

"Knock knock, Ambrose! Get your ass out of bed!"

A thunderous roar fills my apartment. Really? Seven in the morning on a Sunday? It takes a bold person to bang on my door this early on my lazy day. Maybe if I keep my eyes close they will move along and assume I'm not here.

"Swift! I know you're in there man, open up!" The voice bellowing at my front door belongs to Beaumont Marshall, known to the Albertan underworld and law enforcement as Crash. He's the closest thing I have to a friend and technically my employer; but come on it's Sunday!

I'm nowhere near ready to greet the world this morning. The creaking of my front door sends me the message that he got tired of waiting and just opened the door. I guess I don't have much of a choice. Damn it Seth, how could you not lock your door anyway?

"Ambrose come on; you'll want to hear about this job," Beau's voice calls out, this time from my living room. With a deep sigh I surrender and sit up in bed.

My reflexes register somewhere between slow and rigor mortis. I stumble around long enough to find the nearest pair of sweat pants on the floor and slip into them. It's only Beau, there's no need for a shirt. I blind myself by opening the curtains in my room, it takes a few moments to adjust. I open the bedroom door to reveal Beau standing in my living room. He's fascinated with my shelf of high school trophies.

Beau is quite an odd guy when it came to wardrobe. Take his current outfit for example, there he is standing in my living room with loose black slacks complimented by a green and blue floral designed shirt buttoned to just below his pecs. He isn't a large man, but there's something about the way he carries himself which deterred larger men from testing him. His eyes remain hidden, as always, behind his dark shades.

"You know Swift it's been so long, I forgot what a child prodigy you were," Beau says as he glances at my little shrine of awards. My marksmanship had no equal back in high school, whether shooting a bow or hitting a cue ball.

My guest dropped onto my couch, putting his feet up on the cheap coffee table in the center of the room. I struggle to keep my eyes open, still mostly asleep. I head to the fridge and grab a beer, Beau declines my offer for one. The kitchen and living room are the same area in my apartment, it's the best part of living in a bachelor pad.

"Not that I don't appreciate the company Crash, but you didn't come here to reminisce. You said you had a job." It's too early in the morning to play games. I make a silent prayer to any potential deity listening above to make this worth my while because my bed was exceptionally comfortable this morning. I place the top of the beer on the corner of my coffee table and bring my fist down on the bottle. The cap soars through air nearly hitting Beau.

"It's always about business with you isn't it Seth? You really have to lighten up you know," Beau comments with a gleam in his eye, not reacting to my choice of early morning beverage. Uh oh, this doesn't bode well for me or my well being. In all the years I've known Beau he's only referred to me by my first name twice, this is the third time. Both times it was a prelude to some outlandish scheme that nearly got me killed.

Maybe this is just a dream and I never got out of bed? What are the chances?

"This job is slightly more high profile than you're used to working. Tell me Swift, what do you know about Douglas Rossi?" Anything Beau may have said after that question may as well have been gibberish because I checked out at this point.

"No way, god no, hell no." I cut off whatever he's trying to say. "This is a joke right? People who mildly inconvenience Doug Rossi have a tendency to vanish without a trace. Count me out of this one Beau, I don't care what the score is. There's nothing you can say that would make me even consider a job if Rossi is the mark.

"C'mon now. You haven't even heard the score yet," Beau responds in curious fashion. His expression remains unchanged, he doesn't look concerned at my refusal. He knows something that I don't.

"Was there anything unclear about what I said. There's no score worth the risk of making an enemy of Doug Rossi," I contest. "Tell me what is the point of money if you're not alive to spend it?"

I've been asked many times what I do for a living and the question is always difficult to articulate. The best way to describe it is I do odd jobs for Beau when he wants an extra pair of hands.

Honestly though, Beau only reaches out to me when he knows my rent is due. It's usually something like roughing up someone who forgot their place or pissed off the wrong person. A few times the job included motivating some deadbeat to pay his debt. I loved those jobs because I don't look like much and they usually don't take my motivation serious. Let's just say I am quite capable handling myself.

The work isn't difficult and anyone could do it. Beau usually contacts me because he knows I need the money and I'm too stubborn to just accept money from him. I'm no charity case.

What does Beau do? Well, that's more complicated to describe. For clarity's sake let's just say he's a problem solver. Wealthy and powerful people come to him when problems get out of control, Beau offers solutions. His solutions don't necessarily land on the right side of the legal system, which is why his services don't come cheap.

Calgary Police have been trying to nail him for a number of years now but Beau knows that system too well to make foolish mistakes, or at least that's what he tells everyone.

"You're absolutely right. So what if I was to tell you there was no money involved?" Beau drops that very suspicious tidbit. "I'm not getting paid for this one." This is clearly not one of those conversations where I can just go back to bed when we're finished so I get up heading to the bedroom for a shirt.

At this point Beau's words begin to enter a gray area straddling the line between intriguing and insanity. Nothing on this earth is more important to Beau than money.

"What if I told you this job is about our moral responsibility to do the right thing and aid in the advancement of science." The words come from Beau's mouth but I can't be hearing them right. It creeps me out, no good can come from this. "How would you feel if the score on this job the potential treatment of extreme substance abuse?"

Wait a minute... what did he just say? Did I hear that right?

"VM Stassis? You're talking about a treatment for VM Stasis?" The words escape my lips but I refuse to get caught up on that idea. He can't be serious. He smirks at my reaction.

"I figured that would get your attention," Beau says, still brandishing that smirk. I can't help but question his legitimacy on this one. On one hand Beau knows how to push my buttons, on the other I can't imagine this is a subject on which he would jerk me around. The thought of VM alone begins to stir a rage in the pit of my stomach.

"How long has it been Seth? A year or two at least." Just hearing Beau talk about my sister causes that anger to flare.

"Damnit, leave her out of this conversation!" I emerge from my bedroom. In what may have been an over-reaction, my fist finds a home

in the drywall next to the doorway. Crash sits there smiling, he's amused.

"I keep telling you to stop blaming yourself; it's not your fault. Stop beating yourself up," he looks at the hole in the wall. "and your poor apartment."

"What's your angle Marshall?" My words cut through the air, after releasing my frustration into the drywall all that's left is unadulterated malice. Beau never calls me Seth unless he's about to propose something ludicrous, likewise I only ever call him Marshall when I want him to know he gets dangerously close to crossing the line. The smirk on his face fades and he starts taking this serious.

"Listen, you already got vengeance for your sister. All I'm suggesting is the chance you might be able to help her recover. I'm not trying to con you into doing something stupid, just hear me out." He explains in a more subtle tone, I respond with a nod. "Okay maybe it's reckless to be taking on Doug Rossi but that's why I'm here. That's why I'm talking to you; I can't think of anyone with more motivation and drive to see this through." I know he intends that to be positive in some way, but it really translates to no one else is dumb enough to consider the job.

This already sounds like he's trying to manipulate me, though I can't help but let him say his piece. There are many words in the English language to describe Beau, most of them are not complimentary, but liar is not among them. He has been a pain in my ass for a long time in a lot of different ways but I never caught him lying to me, not when it counted.

VitaMors, or VM as the newspapers like to call it, is the most recent wonder drug of choice for the junkies and seedy underbelly of all major western cities. It's potency dwarfs all other narcotics on the market and even the most disciplined users succumb to its addictive nature. Every law enforcement agency in North America has some sort of task force exclusively dedicated to uncovering its source and how it's manufactured. Crime labs have subject the drug to countless testing and have exhausted all the resources available to break the substance down, but everything ends up inconclusive. No one knows what composes the pale red liquid, at least not for sure.

The worst part about the addictive ferocity of VM is the effect it has on a human body. When you overdose on a traditional drug, it reeks havoc on the body and in a lot of cases you end up dead or worse.

VM Stasis is the quaint term coined by the media for long term or heavy users who slip into a catatonic state induced by the drug.

Studies show brain activity in these victims is the same as someone who is awake and alert. The conclusion doctors have come to is that in this state you are completely aware of the world around you, you simply lack the ability to move any part of your body. You become a prisoner in your own body. The usual treatment is to simply induce a coma, so at least the patient isn't driven mad by their inability to move.

It's a fate worse than death; the fate of my sister, Hope Ambrose. She spent a few weeks in Rockyview General before being moved to the Phoebe Roams Care Center, a government funded group home for victims of VM stasis. She's been a ward of the Phoebe Roams for just shy of two years.

"Alright fine, I'm listening." Even as I say it, I'm already regretting this decision. Beau looks enthused by my response while I take my seat again next to the coffee table.

"A friend of mine contacted me yesterday. He's a researcher who has been working on the effects various narcotics have on the human body, specializing in VitaMors.. They were close to a breakthrough when his colleague and partner went missing," Beau explains.

"A missing person job? " I interject.

"Dr. Westcott is a friend of mine calling in a favor, but aside from that, his work with Dr. Raquel is years ahead of anyone else in the field. From what Westcott told me last night we could be looking at a treatment within months, assuming they can get back to work," Beau explains.

"So you want me to Sherlock Holmes this job? Pound the pavement, canvas the area?" My anger subsides; it's hard to take this job serious. I'm not a gumshoe, or a dick. Beau retrieves some paper from his pocket. He tosses it down on the tables in the center of the room. "What's this?"

"Swift you're from Janus right?" He asks, ignoring my questions.

"Uh, yeah. I lived there until I graduated high school. Why do you ask....no, you can't be serious." I don't need to look at the table anymore. I know what he put there. It's plane tickets. "Are you serious? You're expecting me to go up against Douglas Rossi in Janus? Maybe you didn't get the memo but that man owns that city." I'm not even exaggerating that much. Rossi turned heads years ago but relocating the headquarters of Rossi Inc to Janus, Newfoundland. Since then, he's sunk so much money into the city's economy and public sector that he practically runs the place.

"I knew you would be excited to get back to the rock," Beau smiles, I resist the urge to take a swing at him for putting me in this position.

There's a strong possibility this is the job that finally gets me killed. Though do I have an option to walk away without hating myself? Hope isn't getting any better and no one is even close to finding a treatment. Even with how long of a shot this is, it's one I have to take.