

A Stormy Night

It wasn't exactly a dark and stormy night.

But it was cold, as cold as it ever got in Warsaw. Snow covered the streets in huge gray to black mounds. I was sitting in my usual corner at the "Broken Leg" diner. It was a place I had come to call home ever since I "got out", from Prison, two years ago... Prison changed me. Twice. Guess it does that to every one. When I first got inside I was young, cocky and had a lot to prove. Now I just try to survive. I don't have a thing to prove any more... because there are none. The hot potato soup did it's bets to warm me up. I kept my eyes on the door. I had a meeting coming up and I intended to stay sharp. Ever since i got out I'd been living my life like I was still inside. Reading people. Watching my back. Taking extreme care not to let anything show on the outside. Survival tricks on the inside. And they seemed to work out here as well.

The man walked in from the freezing night air. He scanned the room quickly for the man he was looking for... me. He was trying to appear like a man at his ease. Damn if I was at ease, having to carry this shit around... most people wouldn't know what it was, but men caught carrying around packets of strange smelling powders tended to be treated somewhat roughly by the polish authorities.

I was being paid handsomely by my employer to get the job done, and the Sagacious Man did not tolerate failure. I always wondered why a man who commanded thieves, bullies and assassins would use such a name, which most of his people wouldn't understand. Still, the biting irony of it was entertaining.

Within a minute he saw me. He sauntered up casually, keeping his black leather coat tight so no one would see the heat I could tell he was packing. No sense in having the diner personnel calling the cops, or worse yet, try and kick him out or confiscate it.

"Bout time you showed up," I greeted him as he sat down.

"If you'd chosen less of a shit hole to meet in maybe it wouldn't have taken me so long."

"Same thing if you weren't such a dense bastard."

"Strange weather this week."

"Indeed...."

As we continued to mouth meaningless pleasantries over the soup, I passed the package to him under the table, feeling relief at not having it on me, but trepidation as well. My night was far from done, and this guy having the package was not the signal of the end of my work, but the beginning of the most dangerous part.

"Well, I hope what you have to say is worth it," I said.

"We are supposed to meet the courier in the market." I bit down a bad pun about a mark in a market, and waited for him to continue. When he didn't I prompted him.

"And what else?"

He just looked at me.

"Shit. This isn't good."

"You're telling me."

"When were you asked to do this job?"

"This morning."

"Fuck man...something doesn't smell right here. This powder isn't just expensive, it has to be military grade stuff, and is damn rare. This was ordered months in advance for a job and only arrived in Warsaw yesterday. The amount of cash, time and trouble it would have taken to get it here... it doesn't smell right that they would have hired the middleman on the day." I told him.

"You're right...but why the hell would the Saga set us up? We're small fry in this...shit. Damn man, all I know is the contact told me this morning that their mainstay had been compromised."

I started thinking. A fixer with some connections who called himself Daze had been found in the harbour facedown yesterday. He was considered within the Saga's good graces... perhaps that was all this was, us replacing him. Every nerve I had screamed against it, but I was in too deep. No way to back out now and leave the Warsaw alive...the man had everything too well covered.

"That's one way of putting it. Look, I don't like this one bit more than you do, but I have to go along with you. As insurance, apparently."

He grunted, hardly surprised, but not pleased at the prospect either. "Just don't get me killed."

"I'll make a special point of it. But before we go....I need you to trust me out there. If you've been set up, so I have I. I don't have a damned clue more about this than you do."

"Yeah...I guess you wouldn't. They wouldn't make it so obvious as to send a killer along with me if I was being rooked. Ok, we'll wait an hour then head out for the Market. Just be ready to follow my lead, and for god's sake keep your step light and your ass out of sight when I tell you to."

"By the way, my name's Janos." he said offering his hand.

"Whatever." I told him turning down the offer.

I didn't like this one bit. But I tried to keep my expression as dead as possible. I could tell I was doing a better job at it than this Janos fellow.

I knew him by reputation only. He was probably ok. I didn't think he had done any time on the block though, probably not. The way he carried himself and kept flashing that gun on people were not traits that marked an ex con. Inside you never boasted like that. You had to be either dead calm or acting with intent. Threats would just give the other guy a head start, and then you would end up dead. But from what I heard he had done some work for Saga before, and he had obviously stayed in his grace, which meant that he had done well.

One hour to wait. Waiting was never a problem for me, not since my first round in prison. Waiting was all you ever did in there. And I was really good at it. I kept running the scenario through in my mind. Kept ending up not liking it. Any other day I would have turned this one down. But I was short on green.

I looked at Janos to see how he was doing the time. He didn't seem that bothered. That was good. One hour later we moved out of the joint. I don't think any one saw us leave this time. The ones that were still there was drunk stupid, asleep or both.

Soon after, we were scanning the market...