

Shadowed Thoughts

Kyle Biery

“It is beautiful in its own way, is it not?” Marcus asked as he examined the photo. The chill of a Maryland Autumn made him pull his coat tighter around his body, despite the heater nearby.

The brunette shrugged, flipping her locks over her shoulder as she considered the picture of the Cadillac on a dark street. “To a certain extent,” she admitted to her boss. “But I fail to see what it has to do with our current duty.” She gestured at the gallery around them, a small place with barely enough room for ten small pictures to line the wall. Her phone buzzed and she looked down at it. “One minute to deadline.”

Marcus laughed, a low creaking noise, and nodded as a car pulled up outside. “Right on time,” he muttered. A bell chimed as someone entered, but Marcus stepped towards the picture. “These things can tell many a thing about a person. The picture shows that the photographer simply recognizes a good shot when they see them. I see something different.” He traced the outline of the car. “I see a vehicle without plates on the front, possibly the back as well. It’s in a poor neighborhood and it is all the owner can afford.” He tapped the sidewalk. “Grass is overgrowing at the edge and in the background, so the owner may give their vehicle an equal amount of attention, perish the thought.” He paused at the vehicle again. “Although the shine on the front may say otherwise.”

Clapping made the two of them turn to see a man in a black hood. “Impressive, Mr. Brent. You have an eye for the finer details in life.” The man said.

Marcus merely smiled, his face gaining more lines as he did so. “You will find that one must in this business, especially with the more valuable wares and the secrets they may contain,” he said, tapping his cane against the lone bench in the small galley, which had a manila folder atop it. The hooded man’s eyes snapped onto it and he took a step forward, only to stop at Marcus’ raised cane. “I would advise against that, young man.” He gestured at Hope, who had a handgun drawn and pointed at the man’s head. The hooded man’s eyes merely narrowed.

“I would advise you step back,” Hope said.

The man raised his hands and complied. Marcus however looked somewhat embarrassed. He lightly tapped Hope’s shin with his cane, making her look at him. “There is no need for any real violence, especially any that could bring the U.S Government down on our heads.” Hope’s eyes widened and she quickly lowered her gun.

The hooded man sighed in defeat. “What gave me away?” He asked.

Hope walked over to him and took his wallet from his pocket before flipping it open. “Jacob Burke, O.N.I. Captain,” She said to her boss.

Marcus hobbled to the grimy window and looked at the vehicle outside. “Government plates for one, idiot.” He whacked Jacob hard on the shin as he hobbled back to bench, making him curse and rub the rapidly bruising skin under his pants. “And your clothes are too clean for this neighborhood.”

“You’re paragons of filth then,” Jacob said as he pointed at Marcus’ grey sport coat and Hope’s black business suit, both spotless.

“Unlike you, Mr. Burke, we don’t need to explain to the locals who we are. As professionals, we make it clear that anything we sell is both clean and nonaffiliated with anyone’s enemies,” Hope said.

Jacob snorted a laugh. “So why break that chain now? Selling enemy secrets would certainly count as being affiliated with someone.”

Marcus wheezed with laughter as he looked at Hope. “I like him.” He turned back to Jacob, his face quickly hardening. “Mr. Burke, I will not lie to you. If the plans in those folders went unnoticed, they would result in battles that would level this neighborhood and many others. While I do not give a shit about the rest of this country, I will not allow my work to be destroyed in the course of a few days.” He picked up the envelope and turned to Jacob. “You Naval Intelligence brats have been giving my little fences no small amount of trouble over the years, but I respect your commitment nonetheless.” He presented the envelope to Jacob, who took it with wide eyes. “Russian Navy battle formations and attack plans. Recently obtained and sent to me by a... indebted associate of mine.” He grinned at Jacob before patting him on the shoulder and turning him around towards the door.

“You’ll find your way back to Suitland unimpeded. We have two teams clearing the roads ahead of you,” Hope explained to Jacob, who was still staring at the folder. She rolled her eyes at his expression. “Good day to you, Capt. Burke.” They both waited until Jacob’s shadow shook itself and ran for his car. “Do you think the government will take action?”

Marcus’ laughter sharpened as he continued examining the picture. “Considering who’s in the White House right now, I doubt it.” He turned back to Hope. “Contact everyone. Tell them to prepare for the worst.” They started for the door and Marcus paused to look at the shadowed picture one last time. “A damned bloody shame.”