2454 Lone Wolf  
  
The Nihilist… was the stupid name the journalists had given the unhinged predator who stalked the dark alleys of Mirage City.  
  
The killings seemed random, but were too flawlessly executed to be anything except meticulously planned. The murderer did not discriminate in choosing victims, either, so the whole city was on edge.  
  
The incident that had led to Sunny being sent to mandatory counseling, as well as to the new captain's sudden promotion, were connected to the Nihilist, as well.  
  
'Shit. Even I am starting to call him by that idiotic name.'  
  
Not only did Sunny hate the idea of giving a sick, cowardly loser a name as pompous as that, but it was also somewhat of a personal sleight to him. The killer left absolutely no traces behind and chose his victims through a seemingly meaningless process, so the newspapers had invented an ominous moniker — the Nihilist — to draw more attention to the story and sell more copies.  
  
Every time a new victim was found, their advertising revenue exploded. Politicians, meanwhile, gave impassioned speeches to build populist platforms while simultaneously introducing invasive laws under the false pretense of ensuring public safety to tighten their control over people. Many ghouls were reaping benefits from the gruesome deaths of the serial killer's victims…  
  
But enough was enough.  
  
The same politicians who had used the public panic to score points would start to look like fools if the Nihilist wasn't caught soon. The press could not keep selling the same story over and over again without losing the public's interest. And people in law enforcement who had climbed the career ladder with promises of swift results were growing more and more desperate to produce them.  
  
So, no matter how much the new captain disliked and was threatened by Sunny, he could not do anything about it.  
  
Because Sunny was indeed the best detective in the division, by far. He had come up through the ranks fair and square, first as a beat cop, then as a detective in the Organized Crime Division… naturally, he made more than a few enemies in the deeply corrupt and rottеn Mirage City Police as a result.  
  
The fact that he had never been demoted or dismissed was the best proof of how good he was at his job. Although his methods were often messy, Sunny always brought results.  
  
The new captain glared at him silently, seething with fury. But Sunny did not care — he was going to catch the Nihilist, and a mere sicophant was not going to stop him. "So… can I go take a look at the crime scene before rain washes everything away? Sir."  
  
The old man ground his teeth, then cursed loudly.  
  
"Fine! I'll give you the case, damn it! Be warned, though — if you fail to bring that sick bastard in, it will be your head flying. I'll feed you to the newspapers and make you a proper scapegoat. Don't say I didn't warn you!"  
  
Sunny shrugged with a derisive smile.  
  
"What else is new? I'll get going then."  
  
The captain leaned forward.  
  
"Not so fast, asshole. I said that I'll give you the case, but I didn't say that there would not be strings attached. In fact, I have a condition."  
  
Sunny let out a long sigh.  
  
"Why does everyone want to give me conditions today? Captain… you're not going to slip me your number too, are you?"  
  
The old man scoffed.  
  
"What the hell are you even… actually, never mind. You can have the case, but I'll be assigning you a partner. Someone has to watch your back, anyway — lest the recent incident repeat itself."  
  
Sunny frowned deeply, then said with a hint of barely contained anger in his voice:  
  
"Like hell you will. You know I work alone, Captain."  
  
The captain stared at him with wide eyes.  
  
"What kind of bullshit are you spouting? Have you hit your head repeatedly on something hard, Sunny? You work alone... what? I don't care what your preference is, this is Mirage PD. There are rules that even bastards like you have to follow."  
  
He shook his head, then sighed and waved his hand.  
  
"If you are worried that it's someone I am sending to spy on you, don't. This is a... different kind of situation. She's a good kid — a former national athlete with a rousing story of overcoming adversity. She's the pride of the nation, the pride! You get it? We were all celebrating when someone like that enrolled in the Police Academy!"  
  
The old man sighed wistfully.  
  
"She graduated first in her class, too, and did exceptionally well as a patrol officer. As a result, she was on a swift track to making detective before, well… anyway, now that she is back from an extended maternity leave and freshly promoted to the Homicide Division, I want you to show her the ropes. And be nice about it!"  
  
Sunny studied the captain dubiously.  
  
"Actually, I don't get it. That's the whole reason?"  
  
The old man looked at him with distaste, then sighed again.  
  
"Well... and she looks great on a poster. Not that a thug like you will understand the importance of a clean and stirring image. So, when the reporters besiege you — and you know they will, considering the case — I want you to plant her firmly in front of the cameras and take a step back. Better yet, take three steps and get out of the shot, your morose bastard. You don't like dealing with public relations anyway, so it's a win-win."  
  
He leaned forward and added in an even tone:  
  
"In any case, it's not a discussion. It's an order. Either you take a partner and play ball, or I'll give the case to someone else."  
  
Sunny remained silent for a while, looking at the old man darkly.  
  
'So, he wants me to bring some washed-out mom around and let her stand in front of the cameras?'  
  
Everything inside Sunny rebelled against the idea of bringing someone whose only worth was looking comely into the hunt for the Nihilist. But he understood that if there was one thing the higher-ups cared about, it was the visuals.  
  
A national athlete — with some kind of inspirational story, no less — choosing the Police Department was a big win for the PR Division. Now that she was a proper family woman and a devoted mother, to boot, they were all probably salivating.  
  
Softening the image of the traditionally rough and gruff, predominantly male-dominated police force was candy those scumbags could not resist.  
  
So what if he had to carry dead weight around? Babysitting a weak, useless, and soft rookie was not the worst punishment.  
  
And if that poster girl… well, poster mom… ended up actually dead as a result, it would be on her. Not on him.  
  
Sunny cursed quietly and then nodded.  
  
"Fine. As long as she doesn't get in my way, I won't send her back to play house."  
  
The captain gave him a long look.  
  
"Great. She'll be waiting for you at the crime scene. Now, get the hell out of my office!"  
  
Sunny stood up and did just that, already thinking about what he would find at the scene of the murder.  
  
'That damn rain…'  
  
Water could wash away the blood, and at times, it could even wash away the corpses.  
  
But it could not wash away sin.  
  
Cleansing the city of sin was Sunny's job, and he was quite good at it — even if, in the process, more blood was spilled.