

"I walk through doors of wake and sleep as if my only qualification to exist at all is as my own mental caretaker." Borrada trod the floor, vaguely remembering prayers as a block to the incessant loops, over and over that shook his foundational neuroses.

The swish of torchlight at the window was Ascolta. He came in and sat on the bench. The cell was hot despite Borrada's shallow breaths. But Ascolta's face was pallid.

He spoke softly, wary of the CCTV pod. "Listen, please, Prime Minister. You're the only father for Dolour. They rioted on the streets after you were dismissed."

"Dismissed. Ha."

"You don't seem to realise you're needed beyond these walls; far beyond."

"What idiot are you to tell that to the prisoner?"

"Look deep for the plan in you. The people of Dolour: we need you."

The bronchitic air-con became a distraction to Borrada's upset. "I can't disavow you Ascolta when you wear such a tender heart. I can't deny that, even trafficked as I am in overdoses. You give me the assurance of the old biographies, and I just wanted you to know that." He sighed his greyness.

Ascolta shook his head. "They don't like me here. Gottisttot's taken me under his wing. They don't like it. This is a Neufort institution. They want me to grass up unfaithful staff to The Board; the big bosses. I'm no grass but I don't know if I have a choice. They practically threatened my family's safety. That's how they run it here."

"What do you mean?"

Ascolta shook his shoulders. "Aw look, I don't know. I have to go."

His un-dieted face was so young and new and genuine.

Borrada grabbed his arm as he turned to leave. "I'm glad you have a family. Look after them. I never had any. My father sent us away. Even my mother sent me off to school at ten. I was rebuffed so many times that I feel an orphan. I live with the worthlessness and sense of ill-fit as though I don't belong; as though I'm not worthy of belonging."

Ascolta eased back to Borrada and made Borrada's arm slacken. "I hear the whip of childhood mistreatment loud in that child's life."

Borrada shook his head, breathed and shook his head some more. "In all my thirty-nine years," he said, "you're the only person that's ever acknowledged that to me. Here of all places." And he put his arms around Ascolta and drew him in.

"As a father now myself, Prime Minister, I think about these things."

"Of course you do. Because you care. My father made me what I am. And that's not a good thing. You'll do better for your little angel, Ascolta." He smiled, eased, but sad at seeing Ascolta check his watch.

Ascolta's brows rose. "Have you felt any benefit at all from us talking?"

"Ah, my friend, how can the prisoner answer when he's conquered and rotted by prison existence? But I have a hope. I hope in restoration by the sincerity of a young father called Ascolta."