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A man in a dark trench coat is walking away from the camera down a city street at night. The street is filled with long, vibrant light trails in shades of blue and orange, suggesting a fast-paced, futuristic environment. In the background, there are tall buildings and a sign that reads 'Bank Street' and '68W'. The overall atmosphere is cinematic and mysterious.

FOR OUR DAUGHTERS

SHORT SF STORY

Mihovil Logar FOR OUR DAUGHTERS

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A SHORT SF STORY BY MIHOVIL M. LOGAR

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I don't know if what I recall of the saddest day of my life is true. It is all a blur right now. It was raining, and it was cold. That is all I remember clearly. Everything was like a smudgy wet autumn painting.

I received the call at the office. I sensed fear as the female voice calmly presented what happened. It was someone from the company, liaison to the city police. I probably know the person well, but I don't know who it was. I have no recollection of leaving the office, driving, nothing. I was suddenly there in front of the classy skyscraper where my daughter used to work.

Police were at the entrance, scanning everyone. I made a few hurried steps towards them. The cop noticed me instantly.

"I am here...for my daughter," I slurred nervously. My chest was near implosion.

"I am sorry sir, I cannot let you pass. Investigation is in progress, but I will inform one of the detectives..."

"Scan me!" I said abruptly.

"Wha..?"

"Just. Scan. Me."

He waved his hand over my shoulder. Information became visible on his visor instantly.

He spent too much time reviewing it for my taste.

"Well?" I insisted.

"I...I am sorry sir, I will call someone, I have never..."

"You have never seen a bearer of the security certificate A.1.1? No, you haven't. Nor will you ever have the opportunity to do so again, most probably. Let's not waste time. Read to me what your manual says about A.1.1."

"Well, yes, just a sec," the police officer thought - searched "The Book".

"A.1.1. is the prime security clearance and command certificate. The bearer is considered to be in the higher position in the chain of command to all the security and intelligence forces with lower level clearances."

"Good," I said, "Will you now escort me to the place where my daughter is."

"Sir," He nodded.

I followed him. To my surprise we didn't enter the building, we went around to the side alley.

The augmented reality imager was finishing the scan when we walked in. Two uniforms, a technician and two detectives waited for the scan to finish. I felt this sharp pain in my guts. All the training in the world couldn't get you ready for this. Emotions brewed as I fought the tears.

The cop that escorted me exchanged few words with the detective and left. I was standing, crushed, and focused on my little girl's body. She was lying there on the cold pavement waiting for me to say goodbye.

Detective approached and woke me from my reflection with a cautious cough. Then he waved his arm, politely asking me for a scan. I just nodded.

"Mr. Godfrey, unlike my colleague I know what A.1.1. is."

"Anthony, call me Anthony please," I responded automatically. The AR imager just finished and I moved forward.

"Anthony, I am detective Stevenson. May I suggest that you don't walk over the crime scene, you might compromise the evidence."

"No," I replied.

"This will not help the investigation, sir, please, we need to work on this..."

I didn't hear the rest of his babbling. I dropped on my knees and placed her head into my lap. I stroked her wet almond hair and I cried.

I never cried before. When I lost my parents, when my wife passed, when I was shot, gutted and suffered from advanced torture techniques I never cried. But now, it all just went out, unstoppable like a flood.

I don't know how long it took me to get it back together. The cops knew better than to disturb me.

I thought - called my son. We haven't been in touch for years...I wasn't able to cope well with his homosexuality. All contact ceased after my wife died, but all I wanted at that moment was a hug from the remaining member of my family. But he didn't pick up, so I left him a thought-message.

"I...please call me, it is important."

I couldn't give him the news over a message, but he'll understand just from the tone that something is wrong. He will call.

I stood up. The detective was standing next to me, silently.

"Do you have any children detective?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, "I have a daughter."

His eyes screamed an uneasy understanding, "We will catch whoever did this Anthony."

We sure will, I thought to myself. But not in the way you think.

"Detective. I am pulling A.1.1. on you, I want daily progress reports, I want all the information, and I want everything. You will send it all to the address you received when you scanned me. Use state encryption protocols when contacting me, including thought."

"Alright. I'll continue with the work then."

We shook hands, and I left.

*

I was back at the company and on my way to the Coordinator when he called me personally.

"Anthony, I just heard..."

"Yes sir. I am on my way to your office, I hope you can see me right now."

"Yes, of course."

I was there within minutes. The secretary knew me very well. She had tears in her eyes. I just waved and went in the office.

The Coordinator of all security and intelligence forces, my boss, greeted me and sat me down.

He pressed a button on the table and the room became electronically secured. We were in a protected area, it was safe to talk.

He handed me a glass of whiskey and sat down next to me. It is almost twenty years of acquaintance and working together that binds us together.

"So Anthony, what are you going to do?"

Straight to the point, no BS, no heartbroken speeches. The man knows me.

"This is a non-conversation sir?" I asked.

"Yes," He answered.

I took a sip of that wonderful smoky flavored whisky he pours in special occasions, and looked him straight in the eye.

"I am going to kill anyone and everyone involved in the death of my daughter."

He nodded.

"As a father I understand. I think I would do the same, heck I sometimes want to kill the SOB my daughter married just for disliking him."

He smiled and continued almost whispering.

"I expect you can do it in such a way that the company is not involved. If you become compromised, I cannot protect you. Do what you must, cover your tracks, but if you slip I will shut you down. Company comes first."

"Company comes first," I agreed. It was an unofficial credo of the company, and what I had to do was deeply personal.

We emptied the glasses and he pressed the button again.

"Please inform my secretary about the funeral arrangements, I would like to be present."

I thanked him and went out contemplating my next move.

*

"Son?" I answered the call.

"Dad."

It's been a long time since I heard his voice.

"There is something I need to tell you..."

"I know dad. I was her 'in case of emergency' person. They contacted me first."

"Oh," I was genuinely surprised, "I didn't know that."

"Yes, well, there is a lot you don't know about your children. I am traveling right now, I am going to stay at..."

I interrupted him.

"I want you to come home son. Please. I know I was a prick, and I am probably still a prick, but please come home so we can spend time together."

I don't think I ever said anything similar to him. I wasn't around much, and when I was, I was thinking about pressing matters. Company comes first.

"I will pick you up," I insisted, "when will you be arriving?"

"All right dad. My vactrain is arriving in 20 minutes."

I drove like crazy to get there on time.

*

I let my son prepare the funeral. He knew his sister better than I knew my daughter. I insisted only on paying for everything. He didn't argue against it, which made me check his credit rating and bank statements. I did it in front of him, no subterfuge this time. We talked for a long time, he was surprised and relieved by my attitude change. Then I paid all his loans, including the one for his house. He protested until I said that I don't care whom he is living with, as long as he is happy and alive.

I returned to the office.

*

The detective I met was proactive. His file wasn't much, old police dog, but he sent me every piece of evidence he found, including his memos and conclusions. Video surveillance showed a man in a long raincoat, cowboy hat and a facemask crossing the street when my daughter left the building. He reached her at the entrance to the side alley and forced her to go into it at gunpoint. Nothing was taken. This was a hit, not a robbery. Further investigation showed that the man used the sewer to get in and out of the area, so they could not backtrack the movement via the government surveillance network. In addition, the neck chip was disabled, or scrambled, indicating professional resources. Countering that, the kill was sloppy. She was shot three times in the back, the killer missed all the crucial organs. She bled out. This made me very angry and additionally determined. The law enforcement will not be able to find the killer, but I will.

*

Ninth underground floor of the company building was labeled as a storage room. It is actually a big armory. My friend George and ex-field operations partner runs the place.

They buzzed me in. I went straight to George's office.

"Hello mate!" I said.

George seemed concentrated on some data sheets on his desk and slowly looked up.

"Oh, Anthony, come in. What brings you here?" he smiled. It was a good thing that the news still has not reached him.

"A list of things," I answered truthfully and handed him a list handwritten on a piece of paper.

“Sure...” he started as he glanced over the list, “...but...just send the field requisitions form as usual, I need it to be digital you know.” He smiled.

“There will be no formal requests George,” I paused. “This is a black op.”

“Anthony, what is this. I can’t just hand you the thought scanner,” He laughed at my preposterous request.

“How is your daughter?” I asked. I knew George very well. Good guy, true friend, but incredibly stuffy. I had to do it this way to get what I needed.

“She is well, thank you, and the wife too. How are your kids?”

I leaned towards him, “My daughter is dead. She was killed yesterday with three bullets in the back. My son is organizing the funeral.”

He went pale. He slid back in his chair. He was giving up. I instantly felt sorry for what I did, but he would not have said yes if I asked nicely.

“Ok, I get it,” he said, “my condolences.”

I remained silent.

“Does the Coordinator know about this?” he asked.

“Officially, no. If anything goes wrong I am history.”

He scratched his head, which he did when he was nervous.

“I will pack the stuff myself. I will take you to the armory where you will take it personally. You will have 48 hours to bring it back. If anything goes wrong, I will say you stole it. Is that ok Mr. Black Ops?”

“Sure.”

*

I expected that the police would not be able to find much, so I decided to take a sledgehammer approach. I will scan everyone in the company my daughter used to work with using the thought scanner. I will ask everyone if they are in any way connected to her murder and someone will be. I just had to think of a way of scanning them without them knowing it.

The problem with this approach is that the thought scanner is not legal. It works very well, as does the rest of the thought tech, but it harms the subject a bit during the scan, as it probes too deep to find out if the subject is lying. Not a big deal, headaches are usually gone after 24 hours, and only 0.5% of subjects might acquire a long-term effect, like chronic dizziness. Because of that little bit of harm, the thought scanner remains a hidden technology gem used only in black ops of high national security interest. Like this one.

*

Procurement Joe gave me everything I asked. He came to the company from military intelligence. He still wears a military regulation moustache. I took an honest approach with him, told him everything about my ordeal over a glass of Jameson whiskey. By the time we finished our little talk the bottle was empty and Joe wanted to come with me to, “Kill the bastard himself.” It was harder for me to get that idea out of his head than to make him break the rules to get me all I needed. I handed him the list when we parted. He smirked, still not happy about not letting him join the action. Tomorrow morning, I had it all. Armored police uniform, chip control set and an untraceable company car. I changed my neck chip data to suite my police disguise. Of all the things I got from Joe the chip control set was the most problematic. Those things are government monitored for a reason, and I am sure it will be missed if not returned promptly.

*

Dressed as a cop I entered the building my daughter used to work in. The police helmet covered my face hiding me from camera view, just in case someone wanted to check me via face recognition. The thought scanner hovered innocently next to my shoulder. I approached the security desk.

“Hello sir. I am officer Don Carson. I am here to follow up on the murder of Martha Godfrey.”

“You mean Godfrey?” Asked the security guard.

"Oh, yes. My mistake. This is standard procedure. Can I speak with someone from the management of the company?"

"You didn't announce the visit?"

"No, as I said, I am just following up."

"I will call upstairs. Please, lower your neck so I can scan you."

"Thank you."

I waited for a couple of minutes when a smartly dressed woman approached me.

"Mr. Carson?" her hand reached out to me, "I am Maria, I will show you in."

Maria smelled nice. She left a trace of expensive perfume as we walked. I wondered if my daughter looked like her every day on the job. They were roughly the same age. I instantly realized I have to start my investigation. I thought started the software and initiated the scan. Then I focused the little ball on Maria."

"Maria, did you know the murdered girl?"

"Oh yes, I know everybody. She was so nice."

"Do you have any idea who might have wanted to harm her?"

She moved her hand over her chest and looked to the ground.

"Absolutely not. She was, Martha was the kindest person I knew, and we were nothing more than colleagues. But I am a desk girl, and I greet every one face to face."

I just nodded and stayed silent.

Maria walked me through the corporate hive. Busy people, open space, they all seemed to be doing something very important. The people whose way of life I am protecting and my guts said one of them killed my daughter.

We stopped at the massive wooden door.

"This is the office of John Prescott, he is our CEO," Maria pointed to the holosign next to the door.

"He will see you now."

She entered and I followed.

John was a beautiful man. Dark hair, blue eyes and an athletic posture. A handmade suit fit him like a glove.

Maria introduced me and left.

"My apologies sir, I didn't announce my visit," I spoke first.

"No need for that, we must all do whatever is necessary to bring the killer to justice."

I focused the thought scanner on him.

"Did you know her?"

"As a CEO I tend to know everyone who works for me. She was my CFO, which means we worked together on the daily basis. Frankly, I don't know what I am going to do without her now."

"Could she have been at odds with someone from the company, considering her position?"

"Mr. Carson, as I have already told your detective, what's his name..."

"Stevenson," I jumped in.

"Yes, Stevenson. Well, he was here on the day of the murder and...I told him all that. She was respected, a true professional, and a valued member of our team. I am unable to perceive a reason for her death."

"Thank you, sir. I will not take any more of your time. I need your permission to talk to your employees on the floor. I will not ask more than two questions."

"Certainly."

"One last thing sir. Did you personally have anything to do with her murder?"

He did not like the question, he looked insulted.

"I understand you must ask that, and no, I had absolutely nothing to do with her murder. God I hope you catch the bastard."

I left his office and spent the rest of the working day interviewing all of the people on the floor. Eventually I managed to ask everyone if they had anything to do with Martha's murder. Tired, but feeling hopeful I went back to the company and hooked the thought scanner to the analyzing software.

I closed my eyes for just a second and woke up at 5 AM. The screen was blinking, analysis was over.

The little ball did the trick. Analysis offered everything I needed. Thought patterns, recorded conversations, body reactions, it is a truly marvelous piece of engineering. Each interview I took was marked as truth, but one. Thought scanner recognized, with 99,9 certainty, John Prescott as a liar. He lied when I asked him if he personally had anything to do with her death. Everyone else I interviewed spoke the truth.

I reprogrammed my chip again to some low life criminal, known for battering, just in case something went wrong. I pulled Prescott's address from the police records, got a ski mask and went in front of his house to wait for him.

He was an early riser. Fucker. When he got out of the house, I had a rage rush, but managed to overcome it. I had to be sure before I kill him. It was a nice, upper-level neighborhood, not many people were moving around. That is good thing when you plan to stun someone with a military grade Taser and put him in the back of the car.

It wasn't the first time I kidnapped someone in broad daylight, but it was the first time I was enjoying it, I will admit that much. I drove to "the Clinic", a special place where we conduct deep interrogation. It's a small house, next to the big industrial slaughterhouse and it's located there for a good reason.

I tied him to the interrogation chair and splashed a bucket of cold water on him.

"Rise and shine."

Eyes opened, he was conscious again.

"Gnnn...whaa, whoo..."

"Look at me," I grabbed his chin. "Tell me why you killed Martha."

"I...I...I didn't..."

I hit him and walked away. I opened a small cabinet and took the pistol syringe. I loaded it with truth serum and shot him in the neck.

It took three minutes for it to start working.

"Why did you kill Martha?"

He cried.

"I didn't. I didn't. "

"But you had something to do with it?"

"She found out about my side investments using company funds, she was going to blow the whistle. I paid a guy to do it."

"Who? Give me the name."

"Aurelius Cochran."

The name I know very well. Ex contract plumber who did government network, retired years ago. I used to be his handler when company used his services. We never met face-to-face, he just did what I requested.

"Did Cochran have anything to do with the fraud?"

"We invested together."

This complicated things a bit. I was certain Cochran didn't do the killing himself because it was a sloppy kill. He was a trained and effective killer. Nevertheless, Aurelius Cochran had to die.

I shot Prescott three times and left.

*

Aurelius was easy to find. He was a respected businessperson now. The money he got from networks was laundered and invested into legitimate businesses. It was time to finally meet him face-to-face.

I was sitting in his living room patiently waiting, when the door unlocked. He had good home security installed but not good enough to stop me from entering. He hit the switch and the lights went on. He moved around not noticing me.

“Good evening Aurelius.”

He was startled and almost jumped. Still, you could notice he instantly calmed, and assessed the situation. He saw a relaxed man, sitting in his comfortable chair, holding a Zastava CZ 2099 “Duckbill”. Terrifying gun, made ugly on purpose so it can be recognized instantly. It’s an energy weapon with a ninety degree arc beam which splits everything in front with effective range of seven meters. He didn’t have where to go to get out of the range.

“Why don’t you sit with me so we can have a little talk.”

Aurelius walked cautiously and sat on the couch in front of me.

“How are you old friend? I thought life was good for you since you’ve retired.”

I saw a quick realization on his face, “Index?” he asked.

Index was a call name for all of his handlers. For a time I was Index.

“Yes, I am Index. It’s nice to finally meet you Aurelius.”

Thought blocker buzzed in my pocket. Aurelius tried to send thought messages. I could see he didn’t like he couldn’t get through.

“The pleasure is all mine. Are you here to fully retire me, I thought I played by the book?”

“You did. The Company still thinks you are a good boy.”

A smile danced around his lips.

“However...” I paused, intentionally, “my visit is deeply personal.”

“Personal? I don’t understand.”

“Let me introduce myself then. I am Anthony Godfrey, father of Martha Godfrey.”

“Shit.”

“Indeed you are. Deep in it.”

“I didn’t kill her.”

“I know. I want to know who did.”

He closed his eyes and thought aloud, “The only way you could get to me is through Prescott. I can safely assume he told you everything.”

“Everything I wanted to know,” I eagerly clarified.

“There is no way I am getting out of this alive,” he concluded.

“No,” I concurred.

“I will take a cigarette now,” He said.

“Please do,” I demonstratively aligned the gun.

“The fact that I am still alive means you have questions for me, which you want answered.”

“Yes.”

“You will get it out one way or the other.”

I didn’t answer, it was a great conclusion.

“All right Index, I will tell you what you want to know.”

Of course he will. He knows I know everything about him. He knows I know he has a wife and a daughter hidden in another city, safely tucked away from his past. He knows I am ready to do anything to get what I want. This was a simple deal. He talks. He dies. They live.

He started the e-cigarette cartridge and continued.

“Prescott and I met last year at an investor forum. He was looking for investment partners. Good, sound idea, I chipped in. Prescott got greedy and invested the money from his company. Your daughter found out. He knew that the whole investment thing would blow if she came out, so he came to me. He knew my background was shady, and he hoped it was shady enough. He asked me if I could make her go

away. At first, I thought about doing it myself, but then I passed it on. Prescott paid for the hit so I contracted Joseph Grimaldi to do it."

"Who is that?"

"A street kingpin. He was a fellow wetworker for Salvatore Rosa. I trained him. He owns district 45, you can find him there."

"If he is a kingpin, he didn't do it himself then?"

"I doubt it."

"I'll pay him a visit."

He finished the cigarette. "Do I get to choose how I go?"

"Any suggestions?" I asked courteously.

"As a matter of fact, yes I have. In that showcase, left of you, I have a pretty African miniature coffin. Inside of it is a gem. It's something I made years ago."

I knew where this was going. "All right, get it. Slowly."

He got up and got a tiny, black, diamond looking object from the box.

"It will kill me in 5 minutes, painlessly."

"Go on then."

He returned to the sofa, "I hope my family will be exonerated by my death?"

"Yes. You have my word."

He took the pill and lied down. After five minutes I approached and checked his pulse. Nothing. I took my .45 and shot him in the heart, just to be sure.

*

Joseph Grimaldi was a known criminal, although I never heard of him. Police file on him was huge. Small time kingpin, he was in charge of District 45, especially the slums part. Getting the information from him was going to be tricky.

Joseph was always in his office, in the back of the local restaurant. I came dressed in my best suit and approached the muscle at the doors.

"Hi. I am John Prescott, I would like to see Mr. Grimaldi."

The muscle sent a thought message. I waited. He then scanned my chip and thoroughly checked me for weapons.

"Follow me," he said at the end of the procedure.

We walked through a nice restaurant and into the back office. Joseph Grimaldi was sitting at a massive desk. Two guys were strategically positioned on the left and right of the room. Muscle showed me to sit on a chair in front of the desk. He went out.

"So, you are John Prescott. I wonder what brings you here," Joseph said.

"Our business associate Aurelius Cochran said I might find you here."

"As you can see, he was right," there was a shadow of something on his face I didn't like.

"I am not satisfied with the way my problem was handled."

"You are not? Isn't your problem gone?"

"It's gone in the dumpster next to my office. I have police visiting my office every day. I am not very happy about that. Who the hell did you send to do that?"

Joseph sighed. He opened a desk drawer and took a gun out. I recognized the Taurus 454 "Raging Bull". It stayed pointed at me. Other two guys also unholstered their weapons. I was betting that Joseph Grimaldi never met John Prescott. I guess the bet failed, but I was prepared for that.

"Listen mate, whoever the fuck you are, you will be alive for the next 30 seconds. Is that the last thing you want to hear, who did that?"

"Yes," I said unmoved.

He stared at me for a moment.

"Cowboy did it. You'll find him in the Orchard, but he will probably find you in hell."

The moment he finished the sentence I pressed the button on my watch. Neat gadget, psych stunner. The two guys on the sides fell instantly. For a second we were both surprised, Joseph because the two guys fell down. I was surprised because Joseph didn't fall. That meant he had the same protector somewhere under his skin, and that is not a civilian piece of hardware.

I jumped, he fired the gun. It hit me, I felt it. I used the desk for cover and reached him on the left side. The chair was as massive as the desk, which made him unable to react fast. He was slowed just enough for me to reach his behind and snap his neck with my bare hands.

My head hurt like hell, and I was spilling blood. I was still standing, so it wasn't grave. I didn't have the time to assess the wound, I just took Joseph's gun and went out. I didn't care about the shocked cries in the restaurant, I had little time to finish what I started.

At the entrance I pointed the gun to the muscle's face and made him kneel.

"Where is the Orchard?"

"Orchard? Wha..?"

"I don't have time for this, where the fuck is it?"

"24th street."

"What is it?"

"Shooting gallery."

Great. I was looking for a junkie. It all made sense. Sloppy kill, done by someone who has probably never done it before. Joseph took all the money and traded a kill for the junkie's drugs.

I disappeared in the alleys behind the restaurant and stopped a Taxi in a dark place. Paid him triple in advance to make sure he drove me to the undesirable location. When we got there, I understood why the place was called the Orchard. The building's walls were painted with beautiful graffiti of trees and fruits.

I entered. People lying around, trash was everywhere. Smelled like drugs and death, sweet, like rotten fruit. Orchard, I get it.

I found a guy that looked like he was able to talk.

"I am looking for Cowboy," my bloody hand was holding a burner credit chip. He took it.

"That's him, in that corner, with the raincoat," he pointed.

I approached him with the pointed gun. I turned him slowly, he seemed to be out. That was him. Raincoat, cowboy hat. He was dirty, didn't change for days. He killed my daughter wearing this. I checked his pockets. One pocket had a mask, the other the gun. It was THE gun. He emptied four bullets, which meant the police didn't notice a bullet hole somewhere in the alley.

I pressed the gun on his temple and checked his pulse. He was fucking dead. His neck had a visible scar, his chip was removed. Either Joseph killed him with tempered drugs, or he killed himself with an overdose. It didn't matter. It was over.

*

I was feeling empty at the funeral. My head was all bandaged, the bullet left a big scar and blown most of my ear. I avenged you, I repeated it like a mantra, while the casket was going down. My son was standing next to me in tears. I hugged him.

The Coordinator approached me after the service. We walked.

"When I said to do it discretely, it was the opposite of what you did," he said.

"I understand. I will clear my desk..."

He raised his hand and stopped me from talking.

"That cop who was on the case is a very smart fellow."

"Stevenson?"

"Yes. Stevenson. He did a most peculiar thing."

"Yes?"

"He covered all your blunders."

Mihovil Logar FOR OUR DAUGHTERS

“He did?”

“Oh, yes. You see, he was very eager to join our ranks. Seems to me he understands the concept of Company comes first better than you. I already signed his transfer to operations.”

I remained silent. He put his hand on my shoulder.

“Anthony, ultimately we do what we do for our daughters.”

With that he set in the car and drove off.