

The Stoic's Enigma

By Jacob Williams

Chapter 1

“Clear skies...not a single drop of rain...Something always tends to go wrong when the night sky is clear like this.” The Detective says looking at the decrepit building. Windows broken. Green paint chipped everywhere. Three floors up is a man with a gun. Bright light from the police on the street is aimed at him revealing his hostage. A young girl maybe 8. Blonde hair with a gun on her skull.

Poor thing...doesn't deserve any of this.

“Why would criminals give a damn about the weather?” Damian says sipping from the straw of his soft drink leaning up against the car, calm and collected as always. Dressed in slightly stained dress pants and an untucked button up shirt.

“Well contrary to the city's current belief, criminals are people too. And all people hate the cold and they hate being wet.” The Detective says.

“Maybe the lazy criminals. But not the relentless psychopaths.” Damian says gesturing up to the man in the building. The man is screaming and yelling words that are drowned out by the police sirens.

“Less criminals on the street, even just the lazy ones, means we can focus on the pricks like that..... For that reason, I honestly wish it would rain or snow every day and every night.” The Detective says.

“That makes one of us Detective.” Damian says, taking another sip. The Detective pats Damian on the back and then begins walking towards the building with the psychopath and the hostage. He walks past the police vehicles that are flooded in the street. Damian watches from their black rusted Chevy Nova as the police try to hold the Detective back. Once they see his face and realize who he is, they all back away slowly. Damian laughs and the Detective can hear his faint words.

“No point getting in his way. I will just hang tight here.” Damian says.

Damian was always the laziest of the bunch.

The Detective reaches the front of the police crowd. He is greeted by Sheila, a fellow Stoic.

Sheila is underestimated by the rest of the Stoics division. She has a keen eye for things out of place. Her brazen smile and soft eyes could fool even the most steadfast Stoics.

“No need to intervene, Detective. Samson just entered. He will get him down one way or another.” Sheila says, pulling out a cigarette from a pack labeled ‘crab sticks’.

Nasty habits and Stoics go hand in hand nowadays.

“You always were the faithful one of them all SheilaHowever I am not so keen on random luck. I don’t like to leave things up to chance if I can help it.” The Detective says with a forced smile. Sheila lights up the cigarette after she gets done fiddling with it in her hands. The glow lights up her dark skin and curly brown hair that’s in a messy bun.

Stoics always were more casual than the rest of the force but the north’s Stoics love the uniforms. Sheila and the rest of the division always have their uniform on and

wrinkle free. Something I always thought was foolish with the public unrest. They might as well just put a big red X on your chest and say shoot me here.

“He’s got it. Samson knows how to solve disputes.” Sheila says.

“Well, how is he planning exactly, on getting the hostage down?” The Detective asks as he looks up at the three stories of the deteriorating building. The man is yelling more nonsense to the police. He is almost foaming at the mouth. The Detective looks around at all the rookies with their pistols drawn pointed at the man.

Damn fools would put 50 holes in that poor girl if that man turned the gun their way. Damn rooks.

“Don’t know. The girl will probably get mania either way so she will have to be put down too.” Sheila says cold and calculated. She takes another puff of her cigarette. The Detective just sighs.

“And they wonder why the public hates Stoics so much.” The Detective says. He starts walking into the building's broken front doors. Most likely from Samsons large frame.

“Hey you can’t go in there! You are not authorized by the Chief!” Sheila yells, dropping her cigarette out of her mouth to the broken asphalt.

“This building is on the south side right? Therefore I am authorized.” The Detective says back without missing a beat.

“Fucking Prick.” Sheila says under her breath, picking up her cigarette and taking another long puff.

The north side loves their rules. Seems to be all they care about as of late.
Doesn't matter who it is, if they have mania then they get put down. But they are yet to realize rules don't work so well here on the south end.

The Detective walks into the apartment casually like a Sunday morning stroll. Everything in the building is worn out and weathered. Every room is broken into and ransacked. Pitch black in most places. The red and blue lights flash through the broken front door lighting some of the hallway next to the flight of stairs. The Detective's shadow fills the hallway. The Detective draws his all black knife from his sheath strapped on his chest. He gives it a look over admiring the large Ivory handle. A set of black scales are engraved on both sides.

Wish I didn't have to use something so beautiful to do something so heinous.

He then walks through the dark, hearing most likely Samson, walking upstairs attracting more attention than a Stoic at a comedy show. He walks up to the creaking stairs to the next floor. The air is musty and stale. Much colder in the building to where the Detective can see his own breath. At the top of the steps he sees Sampson heading upstairs across the hall to the third level.

"Samson, can you be any louder?" The Detective whispers. Samson turns with his large red bladed Bowie knife drawn.

"What the hell are you doing here Detective!?" Samson says in his normal deep bellowing voice. He walks down the steps to confront the Detective. Creaking and shaking with each careless step.

"I am here to save the hostage from the psychopath and the psychopath from you." The Detective says as he walks to meet Samson halfway. The size difference

shows more and more the closer the Detective gets to Samson. Samson is a large man in height and muscle. Standing almost 7 feet and weighing 350 easy. The man is a mammoth amongst men. He has buzzed hair and piercing small blue eyes. Crooked nose from all his confrontations over the years. Scars on his knuckles and breath that reeks of cheap liquor and steak.

“That hostage is probably long gone. I am just going to drop him and hope for the best. Save time on paperwork too” Samson says, cracking his neck side to side.

“Victor needs to teach you guys more about some damn ethics. We are here to diffuse the situation, not cut up everyone.” The Detective whispers.

“Oh, I am sooo sorry asshole, but our job is to stop mania. It isn’t to save every nut job that is in the city.” Samson says pushing closer to the Detective to try and intimidate him.

Stupid for a Stoic to try and intimidate a Stoic but Samson is the muscle of the north definitely not the brains.

“Mania spreads when life’s are lost no matter whose life it is. Trust me we can save this girl and the man. Now let’s stop wasting time bickering. I will follow you up.” The Detective says not flinching to Samsons aggression. Samson holds his stare. He then grits his teeth.

“I am surprised they still let you be a Stoic Detective. I have seen the reports and there is no way in hell I would let a damn backstabber go up behind me.” Samson says. The lights of red blue flash through the broken windows illuminating the stone face of Samson with every flash. The Detective pauses and holds the stare down.

“Fine.... I will go up first. Let me try my way, then you can use that knife any way you please.” The Detective says

“Any way I want huh?” Samson says lifting his knife closer to the Detective's throat.

“That's what I said, didn't I?” The Detective says unmoving. Samson lowers the knife and sheaths it. He then pats it on his chest sheath.

“Deal. And when your way blows up in your face, I will be there to put them down like the dogs they are.” Samson says with a devilish grin. Samson then steps aside and waves on the Detective sarcastically.

Glad to see they still feel the same way about me up north.

He ascends the stairs slowly. A creak from each step like they could cave in plummeting the Detective back to the first floor. The stairs turn and lead to a hallway with many rooms. Most have their doors closed. Halfway down the hallway he can see the spotlight shine through, flooding the hallway with light. The third floor is not as wrecked as the bottom two but still destroyed. The Detective walks down the hallway into the doorway filled with light. He sees the man who is shaking by the window. He is wearing a nice suit and a gold wristwatch but his hair is disheveled.

Definitely not from the south end.

The Detective sheathes his knife. The room is small and completely empty besides the man and the girl. Just one giant window that is half broken. The man jumps around out of the sight of the window. Pulling the girl close to him with the gun barrel still tight against her skull. The light almost blinds the Detective who winces at it.

“Get the fuck away or her brains go splat.” The man says. The little girl is crying and screaming.

“Shut up or I will blow your jaw off you brat.” The man says pushing the gun on her jaw.

His eyes are normal and so is the girl's. Mania has yet to take hold.”

“No need to do anything drastic. I am unarmed minus my knife here.” The Detective says, patting his sheathed blade on his chest.

“You have all the power right now. I just want to talk and get this situation figured out ok?” The Detective says with his hands now raised in the air.

“What the hell do you care? I am doing what I have to do for him.” The man says. He is shaking and the Detective notices his gun is a police issue.

Not illegally bought. A raven swooping down is engraved in the side of the barrel, the symbol of the force. How could this man get his hands on a piece like that?

“What would that thing have to be exactly?” The Detective says taking a small step inside the room.

“Distraction. All I have to do is distract you all, Then my wife will be freed.” The man says.

The gun lowers slightly at the mention of his wife.

“Distract us from who or what?” The Detective asks.

“I don’t know. I wish I did. Some psycho kidnapped my wife and told me to distract the police on this day and time or else my wife will be sent to me in pieces.” The man says on the verge of tears.

“Well great news. You have distracted us. You can lower the gun and we can get you out of here safe and sound and help you find your wife.” The Detective says walking further into the room with his hands still raised. The man gets startled and points the gun at the Detective.

“I have to distract you until midnight. That is what he said. That is what he said to save my beautiful Darla.” The man says. becoming erratic.

“It’s almost midnight. You did what you had to. We can save your wife and you both. If you lower the gun we can work this out. Then everyone can go home safe.” The Detective says. The man lowers his gun slightly and quickly brings it back up

“Yeah and trust a damn husk. Do you think I am an idiot? You can’t even love or feel. You probably don’t give a shit about any of us. How the hell do you even understand anything I am going through. You husks are the poison in this city.” The man says becoming more and more frantic. His eyes start to get a red glaze overtake them. His voice begins distorting.

“Shit.” The Detective says. The man brings the gun to the girl's head tightly. The girl screams in horror.

“Maybe I want to do more than distract.... Maybe I want to end this entire fucking city!” The man says with a low groveling voice that sounds like a demon.

“Look at me!” The Detective yells aggressively. The man is shaking and foaming at the mouth.

“Remember Darla? Think of your beautiful wife Darla. You love her right? I know I am a Stoic and I am just an empty husk inside but even I can see, you love Darla. Think about her. We can save her together. If you truly love Darla, you deserve to see her

again don't you? We can end this whole ordeal." The Detective pleads. The man stops and shakes his head. He slows his breathing slightly and his eyes begin to fade back to their normal color. He takes his finger off the trigger and lowers the gun. He begins crying.

"I just wanted to save Darla.. That's all I wanted....I am so sorry." The man says sobbing more and more. He pushes the little girl forward and she runs over to the Detective. The girl hugs the Detective and is still in tears. The man walks forward in front of the window.

"Thanks Detective. He said she would be at the cerebral center after midnight." The man says.

"Great great... Now let's go get your wife ok. You made the right choice." The Detective says with a smile.

"You know what...Maybe you Stoics ain't so bad after a..." before he can finish, bullets fly from the street below. Snipers and 9mms eviscerate his body from every cop on the street. The Detective pulls the girl close and covers her ears.

"Keep your eyes closed and follow me." The Detective says over the gun fire. They walk backwards keeping the girl shielded from the mangled body of the man now bleeding out on the floor. He is still breathing and gurgling. He looks up and says to the Detective.

"Sewer underCerebral Center... Darla." His body goes limp as blood puddles around him. The Detective pulls the girl out of the room in the hallway.

"Are you ok? Is everything alright?" The Detective asks. The little girl looks up and the Detective sighs with relief. Her eyes are normal but full of tears. She nods

through the tears running down her face. Samson then grabs the girl from the Detective and lifts her in the air. He brings the knife to her throat.

“Don’t try it you damn basket case.” Samson says. The girl screams and can hardly talk from Samsons knife by her throat.

“She is fine. Look at her eyes, she didn’t contract mania.” The Detective says with his knife drawn at Samsons throat. Sheila and a few beat cops run up the stairs to the scene.

“She could still be infected. We can’t take the chance and have her turn.” Samson says.

“If you lay a finger on her It will be the last damn thing you do.” The Detective says

“You wouldn’t dream of it, Detective.” Samson says blowing him off.

“Maybe that’s what Vincent said before I plunged my knife into him.” The Detective says coldly. Samson freezes. He feels the cold steel knife on his neck. He looks into the Detectives eyes and yields. Samson then sets the girl on the floor slowly.

“Mania will kill anything and anyone. You have to be willing to do the same if we ever want to contain this shit.” Samson says sheathing his knife. Samson then walks down the steps shoving the other officers aside. Sheila walks over to look at the girl.

“Are you sure she is not a basket case?” Sheila says looking into the little girl's eyes, who is shaking.

“I am positive. The man never went full basket case. She didn’t see the aftermath either.” The Detective says.

“Well, good job shielding her from that mess.” Sheila says handing the girl over to the beat cops who put a blanket on her and take her downstairs.

“Didn’t help that the man gave himself up and your team terminated him before we got any information.” The Detective says agitated.

“You got the girl out of the situation. That is what matters and I am grateful. But we have a job to do here. Our officers are trained to combat mania and that’s what they did. I did all I could do for you and a little girl’s life is now safe. Just take the win and go home Detective.” Sheila says, patting the Detective on the shoulder.

“Thanks but it doesn’t seem like that night is going to play out that way. Hopefully that little girl won’t be too scarred from this. I just wish the other guy could have made it.” The Detective says looking into the room of the mangled man soaked in his own blood.

“At least it is over.” Sheila says, staring at the body as well.

“I wish it was. He was doing all of this to save his wife. Before he died he mentioned the sewers underneath the Cerebral Center. Said he had to distract us all until midnight.” The Detective says.

“That is very strange. Why do all this just to distract some officers? We will check it out once we get cleaned up here.” Sheila says, lighting up another smoke.

“Good idea... Well, take care of the girl please. I would keep Samson away from her if I were you.” The Detective says walking past Sheila.

“I will handle Samson. And hey Detective.” Sheila says. The Detective stops at the top of the stairs.

“Yes Sheila?” The Detective replies.

"I meant it when I said you did a good job today. But did you really plunge your knife into Vincent like that?." Sheila asks, almost forcing it out .

"Thanks... and no. Just read the statement I gave the police." The Detective says.

"If I wanted political Bullshit would hang out with the Chief. I am asking you to hear your side." Sheila says. The glow of the cigarette barley lights her face in the dark hallway.

"I did what was needed. That's my side." The Detective says. He then walks down the stairs. He walks to the main floor and grabs the railing for a moment as his heart rate increases.

You are a Stoic. Act like one Dammit!

He takes a deep breath and heads out of the building. Cops all move to the side when he walks out, almost clearing a path back to his vehicle.

After all these years. They still are terrified of us.

He sees the little girl at the ambulance getting checked over. She sees the Detective and smiles.

At least one life was saved.

The Detective smiles back but then she mouths silently to him.

"I want out." She mouths as clear as day.

The Detective is confused as the little girl holds her stare. The ambulance door is closed by an EMT.

I Need to stop working late. These long shifts are getting to me.

The Detective then walks over and meets Damian who is still leaning against the Nova.

“Hey get in, this is going to be a long night.” The Detective says opening the driver's side door with a loud squeal and grind of metal on rust.

“Come on Detective. Let the north Stoics handle the paperwork for once. You did what we needed to do. You saved the damn day. Let's just go home for the night and read about it tomorrow morning.” Damian says. The Detective gets in the car and starts it up. He yells from inside the car.

“Unfortunately this is not voluntary nor is it paperwork. Get in, I will tell you more on the way.” The Detective says. Damian sighs. He thinks to himself for a moment. He then finishes his drink and tosses it at Samsons cruiser parked behind them. He gets in and buckles in.

“Well let's start with the rundown of what happened in there.” Damain says as the Detective floors it. In the rearview mirror they can see Samson getting out in an outrage at Damian's disrespect. His arms are flailing and he punches a light post in rage.

“You didn't have to piss him off even more, you know.” The Detective says adjusting his rearview mirror.

“That guy is a grade A prick. He is lucky he just got a cup thrown at him and not my fist. Now back to what happened in the building?” Damian says as the Detective takes a hard right turn.

“Short story short, the guy was just distracting us. His wife is held hostage underneath the Cerebral Center.” The Detective says.

“Cerebral Center? Have you been back there since...” The Detective cuts off Damian.

“That isn’t important right now. Let’s just find the wife and close this case.” The Detective says. The Detective feels sweat drip down his back. His hands begin trembling.

You did what you had to do right? Yes yes of course you did. But what...No no but you were in the right. Keep it together.

The Detective notices Damian watching his hands tremble but he doesn’t say anything, he just smirks.

Odd response.

They arrive at the Cerebral Center. A giant stadium that is used for gatherings of the city stands before them. It has more seats than can be counted. The building is a large all white dome. All that is on the outer walls is just a memorial banner that reads

“30 lives lost but not forgotten.”

Looks like a Roman coliseum but more like a tomb.

“So where do we look in the sewer? It stretches quite a ways underneath.” Damian says, tapping on the window.

“How did you know it was in the sewers?” The Detective asks, confused.

“You said under the Cerebral Center. Where else would that be?” Damian says confused.

“I did, didn’t Isorry it has been a long night.” The Detective says, opening his door.

“Let's split up and take each side. I will go down here in the south end and you drive around and go in from the north. We will meet in the middle. Cover more ground that way.” The Detective says.

“Sounds good to me. Stay frosty Detective. Something rubs me wrong about this whole thing.” Damian says, hopping into the Novas driver's seat and speeding off. The Detective looks at the Cerebral Center.

It seems so out of place compared to the wasted buildings of the south. Used to be such a vibrant place until... Memories of gunfire and screaming almost overtake him. He shakes his head. *Stay focused, no time to reminisce.*

He walks over to the nearest sewer grate. Solid steel that must weigh 50 pounds at the least. It has the words ‘water department’ stamped in the steel. He lifts off the grimy sewer lid and is greeted by a long ladder and a scent that could curl blood. He then climbs down the ladder fighting through the wave of foul air. The air becomes humid and stale but the scent becomes bearable. The ladder is cold and wet and not cleaned very often. He reaches the bottom and splashes down into a small stream that continues down each way.

I am literally in the shit now.

The tunnel is maybe 8 feet high and 20 feet wide. Concrete walls that concave over him making a semicircle. He slowly walks down splashing with every step. There are dim orange lights in the walls every few feet that are giving just enough light to see, but not very far. He walks slowly for a few minutes in silence. Each step splashes in the small stream that smells of shit. The sewer goes straight down and begins to curve a little to the right. The air is becoming less stale the more he walks down the sewer. He

then hears a faint scream in the distance. He readies his knife and begins rushing down the sewer. He radios over to Damian as he splashes through the sewers.

"I can hear screaming maybe half a mile in from where I entered. Investigating now." The Detective says.

"Copy that." Damian says, muffled through the radio. The screams become louder and the Detective notices it sounds like a woman yelling. The Detective then sees roughly 200 feet down the sewer line, a woman tied up screaming against the wall. She has short dark hair and her clothes are upscale but worn and covered in dirt. Another woman is slumped over against the opposite end. She has rugged clothing that looks more similar to the homeless. The Detective lowers his knife and runs over to the screaming woman.

"It's ok it's ok. Calm down and take a breath. I am a Stoic." The Detective says with his arms raised. The woman begins freaking out more by the mere mention of the word Stoic. Her eyes become wide and the screams grow louder. They echo back and forth through the sewer lines.

"Please don't kill me..... please don't.. I don't want to die here...." The woman begs sobbing uncontrollably. She has cuts and bruises all over her. Looks like tape was on her mouth at some point because there is a large red mark across her mouth.

Some sick fuck that's for damn sure.

"I won't hurt you ok. I am here to help get you out of here. Who was it that did this to you?" The Detective asks.

"Don't kill me like you killed her, please! I will do anything just let me live!!" The woman pleads louder as she starts to hyperventilate.

“Look I have nothing on me. Just stay calm ok I will call in backup.” The Detective says backing up slowly to try and alleviate the situation. The woman goes ballistic and begins hyperventilating extremely fast. When the Detective takes another step back it becomes even more intense,

“Get Away!” She shouts in a deep harrowing tone. Her eyes roll behind her head. She falls back against the sewer walls. She stops screaming for a moment. *No no no no, please. Don’t succumb to it. Please for once just fight enough for me to help you.*

Her eyes roll back forward and the color of her iris is gone and is now a milky white with a red shein.

“You deserve to die you stoic fuck.” The woman says. *Her voice is no longer of a woman. Instead it is twisted and dark. A deep raspy tone now echoes through the sewers. She tried at least. Unfortunately mania has taken full control.*

The Detective walks closer. The woman is turning into a full basket case. She tries to stand but her hands and feet are tied together. The Detective pulls out his knife.

“So I was right you are trying to kill me you sick fuck!! Bring it on, I will slaughter you. You and everything else in this fucking city!” The woman says, foaming at the mouth and growling like a mad animal. The Detective's face is somber and tense. Depression and sadness fill his mind. He feels a small tear fall from his face.

Impossible for a Stoic to cry. Must have splashed water on me.

He then takes his knife and grabs the woman's head and pins it against the wall. She is yelling louder now and flailing.

“Just fucking kill yourself you damn waste of a husk!” The woman yells in her demonic tone. The Detective involuntarily feels his grip loosen on his knife.

Maybe.....Maybe it wasn't a mistake....Maybe I am the problem....No ..No that isn't the answer. Get out of your head and put this poor woman down before the mania spreads.

He grips his knife tight and plunges it into the woman's skull. Her eyes turn back to normal. Her green eyes shed tears as they look directly at the Detective. She slumps over as the Detective pulls his knife out. Blood and brain matter cover his blade. He wipes it off on his shirt and sheathes it. The Detective's eyes look at the woman and her face is frozen in fear.

Her blonde hair and pretty face do nothing to hide the sorrowful eyes that will be frozen forever. Moments ago she was just like a great white eating a seal. No emotion, just cold calculated thoughts. That last flicker of life shown through in the end. He checks her wallet in her back pocket and reads the name. Darla Dennings...husband and wife both die on the same night, both by cops.

He checks on the other body and her organs fall out on his feet when he moves her. The Detective jumps back. Intestines cover the ground and the shoes of the Detective. The woman's body is cut up from her belly button to her throat. Rugged cut all the way up. The word 'UP' is carved on her forehead along with a weird symbol that the Detective can't make out. It looks like a circle with something on the inside. The Detective hears splashing running towards him. He whips out his knife and jumps back. Damian runs out of the dark with his knife drawn as well. He quickly sheaths it when he realizes it is the Detective.

“What the hell happened here?” Damian asks, walking by the body sprawled on the floor.

“Basket case, she went berserk unfortunately.” The Detective says looking at the Symbol on the other girl's head.

“What about the one who spilled her guts?” Damian asks, wiping back his hair into his slicked back look.

“Some other assailant got to her. Perhaps one impersonating an officer. The basket case was terrified that I was a Stoic.” The Detective says

“Well that isn't a new thing for Stoics. You know this reminds me of one time where there was this chick and she was stunning and I mean stunning...” Damian stops the story when he sees the Detective disapproving look. He shrugs it off and focuses back on the scene.

“Where do you think the attacker went then?” Damian asks.

“Unsure. I heard them both screaming and the wounds looked fresh. You didn't see anyone on your way over?” The Detective asks.

“Nope, not a soul until you. There was a ladder going up a ways back though.” Damian says. He looks at the blonde basket case.

“Always the pretty ones...” Damian says.

Odd comment but Damian was always a little off.

“What do you think the ‘UP’ means?” The Detective says

“I would assume up above us in the Cerebral Center?” Damian says.

“Seems to be the only option available. Well you finish up here I am going to try going up the ladder and see where it goes.” The Detective says.

“Thanks for volunteering me Detective.” Damian says in a sarcastic tone. The Detective just gives another serious look to Damian.

“Just a joke Detective. Go do your thing.” Damian says. The Detective then begins pacing into the dark counting each step.

Twenty three twenty four.

He counts until he reaches the ladder at 76 paces. The ladder looks exactly like the one he climbed down on. In fact if not for previous events it would look like he did a complete full circle. He climbs up out of the muck and stale air and opens the sewer grate. It is on the edge of the Cerebral Center. Guns and blood fill the detective's mind. A knife in the back is all he sees.

You did what you had to do, now focus.

He begins to walk back into the Cerebral Center counting his paces. It doesn't take more than three steps to realize what the word 'UP' means. A stack of bodies lay in a giant pile in the center of the center. One body is staked on a pole with clothing and attire similar to the mayor but her shirt is ripped open at the chest. Carved into the woman's chest is the symbol from below but much larger and easier to read. It looks like a bird flying from above in a circle with its wings spread out. The Detective grabs the radio and calls Damian.

“Damian, do you copy?” The Detective says taking a closer step towards the bodies.

“Yup, go ahead.” Damian replies.

“Call in at least 7 more homicides. Looks like we have something more than a basket case to worry about.” The Detective says.

“Damn....never just an easy night.....Well alright let me radio in dispatch for the meat wagons. Over and Out.” Damian says. The Detective begins looking through the bodies. Each one has the same symbol somewhere on their body. Some on their chest, some on their arms. All women. All Blonde.

This is the beginning of something far worse than just a basket case. This is a message to someone.

No IDs on any of the bodies. He walks up the pile of bodies to the one speared in the center. The woman looks almost identical to the mayor.

I think I see who the message was for. Poor soul. Got caught up in this just because she looks like the Mayor.

Her mouth is slightly ajar like it was broken. A small string sits in her lips. The Detective grabs it and begins pulling. The string goes for a while out of her throat and is attached to a small metal tube. The Detective opens the tube and it has a small note in red that reads.

“Lies are bitter to the stomach.”

The note seems to be written in blood of some kind.

This is one hell of a message. To orchestrate something like this. To convince a man to hold the cops off until you could set up your display. The whole thing had to be set up in less than a few hours. Could be the work of more than one person.

He then looks the girl over and notices her hand begins to tighten slightly.

She is still alive!

. The Detective hears sirens outside the building closing fast. He then tries to move the spear she is staked on but it is wedged in the bodies below. He steps down off

the bodies and begins moving them to get the stake free. He pulls a few and the fourth one he rolls over, he hears a string break. He looks and a string is sewn into the women's chest and hooked to a pack of grenades laid in a circle around the pole. The Detective falls back and dives away from the pile. The Explosion goes off right as he hits the ground. Blood and body parts spray everywhere. Covering the Detectives back. He looks back and the woman's head who was on the spear rolls next to him. Her eyes are looking around frantically with tears until she focuses on the Detective. Her eyes then droop and she stops moving. The Detective gets up and sees the mess that is sprayed in a circle around them. EMTs and police officers rush in through the main doors. The Detective just stares at the hole where the bodies used to be. *This center is now home to two horrid massacres. Both have one common denominator... me.* The Detective thinks.

An EMT rushes to the Detective.

"Are you alright Detective! Let me look you over." The young man says. The Detective doesn't answer and is locked in on the hole.

"Detective!" The EMT yells, snapping the Detective out of his trance.

"Do you need medical help, Detective?" The man asked again.

"No...Just need to wash up is all." The Detective says wiping the blood onto his pants.

"Don't let him leave." Samson yells while walking over with Sheila.

"He needs to be checked over at the hospital Samson." The young man says. Samson picks up the young man and tosses him to the side.

"I said he stays." Samson says gritting his teeth, making the young man almost wet himself and fast walk away.

"Don't punish him, he is just doing his job." The Detective says standing up.

"How noble of you. Looking out for the little guy. Maybe look out for the big guy in front of you that could kill you for messing with his fucking cases." Samson says, stepping forward into the Detectives face.

"Maybe I wouldn't have to mess with them if you did your damn job." The Detective says back, feeling Samsons breathing as he towers over him.

"Enough measuring dicks you two. Chief wants this mess wrapped up tonight. Let's bag them and tag them and get the hell out of here." Sheila says, pulling back Samson.

"This ain't over Detective." Samson says.

"Maybe neck time your mom will give you permission to stay longer." The Detective says mockingly. Samson is about to rush back over but Sheila gives him a glare that makes him turn around in a huff.

"Stop taunting him or next time I won't step in." Sheila says.

"He is the one taunting me. I am just responding to his threats." The Detective says

"Look, just tell me what happened. I don't care about anything but wrapping this up and heading home. This night has been a shit show and I just want it to end" Sheila says, lighting up another cigarette.

"Well here's the rundown. Two women tied up in the sewer. One gutted, the other was a basket case. Came up here looking for the assailant and found what used to be a tower of bodies with this strange bird symbol on all of them. The main woman who was impaled in the center was dressed up as the mayor no doubt for shock value." The Detective says. Sheila opens her book and writes down a bunch of notes.

If the other Stoics were like Sheila maybe my job wouldn't be so damn difficult.

"Ok and what caused the explosion?" Sheila asks

"The girl on the stake was alive so I was trying to get her down and one of the bodies was a booby trap that set off a belt of grenades." The Detective says

"So you tampered with evidence and didn't wait for backup and ruined any evidence basically." Sheila says.

"The woman was alive. I had to try and save her." The Detective says.

"When did you realize she was alive?" Sheila asked.

"When I walked up to the bodies to inspect them." The Detective says

"So you still tampered with evidence. You found out she was alive after you already moved some bodies." Sheila says not writing any of it down.

"Yes. I guess I tampered with the evidence but the woman was alive, Sheila." The Detective says. Then Sheila scratches out some things in her notepad.

"A bomb was set on a timer. Not by you." Sheila says, writing it down.

"No, I just told you what happened." The Detective says confused.

"Yes there was a timer. You didn't break any laws. Not letting something like this get you thrown to the wolves. Now just get out of her before Samson follows through on his threats." Sheila says turning and walking away.

Last true Stoic of the north right there.

Damian is over talking with Samson. Looks like he is giving his side of the story. Damian is giving Samson that cocky smile no doubt pissing him off to no end. Samson looks like he gets flustered and just writes a few things down and walks away. Damian then walks over, casually jumping over the hole in the ground to the Detective.

Damian and I work well together. He is young and lazy but what makes me uneasy is how casual he can be around death and dismemberment. Not once have I seen it phase him.

“Well it looks like the north has it from here. Ready to go crash and rest up.”

Damian says.

“More than ever. We can continue more of this in the morning.” The Detective says

“Sure thing. What happened up here though?” Damian asks looking at the hole in the ground

“I will tell you about it later. I got an eerie feeling about this whole thing.” The Detective says. He walks out with Damian pretending not to see Samsons glare. They head to the Nova parked out front. The Detective drives over to the south precinct to drop Damian off.

“Are you doing alright?” Damian asks as they sit parked outside the precinct.

“Yeah I am good. Why do you ask?” The Detective replies.

“Well the Cerebral Center. Didn’t know if you had been back there since?” Damian says.

“Yes I have. Don’t worry about me, just get some rest alright.” The Detective says with a fake smile.

“Sure thing boss. See you tomorrow bright and early.” Damian says getting out of the car. The moment Damian closes the door and walks away, the Detective lets out a large sigh and begins breathing rapidly. He feels his hands shake. Visions of blood spraying and people screaming. A knife entering someone’s back and the gasp of air. A tear falls off the Detective's cheek. He freezes and wipes his face. His breathing settles.

Must have been from the rain.

The Detective then drives home to think everything over. On his drive he sees homeless people spread throughout the street. Graffiti everywhere. Trash littered on every step.

It is a shame no one cares about the city since the mania started making people lose their shit.

The Detective pulls into his alley and parks his car in his usual spot on the left side by what is left of a fire hydrant. He gets out and walks a few buildings down to a dead end with a giant apartment building. Just like the city there is graffiti and homeless everywhere at his home. The building is gray but the chipped blue paint makes the Detective wonder about the beauty it used to have. Most windows are broken and the apartments are hardly livable. He sees the normal group of hippies and druggies outside his apartment building all huddled around a barrel with a small fire. When the detective walks by they all stare and step slightly away. Waiting for the Detective to arrest them even though he never does.

Too doped up to do anything. They just take a needle and drift off. But they never fail to complain about how bad everything is.

He gets more dirty looks from the three men around the barrel on fire.

I don't need drugs to know how shitty the city has gotten.

He walks up the metal steps to the third floor. He walks to his door marked Apartment 2C accompanied by the usual graffiti written next to it.

"PISS OFF HUSK!"

The Detective sighs, staring at the red spray paint.

The city isn't as appreciated as they used to be. He thinks. Nothing I can do about it tonight.

He walks inside to his one bedroom mansion. Living room, kitchen and bedroom are just one single big room. A small bathroom in the corner that is about the size of a closet. He takes off his knife and chest sheath and sets it on a small table next to his stained twin bed. He stares at the empty bottle of whiskey on his table. *The only way I can get to sleep anymore.* He thinks. He walks to the bathroom and takes off his soaked black t-shirt. He looks into his cracked mirror and just stares at himself.

Look at you. Big bad stoic or the south. Drenched short black hair and cuts all over from basket case after basket case. What do you have to show for yourself....just an empty bottle of whiskey and traumatic memories.

He feels his fist tightening. He wants to smash the mirror. Break every shard off. He doesn't even recognize who he is. His blue eyes begin to water. He feels his heart wrench. He hears a ringing noise and a flash of white fills his eyes. He falls on the cold bathroom tile in pain. He grabs his head. It feels like it's splitting open. He yells aloud. Then it instantly stops. He stands and grabs his head.

Well that's a new one.

He walks to the kitchen and opens his fridge that is empty minus a head of lettuce that is black instead of green. He looks in the cabinet and grabs one of his last two small bottles of whiskey.

My emergency stash and I would consider this an emergency.

He almost grabs the second bottle but stops.

Unfortunately I do have to get up sometime tomorrow. Save it for another time.

He closes the cabinet. He walks over by his bed and opens the bottle and drinks it straight down in one go. He then lays on his tattered bed. Images of the symbol and woman staked on the spear, flash in his head over and over. Then the woman's face in the sewer and the head that rolled next to him. The fear makes him shudder. He eventually begins to feel the effects of the cheap liquor and passes out for the night.