

Bradford II – Badlands

Chapter 7 - Interviewed

“Weapons were difficult and Hector should have known that. This week’s harmless settler, often became next week’s dangerous subversive. There was nothing quite as bad as being shot at with weapons you’d given to a few desperate settlers.”

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Camila wanted to meet Hector alone for his regular meeting and update on progress. She trusted her people, but there was always the chance of a careless word to the wrong person. The world thought Hector Pérez was dead, no longer a problem. Camila was determined that nothing was going to cause any rumours that he might not be dead after all.

“If only the roads weren’t quite so bad.” She muttered.

The roads hadn’t been repaired in living memory in that part of the Badlands. The only forms of transport guaranteed to get to where you wanted to go, were military armoured cars and motorcycles. Camila had been given Bradford’s old hydrogen cell bike, which had a range of a thousand miles and enough power to pull a tank out of a ditch.

She’d met Hector at the same place twice already, but still needed to stop and check a map. The old GPS system was now a part of history, almost a legend. There was a military ground based triangulation positioning system, but it was encrypted and all vehicles using it were logged. Camila was doing it the old fashioned way, with a map, a compass and a flashlight in the dark. She’d just gone past Old Bernie’s rock, a well known landmark.

“So now the Badlands screws with my compass.....Perfect.” She mumbled.

She was moaning for the sake of it, the magnetic anomalies were normal. She had Old Bernie’s rock behind her and Bean Tin Hill about two miles away and a little to her right. A few stars in the sky gave her just enough light to line her map up with the landmarks. Hector would be waiting about half a mile away, in the back room of an abandoned building.

“Crap ! I actually miss the Badlands.”

It hit her as she looked towards Bean Tin Hill and saw the red tinge in the starlight. A hill made of iron ore, which had probably once had a proper name. The inhabitants of the Badlands had renamed everything in their own rather unique style.

“Why not ? No one else gives a shit about the Badlands.” Samuel had once told her.

It looked beautiful under the stars and the air didn’t smell the way it did in the city. There were the bug, snakes and strange illnesses of course, but all she could see was a beautiful night time landscape. Hector would be waiting though.

“Fucking Badlands.” She yelled.

Camila had been daydreaming, if it was daydreaming at night ? Not termites, there was nothing for them to feed on. Some kind of bugs had built a mound in the middle of the old road though and she’d almost hit it. Gone were her almost romantic notions of a beautiful open landscape. She now wanted to meet Hector and get home before dawn. He was there, in the back room of whatever the building had been. Her flashlight found him in the dark, sitting on a pile of cinder blocks.

“Are you alright ?” She asked. “Looks like someone gave you quite a beating.”

“My fault, letting my guard down. Roxy now knows I’m Hector.”

“I told you to keep it in your pants.”

Camila sat next to him and the bruises didn't look too bad, once she was close to them. One eye was pretty blue, but she'd seen a lot worse.

"Not a complete disaster, we're now back together." He said.

"What?! I'll give you this Hector. If you fell head first into a septic tank, you'd probably come out holding a diamond."

She'd given him a small camera. It wasn't much, but it was thin and easy to hide. He was flipping through the recorded pictures, showing one to her. It looked like a huge scorpion, but the rear end was all wrong.

"These things are big, you can't see that from the picture." Said Hector. "As big as I am and probably heavier. There is some really bad shit coming out of the Badlands now Camila, far worse than there used to be."

"Were there many of these things?" She asked.

"I saw about thirty of them, but there must have been more. They dug up from beneath the old bunker below the police station."

It wasn't Hector's main investigation, but Bradford was always interested in new infestations of weird bugs. He almost had an obsession about them.

"Keep looking and recording anything strange." She told him. "Get the good people of Desperation to help if you can. I'll bring you a better camera next time we meet. You need to get out and about, visit other groups. Playing house with Roxy isn't going to get your job done."

"Actually Roxy wants to help, she knows I'm still working for PD489." Said Hector. "She doesn't want money for helping, just a few supplies and maybe a few reliable weapons. All they have is army surplus rejects. One girl almost died because the power pack on her blaster failed."

Weapons were difficult and Hector should have known that. This week's harmless settler, often became next week's dangerous subversive. There was nothing quite as bad as being shot at with weapons you'd given to a few desperate settlers.

"Weapons might be a problem Hector. What else, go through your whole list?"

"There are lots of minor wounds that refuse to heal. Some decent medicines would be appreciated and they're not bulky. Food supplements too, vitamins and protein powder. Most people get enough calories, but the food is crap. I'm sure PD489 can easily lose a few boxes without anyone asking questions."

He was right, it was just the weapons she'd need to make a decision on.

"Can I trust you Hector?" She asked. "If I help you with some blasters, will you use that against me one day?"

"No, I doubt if you'll see me again, once this is over. I'm thinking of staying with Roxy, putting down a few roots in the Badlands."

She knew where Samuel had hidden masses of equipment, enough to equip hundreds of fighters. None of it was new, but it was all reliable. Camila decided to take a risk.

"Fine, I'll get you all the supplies and a decent blaster for everyone in Desperation. I'll be back three nights from now in an APC. No lights, you'll need to search for me, about half a mile due south of Desperation."

"Thank you Camila, I won't let you down."

"You'll need to bring Roxy and a few strong backs. None of it will be light."

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Bradford walked to the San Pablo police headquarters, Roland by his side. He was allowed to take someone with him, though the homicide cops were probably expecting him to bring a lawyer.

Roland knew him though and he trusted him. Plus if it was required, Roland could tie people up in process and procedure for hours, maybe even days. His PA was breathing hard and looking a bit flushed.

“Relax Roland, this is just normal procedure. They’re interviewing everyone connected with Kealani Lee. I was a regular at the house and I did marry his daughter. Of course they need to interview me; they’d be doing a crap job if they didn’t.”

“I’m worried you might get an ambitious detective looking to make a name for himself, or herself.”

“Well..... We can always ask Bobby to take care of them.”

At one time Roland would have gone a nice shade of purple and maybe even hyperventilated. Now he just grinned back at him. Maybe Amoe was right ? Maybe he had turned poor meek Roland into a monster.

“I haven’t been inside this building in years.” Said Roland.

“They gave it a refurb, which cost at least twice as much as pulling it down and rebuilding it.” Said Bradford. “That really pissed off President Herbert.”

The building was old, from a time when all public building were given a classical Greek look. Lots of columns, weird arches in odd places and marble tiled floors. It had more glass now, triple glassed bullet proof glass of course. As they walked through a set of revolving doors, Bradford took a deep sniff of the air.

“No refurb can get rid of that Roland.... The aroma on unwashed cop.” He muttered, quietly.

“Police buildings always make me feel guilty Bradford; even ours.”

The feeling of light and space was a deliberately created illusion. There was a gap of about twenty feet between the front doors and the security desk, with its floor to ceiling armoured glass. If a bomber ran into the building, they were only likely to create a greasy burnt spot of the floor.

Bradford walked up to the nearest security guy, talking to him through a slot in the glass.

“I’m Bradford Scott.” He said. “I’ve an appointment with Homicide.”

They wanted his blaster of course, placed on a tray and pushed through the screen. He had a letter somewhere from the president, giving him permission to carry a weapon at any and all times.

Bradford decided to save that piece of ammunition for another day. Much to his surprise, Roland was carrying a state of the art Ion blaster, one still on the restricted technology list.

“I just wanted to see their faces.” Muttered Roland.

A final run over with hand held scanners and they were being pointed towards a waiting area at the rear of the building.

“There are refreshments and someone will call you.”

The large hall had once been lit by artificial light, reflected off marble clad walls. During the refurbishment they’d created wide windows, which overlooked a tidy garden. There were people, the public no less, walking along a pathway in the distance. Just fifty or sixty feet and several layers of armoured glass, separating them from those sworn to protect them.

“Wow, this place has been improved.” Said Roland. “The waiting hall used to feel like a well-lit cave.”

“Yes, definitely worth all the millions of Herberts.” Bradford agreed.

Bradford looked around and the Police Headquarters looked clean and fresh, but it still looked dated. There really was a slight armpit smell too, which would probably be there until the place was finally pulled down.

They had real coffee, Roland was being drawn towards the serving counter, as if hypnotised. Two young people in the overalls of a famous coffee shop chain in San Pablo. The young girl came over and sold them two large mugs of coffee, for a truly enormous sum of money.

"We can put it on expenses." Said Roland.

The girl was staring through the window. Up against the fence, a man had his penis out, swaying it gently from side to side.

"One of our regular crazies." Said the girl. "They move him on, but he just comes back."

It seemed there were drawbacks to having the new wide windows.

"Just another day in San Pablo." Said Bradford.

They were kept waiting for half an hour, probably a deliberate move to inflict a little stress and tension. Eventually a uniformed cop came for them, taking them up to the 9th floor. Homicide were in suite 102.

"Please come in, sorry to have kept you waiting."

Two of them, an older woman and a man who looked barely out of training. The woman was detective Gillis and detective Rotella was the man. No ranks given, but it was obvious the woman was in charge.

"We will be recording this interview and you will be sent a full transcript." Said Gillis.

Bradford didn't even bother trying to remember their names, Roland was far better at those kinds of details. He'd run them through Maria's security database and know them better than their own mothers, before the day had ended. Bradford sat at the far end of the table, Roland sitting next to him.

"Please state your full names and ranks for the recording." Said Rotella.

Roland went to speak, but Bradford held onto his arm and stopped him.

"My name is Bradford Scott and my colleague is Roland Baur. We work directly for the president's office."

"But you must have a rank and job title?" Asked Gillis.

"You've had my answer."

"But we know you run PD489." She persisted.

"You've had my answer."

He wasn't being awkward, the police leaked like a sieve. Any recording of him admitting to running an organisation that was still semi-secret and it would be sold to the media. Maybe not by Gillis or Rotella, but a cop having trouble paying their rent, was almost certain to sell it.

"Fine, we'll stick to safer ground." Said Gillis. "How well did you know Kealani Lee?"

She was taking pictures out of a file and placing on the table, facing towards him. Full colour pictures of the remains which had been recovered from the seismic hole, the remains of Amoe's father. It was an old trick to gauge a suspect's reaction to the pictures. Was he a suspect?

"I visited the house regularly as I was dating his daughter. I always thought he was an honest man, so I suppose I never really knew him that well."

"You've since married Amoe Lee." Said Rotella. "A very wealthy young woman in her own right, after being left a sizeable property portfolio by her father."

That was how they were playing it. Bradford had the means and opportunity and the cops were looking at the oldest motive for murder in the book, money. He relaxed a little, they obviously didn't understand him at all.

"Yes, Amoe is now my wife and due to have a baby girl in a few months." He said.

Were two and a bit months a few? The birth of Rosa seemed to be hurtling towards him at quite a pace.

"Congratulations." Said Rotella, with all the sincerity of a talking clock.

"There is a clear motive.... Did you murder Kealani Lee?" Asked Gillis.

At one time the question might have caused him to react, but now it didn't. He'd been over the events in his mind so many times and Amoe's father had been beyond the reach of normal justice in San Pablo. Kealani Lee would have died peacefully of old age, maybe even a statue of him erected in a public square. Bradford no longer thought of killing Lee as murder, it was justice.

"No." He said.

"Babies can be very expensive." Said Rotella.

Even Gillis looked embarrassed by that comment. Bradford wasn't rich, but his salary was more than enough to bring up a child. They weren't the best detectives in homicide, far from it. That meant he wasn't really under any suspicion.

"Have you any theories about who might have killed him?" Asked Gillis.

"No one specific, though a list of suspects might well include some very prominent citizens of San Pablo."

Gillis and Rotella both had that look in their eyes now, the look of worried cops, scared they might have just stepped on a landmine. There were more questions, but his inquisitors had lost heart.

Another thirty minutes and he was walking back towards the PD489 building, Roland by his side.

"What is it?" Bradford asked. "You've been grinning like a Cheshire Cat, ever since we left the cop headquarters."

"Homicide don't think you had anything to do with killing Lee."

"Nice news, what makes you so certain?"

"Oh, did you go through all that with your eyes shut?" Asked Roland.

He had of course and his short term memory almost turned off. It was amazing how fast things can vanish from the mind, if you're not really interested in them. He'd already forgotten the name of the male cop.

"Out with it Roland, tell me how stupid I am?"

"Well.... Erm.... I didn't mean. It's all in the clothing really and the general demeanour. The woman was smart enough, but the man had grubby shoes. And did you see his shirt?"

"Can we just assume I didn't?"

"Grubby collar and a frayed right cuff. I can assure you, they'd have sent someone better, if they thought you might be guilty."

It was a useful corroboration of his own thoughts.

"Useful Roland, very useful. I will be adding the 'Roland cuff test,' to my long term mental card index system."

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Camila had trudged down the stairs to the basement alone. The girl was screaming now, if she brought a man with her. In her mind a man being there probably meant someone to carry her body, maybe after a slow painful death. Marie had been calm at first, but two days of solitary confinement can rattle anyone's mind. In truth Camila hadn't made up her mind what to do with her captive, but she had decided on one thing. If Marie was to die, she'd do the deed herself.

"Stand well back from the door." Yelled Camila.

She banged the door twice, before opening the inspection flap. Marie was there, obediently pushing herself against the far wall of the room. A cell really, designed to hold anyone the Hyena's wanted to question or keep out of circulation. A small cell, but with all the essentials.

"I'm coming in, stay where you are."

Marie didn't seem the sort to ambush her with a sharpened piece of metal bed frame, but Camila had learned to be cautious. She opened the cell and entered, noticing that Marie was still wearing

the same clothes as the night they'd picked her up. The small shower looked dry and unused too, not a good sign.

"You've been brought two lots of clean clothes Marie. Why didn't you change?"

"Don't kill me, I told you everything.... Please don't hurt me."

There was a slight gap in the door and Marie's eyes never left it. Camila had seen tough gang members act the same way, but only after months in the cell. Forty eight hours and Marie looked to be in a constant state of panic. She held her hand and gave her the blessing in old world Spanish, the same blessing she'd once given Bradford. Camila had decided what she was going to do with Marie.

"I'm not going to kill you, or let anyone else kill you." She said. "Sit on the bed, we need to talk."

The girl looked more relaxed, allowing Camila to pull her over to the bed and sit her on it.

"I won't tell anyone what I told you, they'd kill me for being a traitor."

"Maybe, maybe not." Replied Camila. "You're Pastor Ivor's kid and no one wants a war. My guess is that you'd escape with just a bad beating."

Gone was the aggressive girl who'd tried to bribe Cruz. Marie was looking over the cell, as if seeing it for the first time.

"Don't keep me here for ever..... Please.... I'd rather be killed."

"That was considered Marie, but we need this room for other..... Guests. I need to be certain you won't talk and that means using a little leverage. You've a string of lovers, none of them really meaning that much to you."

"I won't talk, I swear."

"I need convincing of that and I'm hoping this is permission to use the only leverage I could think of."

Marie looked more relaxed, but still jumped when someone knocked on the door. The head of one of her men came round the door, saying just three words.

"He says yes."

Good, she could threaten the girl with something which might actually work.

"That was permission to kill your father, if you tell anyone I kidnapped you."

"You wouldn't dare..... My father knows President Herbert."

How naïve the young could be. It was Bradford who'd given her permission to make the threat, but she had no doubt the president had been consulted.

"Times change Marie and there are more dangerous people out there than Pastor Ivor, or me for that matter. Start blabbing and I personally will drop your father down a hole in the Badlands."

"I won't tell anyone..... I swear on my father's life."

"Good.... Shower and change, I'm taking you home."

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Amoe was feeling happier than she had in days, but was having to hide the feeling.

"Of course I'll miss you mom. You'll only be one floor up though."

Too close really, but it was the best the building manager could do, even for a hefty bribe. There had been a mix up with an incoming tenant, their immigration papers weren't in order. Or at least they hadn't been in order after Lou had flushed away the ripped up paperwork. A small one bedroom apartment, but it gave her space from her mother. It had been move her out or kill her and it had reached the stage where Bradford wasn't sure if she was joking about the second option.

"I'll have a word with Lou." He'd told her.

They were walking up the stairs as her mother had a fear of elevators. Not a long standing phobia, it had set in at full strength, once Lou had arranged for a viewing of the newly available apartment.

There had been quite a few empty apartments once, going for relatively low rents, or at least low for

San Pablo. Then Bradford and Camila had created a small oasis of calm in 7 East Central and their block had become sought after.

"I couldn't possibly do all these stairs every day." Said Haunani Lee.

It had come, the moment to risk hurting her mom with the truth. It was either that or move into the vacant apartment herself. No, she liked the feeling of sleeping with her husband, his arm around her shoulder when the baby kicking woke her up in the early hours.

"You are going to take this apartment or move to a hotel." She said, sternly. "You can afford a hotel and to be honest..... I can't cope with you living in the same apartment anymore."

"Oh."

That was it, a simple oh. No asking why, no shouting, no reminding her of all the things she'd done for her over the years. It was too easy and quite creepy.

"Did you hear me mom?"

"Yes, I may have my faults, but I'm not deaf. If the room is clean, I will take it and get out of your hair."

"It's a proper apartment mom, not just a room."

Silence, until they found Lou with the door open to the vacant one bed apartment. Not exactly a Des Res, but the block was now fairly crime free and Lou was good at keeping bug infestations under control.

"Hello Mrs Lee." He called out. "You will love this place....A real home from home."

"We'll see."

Her mom knew how to look over an apartment, even if she had been wealthy for most of her life. Amoe followed her, impressed with how clean everything was.

"It was given a quick one coat paint job, just to brighten it up." Said Lou.

There was even a large tin of CompZed bug killer in the kitchen, with a welcome sticker wrapped round it. The only drawback was the view from all of the main windows. Her mom was looking at the expressway ramp, which was the view for everyone on that side of the block.

"The graffiti changes as you get higher, but it's not the best view in town." Admitted Lou.

'The water company are murdering our children,' was there, the spray paint faded by the San Pablo sunshine.

"Painted three years ago but probably right, there were a lot of sick people." Said Lou. "My boss installed a filter system and no one here became ill."

Lou was hovering, people usually said yes on the spot, or no, which was rare. Haunani Lee actually smiled at Lou and shook his hand.

"I'll take it Lou."

"Good and as you're Bradford's people, I'll give you the keys right now."

"I am definitely not Bradford's people." Snapped her mom.

Amoe smiled at Lou, taking the two sets of keys from him.

"Two mechanical and one electronic lock and two sets of each."

"Thank you Lou." Said Amoe. "Your help in getting this place is much appreciated."

She'd made up her mind to buy him a nice present. After all, he had saved her sanity

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Yasmine hadn't carried out any covert work for some time. She was a senior scene of crime officer, specialising in the carnage left behind by gang crime. Sadly that tended to fill her time, often requiring her to work ridiculously long days. Bradford had asked her to carry out the vetting of Jason Cetrone.

“Carry out the vetting in the normal way, but lean on people for information, lean on them quite hard.” He’d told her.

“If I do, they’ll probably tell him that PD489 are investigating him.” She’d remarked.

Bradford had given her one of his grins. They were probably meant to reassure people, but many were terrified of those lopsided grins.

“Trust me Yasmine and lean on people, fucking hard.”

She did trust him and he’d given her full control of the vetting procedure. He’d even let her choose Chet as her assistant. Everyone knew there was bad blood between them, since Chet had once called her ‘Gupta’s Squeeze.’ She was going to use the opportunity for a little pay back and Bradford must have realised that.

“We can’t lean on the guy who runs the San Pablo adult literacy programme.” Chet muttered at her.

“You’ll lean on who I tell you to Chet.” She barked. “Besides, he’s the only place we have to start from. We need to get something out of him.”

Jason Cetrone hadn’t really had much education for a man so important to the president. That was rare but not unknown in San Pablo. Street smart people had worked themselves up the greasy pole in quite a few corporations and government departments. Jason had improved his chances by attending two years of adult literacy classes. That had been his first contact with an organisation that kept records and their obvious start point.

“Urgh...All schools have that certain smell... Like hospitals.” Said Chet.

He was right, though the aroma wasn’t unpleasant. Like a mixture of old musty books printed on paper and unwashed gym kit. The adult literacy department had started off as a small annexe of the San Pablo University, but now had its own large campus.

“We’re wasting the potential of thousands of talented adults.”

Had proclaimed President Herbert, as he’d used a solid silver trowel to cement the first foundation stone in place. They’d used the term principle for a while and then chancellor, but had eventually gone back to calling the head person the Dean.

“Unless the Dean is expecting you..... Dann is incredibly busy.”

Said the woman sat at the desk outside his office. Dean Dann Tavella was loved by everyone and admired by many in government. Never a whiff of corruption or rumours about banging the students, which had been the previous Dean’s downfall. Now Yasmine was about to demand information from much loved Dann, probably using threats.

“We work directly for President Herbert.” Said Yasmine. “This is a matter of national security.”

A minute later and they were being shown into the Dean’s office. Dann had his widescreen tuned to the big match at Herbert Stadium and there was a bottle of scotch on his desk. Yasmine didn’t care; even much loved Deans needed their vices.

“Dorothy said you mentioned National Security..... We’re a school.” Said Dean Dann.

“We need information on one of your past students, a Jason Cetrone.” Said Yasmine. “He’s recently taken up a senior position in a sensitive area, one that requires enhanced vetting. We need a copy of his file, including any requests for references, known associates and notes of any political groups he might have joined while here.”

Poor Dann was looking red faced, angry and flustered, all at the same time. Yasmine doubted if anyone had ever demanded anything from him before. Chet was giving her support, by looking fierce and glaring at the Dean.

“I’d only consider such a request, if it was accompanied by a court order and even then young lady..... Our lawyers contest all such requests, vigorously.”

She understood, being known for handing over information to the security services wasn't good for the image of any educational establishment. Yasmine needed the information though and there had been the 'young lady' comment.

"No one says no to PD489, no one." She said. "Shall I tell you why?"

"Otis Herbert is a personal friend and my lawyers are well known. I advise you strongly against any threats against myself or this place of learning."

"You know the president? Then call him and he'll tell you to co-operate and give me the file."

"I will not be bullied!" Yelled the Dean.

"Reason one for not saying no to PD489. We can have immigration here in force, within the hour. Did you know it's your responsibility to make sure you're not employing illegals? A prison sentence is rare, but we will demand it in this case. Two years for each illegal you employ, plus a fine of up to twenty thousand dollars."

Yasmine had reached the threat about the Dean's bank accounts being forensically analysed for the last ten years, before he'd caved in and agreed to her getting a copy of Jason's file. Everyone had something iffy in their banking records, even much loved Dean Dann. She'd gone to the archives with Dorothy and copied everything herself, every piece of yellowing paper. They were now back in their PD489 car, the file spread over the rear seat.

"Crap, they keep notes on everything." She said. "No wonder their lawyers contest every request for information. I bet their students don't know that even their sex lives get mentioned."

"There's even a note from the campus clinic." Said Chet. "Mentioning that Jason picked up a minor sexually transmitted disease, from a female student."

"Remind me to break into my old alma mater and incinerate my file." She said.

"Thank San Pablo's ludicrously complex cyber security laws." Said Chet. "Everyone scribbles notes on paper now, far less hassle."

They'd need to see everyone mentioned in the file, including the woman who'd given him the disease. That would be an interesting meeting. Yasmine found three old requests for references, two from companies that meant nothing to her. One had a familiar name on the company letterhead.

"Look at this." She said. "It seemed Jason applied to be a night security officer at DeFreitas Properties. Nothing to do with Doug then, this was his father's company."

"You know what Bradford says about coincidences." Said Chet.

"True, though President Herbert will see our report, so we do this by the book. Who does that mean we see next?"

"The lady with the disease."

"Give that man a cigar."

The note just said Ms A Chapman, with no first name given. All those notes and no one had bothered putting down a full name. There was an old address though, even if it was from well over a decade ago.

"Someone might have her current whereabouts." Said Yasmine. "We might as well go there now."

"If we make this much noise, leaning on too many people." Said Chet. "Jason is almost certain to hear about it. Supposing he jumps and runs, goes underground?"

"Then he'll no longer pose a threat to Otis Herbert. And I suspect someone will be sent to track him down and kill him."

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It wasn't that Marie had lied or withheld information. It wasn't that Camila had kept back any snippets of information for her own use. She'd passed everything onto Bradford, including the

establishment figures supposedly getting a bit too cosy with Pastor Ivor. Everyone had played the game, everyone had tried to do the right thing.

They weren't dealing with subversives though, or terrorists, people who kill a few to scare the crap out of millions. The connections and motives were complex and all about making vast sums of money. Even Maria was still finding it hard to work out who was hoping to gain from each action and how. Local police had been told about likely future events, but plans change and there was an unexpected heatwave in the district where the new Tucker's Town development was being built. The luxurious show home was doing well; almost eighty percent of the new homes had been sold. Good news for Tucker's Town realty, but not for the people Marie was working for.

"Don't delay, Tucker's Town section A is almost sold out." Said Polly.

Nothing to do with 'The' Tucker's Town of course, the expensive area of Bermuda, where Howard Hughes had once owned a home. That had long gone, when the floods had taken away most of the USA and a good part of the Caribbean. This Tucker's Town was a few miles west of San Pablo City and catered for the modest requirements of the retired, who wanted to get away from the skin bugs, roaches and gang violence.

"We're just looking honey." Said the old lady. "We'll holla if we need you."

"If you can give me a few contact details, I can let you know about our special offers. No one will call you, I promise." Lied Polly.

Of course they'd be pestered. Once she had their details, the oldsters would be pestered until they either bought a property or died. She handed the clipboard to the husband. Men tended to be easier to pitch to, especially if you were young and pretty. Poor Polly had been young and very pretty.

The explosion killed her, the old couple and a handyman who'd been fixing a sticky lock. Four houses were destroyed and the cloud of smoke was seen as far away as central San Pablo City.

Marie had been told the Tucker's Town development was due to be disrupted a month later, but plans can, and did change. No one had mentioned a bomb to her though, not once.

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