usual casual wear, which made him look more shady and dishevelled than the average subversive.

“Food will be available after Pastor Ivor had spoken.”

He was told by a smiling lady at the door. It was the oldest trick in the book and various religions had been using it for centuries. Offer the flock a meal, but only after they’ve listened to the holy man speak for half an hour. Bradford didn’t mind, he was visiting the cathedral to get a feel for the place again, to immerse himself and pick up whatever information he could. Officially there were no guards around the Pastor, but large men carrying blasters under their jackets, tended to stand out in the crowd. Bradford recognised one of them.

“Tobias, I’d appreciate a moment with the Pastor tonight.”

“He’s got a lot going on, might be quite late.”

“I don’t mind.”

“I’ll arrange it, probably after midnight.”

Bradford did his best to find a quiet spot to merge in with the crowd. Some would know him as a friend of the Pastor, while others would think he probably had heavily armed operatives nearby. Or

maybe everyone was obeying the rules of sanctuary in the cathedral. Whatever the reason he'd never felt threatened on any of his visits.

"About time you listened to one of his talks."

A girl in robes, though he couldn't remember her name. She touched the back of his hand and moved on. Bradford leant against a cold stone pillar and listened to Pastor Ivor, as he trod the line between legitimate criticism of the current regime and outright sedition. It was no wonder that President Herbert had toyed with the idea of an unfortunate accident. Bradford found himself clapping the part where all those in law enforcement, were called oppressors. Ivor could do that though and leave you wanting to shake his hand afterwards.

"A hot meal will now be served in the basement."

Was how Pastor Ivor always ended his talks. Always talks, never sermons, he was quite clear about that. Bradford headed for the stairs with everyone else. Maria had come with him on a few occasions and they'd both sat and ate the food. It wasn't all about being poor and needing a hot meal, it was about breaking bread with people, showing respect.

"Friends eat together." Ivor had once said to him. "Refusing food we've offered to you as a friend, is an insult."

So, Bradford queued up at the long table, waiting to be given a tray with a meal on it. The food was usually quite good. Not up to the standards in Sticky's, but your elbows didn't stick to the table.

"How is your wife doing ? The baby I mean."

The girl in robes again and he still couldn't put a name to the smiling face. She looked about mid-twenties, with brown skin and the same accent as Camila, which meant nothing. The troubles had effectively put the racial mix of the planet into a blender. Add a few generations of living in the New Nations and you had Chinese restaurants, run by a guy called Bob, who sold more cherry pie than noodles.

"Sorry, I know you, but....."

"Marie. Don't worry, you must meet a lot of people."

She followed him, sitting next to him and picking at his food with her fingers. The sort of thing that would have driven Roland crazy, but he didn't mind.

"My wife is about six months pregnant, mother and daughter doing fine."

"Good, it's nice to hear good news in these troubled times."

She carried on picking at his food, while he wondered what she really wanted.

"He is very fond of you. I've heard him mention you often, in his prayers."

Bradford knew who she meant, Pastor Ivor of course.

"We worked out the terms of a truce long ago."

She had a nice laugh and her eyes did hold his just that little bit too long. Once he might have been tempted, but not now.

"I'd like to ask you a favour." She said. "For him really.... If the truce ever ends and they send you after him. Please give him a warning... Will you ?"

Marie, of course, it was all coming back to him. The cathedral might have been a catholic place of worship, but other older religions had been bolted on. Pastor Ivor was no celibate priest; there were several children by at least two different women. He'd fathered one child with an actress, a pretty girl child called Marie and probably the young woman sat next to him.

"I'm sure no one would ever want to harm Ivor." He said.

Marie wasn't happy with his reply, her finger smelt of vegetable biryani, as they held onto his arm. Her pretty hazel eyes, looking into his.

“You owe him Bradford. Give me your word.”

He owed a lot of people and if it hadn't been for LabSync4 adjusting his personality, he might have developed real emotions for Pastor Ivor. He was going to pull himself free of her grip, but something kept him looking at her.

“I'll do better than that Marie.” He said. “If I ever hear your father is being threatened, I'll take him to safety myself.”

Was baby brain contagious? He'd said it and meant it, but had no idea why.

“So you did recognise me?”

“Not at first, but you have the same ‘don't fuck with me,’ look in your eyes, that he has.”

Marie smiled and leant in close, shoving a note into his hand.

“A reward.” She said. “You will burn in hell though Bradford Scott, if you don't keep your word.”

The toilets weren't anywhere near as filthy and smelly as usual, though they still weren't going to win any hygiene awards. He found an empty cubicle and leant against the door, before unfolding the note.

‘The person who bribed Call-Me-Doug's guards, will be in Longmont on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, buying a shipment from Dimitri.’

That was it, no name and a lot of people bought from Dimitri. It would be genuine information though; she was relying on him to look after her father, if things ever went badly wrong. He'd just have to go to Longmont and lurk about. Lurking he was good at, could have won medals for it. Bradford was told Pastor Ivor was ready to see him, at about one in the morning. For an old guy, the priest seemed to work long hours. Two glasses were on the table as he entered the room, full of a clear yellow liquid that Bradford hoped was expensive whiskey.

“Bradford, good to see you. I hope you're not here for me to save your soul.” Said Pastor Ivor.

“I'm good, but I can't work miracles.” He added.

They hugged and Bradford decided that if it ever came to it, he'd keep his promise to Marie.

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They'd spent the night in the apartment by the Ocean. It happened occasionally, when they both needed to get out of the city for a while. The air was fresh off the sea and there was no expressway ramp covered in graffiti. Amoe had woken up to have breakfast with Bradford, before going back to bed for a couple of hours. She felt constantly tired and lying on her side took away a lot of the aches and pains. Women had been going through pregnancy for thousands of years. Yet she couldn't help wondering why something so large, had to come into the world through somewhere so small. Somewhere with tens of thousands of nerve endings, to make the pain really spectacular.

“Just proves God is a man.” She muttered.

Just clothing enough to answer the front door, in case a delivery guy arrived with something. After two cups of coffee, she still felt as though she wanted another nap. Two cups of coffee was her limit though, as a magazine article had suggested too much coffee was bad during pregnancy. She was a sucker for all the magazine articles on having a baby and knew it. It was her new addiction though, one she couldn't shake off.

There was a clatter in the hallway, followed by a thump on the door. It was the usual time for one of the people who ran the front desk, to bring her mail up. Not part of the usual service for tenants, but owning the building brought a few perks.

“Thank you Phil.”

“No problem.”

There was the usual pile of junk and a few bills, plus a new rolled up copy of 'San Pablo Baby', her favourite magazine fix. A postcard from Shereen too, they arrived at the rate of about three a year. Never a return address of course, Shereen was still on the run.

'Still alive... Having fun.'

With a picture of a beach in New Borongan. Shereen still had to be in touch with Bradford, the cards to her in person, had only started after her pregnancy began. Amoe didn't think the cops were still looking for her, but Mike Lakey had been a powerful man, with a lot of secrets in his head. It was well known that Shereen knew a lot of those secrets. She'd be on the run for the rest of her life.

"She seems to be enjoying it though." Amoe mumbled.

By lunchtime she was hungry and not keen on anything in the refrigerator, or the well-stocked pantry. That was how it was lately, always wanting something different to eat. No fads, just a weird dislike of food she'd once loved. There was a decent place to eat not far from the building.

"Come on you slut, change and go out." She muttered at herself.

A quick wave at the guy on the desk as she left and Amoe began to appreciate the ocean again. It was a beautiful San Pablo day, with only a five percent chance of light showers, according to the weather girl on ZMB. The palm trees had just been trimmed; there was no graffiti, no kids fighting with each other. It was also soulless and somewhere deep inside; she wanted to get back to the apartment in 7 East Central.

"Don't complain about the graffiti, it's the only source of genuine news in San Pablo."

Her father had once told her and he would have known. He'd been one of the corrupt politicians, paying to have awkward stories kept out of the press.

'..... on fresh Pumpkin Bread.'

The line on the menu caught her attention. A small street corner eating place, but to she had to have whatever it was on pumpkin bread. At that moment, Amoe would have given two body parts, to eat just about anything on pumpkin bread. Knowing she was being led astray by baby brain, didn't help.

"Sit anywhere you like. I'll come back in a minute for your order."

A young waitress, looking at her bump. Did everyone get that kind of service ? Amie hoped not, there had to be a few perks for being huge and having a psychotic need for pumpkin bread. Amoe sat at a table outside in the cool morning breeze and ordered a triple helping of tuna melt on pumpkin bread.

"How long to go ?" Asked the waitress.

Everyone asked, but at least there was no hand going out to pat her bump.

"Two months, three weeks and two days."

Amoe scrapped a lot of the melt off the bread and ate it, the way a starving dog bolts its food. She was more dignified in eating the second slice, taking her time to enjoy the flavour. Amoe knew that the fad wouldn't last and it would probably be another food tomorrow. She had read about it, in at least two dozen magazines.

Her new issue of 'San Pablo Baby' ! It was in her bag, the perfect accompaniment to sitting in the morning breeze, while thinking about ordering another three tuna melts. Amoe unfolded the magazine and beckoned over the waitress.

"I think it's a fad." She explained. "Can I have three slices of toasted pumpkin bread ? No four, make it four."

"No problem."

Amoe flicked through the magazine, amazed at how much stuff people wanted to sell to expectant mums, all of it essential to baby welfare. It was a con of course, but like every mum, she'd fall for it and buy most of it.

"Hello Amoe."

A tallish man, getting between her and the sun. She didn't recognise him until he'd sat down and even then she couldn't recall his name. He was one of the group of nondescript military types, who'd turn up with politicians who wanted to see her father. A minder, henchman, a guard or a hired assassin, or all of those, she didn't really know. Bulky though and dressed in a jacket that didn't suit the warm morning.

"I have something important to say to you, regarding your father."

"He's officially dead now." She said. "His funeral is on Friday, though it's about two years too late. What could you possibly have to say to me?"

The waitress arrived with her toasted pumpkin bread. Amoe rolled up her magazine, putting it into her bag, as her uninvited guest ordered the lunchtime special.

"Is it any good?" He asked her.

"I have no idea, I rarely come here."

It was going to be a threat of some kind, he had that awkwardness about him. Being a cop for years, had taught her how to read people. The man in the heavy jacket was about to warn her off, but off what? She knew nothing.

"Your father knew a lot about the activity of the people I work for."

"Who would they be?"

He smiled at her with blue eyes, which were rare in the New Nations.

"It's just that there will be a full police investigation and some things best left alone, might be talked about."

He leant in to the table and opened his jacket, enough for her to see polished metal, glinting in the sunshine. A long energy weapon of some kind, with a customised fast draw grip. The grip looked well worn, from practise or use. It was a corny old threat, but people kept using it, because it worked. Nothing said 'shut up' better than a blaster in a holster.

"Are you threatening me?" She asked.

"No, of course not. It's just that San Pablo can be a violent place, to people in the wrong place at the wrong time. Then there are all the bad driver and accident do happen. My employers just want to make sure that you and your mother, appreciate the need to keep fucking quiet."

The F bomb worked, gaining her full attention. The waitress had seen him, and a few of the other diners must have noticed the bulky guy with blue eyes. She was safe, it was all just a warning. Her hand dropped into her bag.

"A new baby on the way, I'm sure you want a quiet life. I just need to know you understand what I'm saying. You do understand, don't you?"

There was a small blaster in her bag. She was a cop with gun permit, but having the military lon blaster concealed in her bag, probably broke several laws. Being the wife of Bradford Scott, she was unlikely to be arrested for having it. Her expression didn't change, as her hand curled round the blaster.

"Fine, fine..... Tell your people I understand."

"Good, good."

He relaxed, sitting back in his chair, allowing his jacket to come between his hands and his blaster. No words, only the uniformed cops shouted and screamed at people, before opening fire. She

smoothly brought the Ion blaster out her bag and shot him twice. Both shots right into the centre of his forehead.

"Shouldn't have threatened my baby." She muttered.

His head went back, but he remained upright in the chair, his lovely blue lifeless eyes, looking up into the sky. Amoe had intended to call Bradford and have PD489 handle everything. The waitress came out with the dead guy's special though and began screaming. Amoe sighed and carried on eating her toasted pumpkin bread. Soon the cops would arrive and realise who she was, before they called Roland. It was a longer route than she'd intended, but it would have to do.

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Camila could have delegated the job to at least six or seven other people. She had a legitimate business, she was a success. One major news agency had wanted to run a piece on her, syndicated out to the media in all the New Nations. She'd given them a firm no to that idea of course. Her cleaning company might be legit, but her other interests definitely weren't. Having her picture splashed all over in a rags to riches piece, was a non-starter.

"Do you want me to come in with you?" Asked Amoe's mother.

Haunani Lee, Amoe's mother and widow of the now infamous Kealani Lee. Bradford had told her to pick the mother up first, then go and fetch Amoe from police custody. Haunani had taken some persuading, even threatening to call the cops, when Camila began to pack a suitcase for her.

"I'm taking you with me Mrs Lee." Camila had told her. "In the back of the car or in the trunk, your choice?"

Not an idle threat. Camila owed Bradford for getting her family out of the derelict buildings near the old cathedral. He'd helped her set up in business and given the right references for her children to attend a good school. Bradford wanted Amoe and her mother brought to his apartment, so she was going to do it. Even if it meant using force and putting a bound and gagged Haunani Lee, in the trunk of her car. Now they were both in the public car park, just over the road from City North Police Station.

"Not a good idea for you to come with me." Said Camila. "These places are never pleasant, best if you wait here."

"Tell Amoe I love her."

Camila looked over the seat at the woman in the back seat.

"You can tell her yourself in a few minutes." Said Camila. "You're not going to run off are you?"

"No, of course not."

"You'd better not, because I will chase you and I will catch you. I'm going to be bringing your daughter out of a police cell and the last thing she needs to see, is me tying her mother to a car door handle.... Do we understand one another Mrs Lee?"

"You are a very disagreeable woman... But I promise to be here when you return."

She should have brought one of her guys with her, she realised that now. Camila walked into the entrance hall of the police station. City North was one of the oldest police stations, constructed at huge expense, out of stone and timber. It looked impressive, though the odour of urine and unwashed bodies, ruined the effect. No queue at the desk, she leant her elbows on the counter top and waited for one of three bored looking cops, to notice her.

"Yes?"

"My name is Camila Martínez. It's all been arranged with PD489. I'm here to pick up Amoe Scott."

"Got any ID?"

"You know who I work for. Don't be fucking ridiculous!"

It worked, three anxious looking cops, with one on his way to fetch Amoe. They all either wanted to work for Bradford, or they were shit scared of his connections. Camila sat on one of the wooden benches provided for the public and waited.

'Javez is innocent.' Was carved into the wood.

The famous Javez case had been fifty years before. There was lots more graffiti, most of it from before she'd been born. It was all plastic and fibre board in the new police stations, but they did tend to smell better.

"Thank you for coming to get me."

She hugged Amoe, even though they weren't always the best of friends. Amoe had been a cop since leaving college and Camila had been a crook for even longer. No, they were never going to be besties.

"Did they give you all your things back?"

"Everything except my blaster."

"That can be replaced. We should leave, I left your mother in the back of my car and she..... Well, let's just say that your mom can be a pain."

"Oh yes, that sounds like my mom....but the blaster. It was a present from Bradford."

Crap, she definitely should have brought one of her guys, maybe two.

"You go out and make sure your mom doesn't run off. I'll sort out the blaster."

Back to the counter and the anxious looking cops.

"I need Mrs Scott's blaster."

"It's evidence in a killing."

Camila gave a long sigh and gave them a good minute of silence. The three anxious looking cops, looked about ready to give her anything.

"Really?! We can see how this works out." She said. "But you know this isn't going to end well."

"I'll get the blaster."

It had been in the evidence lockup and the guy with the key.....Eventually she had Amoe's blaster given to her, neatly wrapped in an evidence bag. To her amazement Haunani Lee hadn't run off and was actually smiling.

"Amoe was telling me you're one of Bradford's people."

It was sort of the truth. At that moment she'd have agreed to being the tooth fairy, if it helped get mother and daughter to Bradford's apartment.

"That's right Mrs Lee."

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