

One of Our Own

Bryant's breath condensed on the plastic eyes of his gasmask, before fading away, only to be replaced every time he exhaled. It was stifling. Sweat from his skin was evaporating within the confines of his rubber hazmat suit, but with nowhere to go, causing him to sweat more. It was like an odious eco system; three hours bound in rubber and duct tape, staring at a laptop, had left him just about ready to faint.

He glanced to O'Donoghue, who stood by the window, clutching his suppressed submachine gun with the light touch of a man with experience. He too was dressed in blue rubber and red gloves, with all gaps sealed by gunmetal tape, and his face obscured by the blank, unseeing respirator. He looked almost comical, stood totally still; he contrasted with the featureless house in which they stood, like a piece of modern art: four grey walls, one dirty window, a broken front door and a clown, holding an Uzi. Bryant chuckled.

"Keep your eyes on that screen." O'Donoghue's voice was a Dublin drawl. Channelled through his mouth-piece, it sounded like a poor quality radio.

"Sorry." Bryant's eyes turned back to the laptop, the single notable feature in the empty room. The camera to which it was linked watched the street outside. It was a dead road. Everyone knew how things worked down here. Everyone knew who was king. Only the twenty-year pigs with their snouts on the green came down here. Only the twenty-years and the brand new.

A car turned into the top of street. A white and blue Vauxhall, with lights strapped to the top, it progressed slowly towards the abandoned house.

"They're here." Bryant closed the laptop. O'Donoghue straightened up against the window, cocking his gun. Bryant did the same, aiming at the door. He could hear his watch ticking beneath his rubber suit, slower than his pounding heart, creating a disjointed rhythm which rang in his ears and drove him insane.

The car pulled up in front of the house, and two pigs clambered out. One man and one woman – fresh-faced, holding onto their high-vis, stab-proof jackets the way only the young and ideal officers of law did. They laughed together. These were the right ones.

"I used to work on an oil rig," O'Donoghue's statement nearly made Bryant fire in panic. It was rare to ever get words out of him, never mind right before a job. "Nearly twenty years ago now. One day there was a fire that killed thirty people. Total accident – someone dropped a crowbar that scratched a tank. But that's all it took. One spark."

The knock at the door. The standard inquiry. The female pig pushed the door open, and Bryant squeezed his trigger. No blood or screams, just the dull thud of impact. The male pig tried to run, but O'Donoghue put him down. Job done. Now they'd collect the casings, leave in the van, and get their cheques in the morning.