

“Incorruptible”

Rubens Medina

I liked to think of myself as a brave soldier of the law, upholding justice and valiantly fighting the mafiosos and mobsters of the city.

Deep down in my hardened, heavy heart I knew this was far from the truth.

In this dark ocean of crime and filth, I am a small, pitiful sailor, desperately clinging to my morals to avoid sinking. More than once had I almost let go.

Everyday I came home in the early hours to a decrepit, dilapidated apartment, and when I tossed and turned in my futile attempts to sleep, the echoes of the city's suffering pierced the paper-thin walls, robbing me of any rest. I kept my badge next to me so I could clutch it, as if the cold steel could have provided me the warm comfort I desired. Sometimes it would. But I might just have been delirious then.

Like always.

In the morning, the alarm went off an hour after I had woken up. The distant gunshots disturbed my dreamless sleep before any alarm could. On the way to the department, I thought of the fat, crooked cops who would be sitting in their chairs, puffing exotic cigars provided to them by their bosses. I arrived and spoke to no one. Didn't want to encourage the vultures. They gazed at me hungrily, waiting for the slightest change in expression. I gave them none. My coworkers snickered. No doubt they could afford to waste their time all day, given who their *real* employers were.

"Who you gonna arrest today buddy?"

"You solve that murder case yet Sherlock? Awe that's too bad, there's six more waiting from last week you know?"

I head for the chief's office. There he was inside, wallowing in smoke and self-pity.

"Chief."

He looked up. The chief's tired, deadpan eyes met mine. The fire in them had been extinguished long ago. Like an ashed cigarette.

"It's not much, but I got a strong lead on a group of suspects. We're getting real close to the end of this case."

"Which one." His raspy voice scraped my eardrums.

"The Russian one."

"That's nice. Only got 30 to go, and that's the ones we know about."

Damn. I had just wanted to let him know there was actually someone doing their goddamn job.

I left without anything else to say, but not before I heard the jeers of my peers as I walked out the door.

"There he goes again boys! Off to fight the forces of evil!"

"Tell Franchetti we send our regards eh?"

Outside, the sky was suitably grey.

I made my way through the ghetto, like a hunter navigating through the deep jungle. The alleys were plagued with junkies; helpless husks of what had once been normal people. The pungent smells of various substances being manufactured and consumed invaded my nostrils. It would have taken years to apprehend every single drug dealer in the district. Even if I could have possibly achieved such a Herculean task, more than half would've been let go on bail or on a "technicality". The system was hopeless, but I, the hopeless fool, would keep trying to fight it.

But what the hell was I fighting for? I had no specific motivation. My parents hadn't been murdered. But you could say their lives had been taken. Had I wanted to "avenge" them, I would have become a doctor instead.

It wasn't a desire to make the world better. I knew too well my good deeds were drowned by countless other atrocities committed across the city. For every murderer or rapist that was actually prosecuted, three more arose in the night. I was battling the proverbial Hydra, and I had no fire with me.

Night came, and the symphony of violence began. Sirens pierced the silence, ambulances and fire trucks raced through the city. Windows were smashed. Anguished screams for help went unanswered. The gunshots from the morning returned, and they brought a few blasts with them. A nightclub nearby blared its music, the deafened clubbers oblivious to it all.

My destination was in front of me. I looked up at the narc's house; the lights were out. It was quite late but he would make time for me. Sometimes I wish he wouldn't help me; I feared for his family's safety and wellbeing. But when I walk up the stairs I knew something was terribly wrong. Dread weakened my resolve. My sense of duty willed me to continue and I stopped outside his door. It was useless to knock. The door gave way to my boot, opening the entrance to Dante's seventh circle of hell.

There he laid, sprawled across the living room in a pool of blood.

Wasn't much of a living room anymore.

The bullets had torn away at his body, leaving it mangled and shattered. It wasn't the first time one of my informants had been punished by his enemies. But he was the first one with a family.

Tears streamed down and I compelled myself to go into the bedroom. I immediately regretted it, and I screamed in anger; the mother's corpse was still covering her son. My knees dropped to the ground, and my hands covered my face. I did not want to look into the crib. The stench of death reached the highest skyscraper, and I wept and lashed out at a deaf God for allowing his children to be brutally slaughtered like mere cows.

But a high-pitched sound came from the crib. A loud, piercing wail. In that moment, there could not have been a sweeter melody.

I cried and I howled, I cried from relief, and sadness, and joy, and anger, and I picked up their infant daughter. When she looked up at the stranger holding her, he stared back, and he realized he could never quit.

I had to be one of the good guys. There was way too many of the bad.