

EXTRACT 4 – Waiting for Unifier

Jacques sat in an office chair, sometimes swiveling around on it on the chair's axis. He did not particularly enjoy it, but amused himself by seeing Della Torre suffering with each of his spins. He rebounded with a leg from the ground and shouted loudly: "Eeee!"

"Would you be so kind as to stop spinning on that chair and sit down in an armchair? You are making me nervous." It was obvious that she would best like to have grabbed Jacques's collar and to have pushed him out of Unifier's private study.

"Certainly. The armchair totally suits me," he replied politely. After all, it was she who had sat him down on that chair at the door. She sat in an armchair by the window and slowly sipped her coffee.

Jacques had dived into the armchair opposite Unifier's desk. He had been in this office a few times before. Firstly, when he had been hired several years ago. It was always a delicate matter in which the highest secrecy applied. He had already made a living through this work for a long time. If he believed in predestination, he would say that he was born for this job. He could not say he enjoyed it. But there was nothing he could disapprove of. Conscience was a luxury he could not, and did not want, to afford. He did things for which every good citizen of the City would condemn him to dissolution. The hypocrites. They would just continue living under the Hatch, without ever suspecting who really controlled their lives. He was glad that at least he did not live in such ignorance, if he had to live in the City.

Voices were heard in the hallway. Among them, Della Torre recognized Unifier's voice. He was speaking to the security officer. She arranged her skirt and stared at the door expectantly. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched Jacques, who also straightened himself up in the armchair. She did not like his gray-blue eyes. Actually, she did not know other eyes of such a color. Jacques's eyes were more gray than blue. When she looked into them, her gaze slipped on the eyes' surface and she could not get any deeper. In previous years she had witnessed that Jacques could conjure up an almost boyish smile, but she also knew how many dissolutions he was guilty of, so she remained cautious. Unifier was small of figure and Jacques was almost a head and a half taller. It was funny to see them next to each other at joint meetings. Jacques seemed more of a bodyguard, which in the proper meaning of the word he was not. Della Torre did not understand how such a man could be inconspicuous in a crowd. But he was their best secret agent and she had to acknowledge that he was totally loyal at all times.

Although the media functioned reliably, public meaning was volatile. Despite this fact, Unifier's position remained stable. She was happy to have the honor to work with him. She admired him. His decisiveness and fearlessness. In her eyes, he was the man who was able to manage the entire City. He was deservedly called Unifier. His person was untouchable. When she was in his presence, she felt she was being herself. At such moments, she was part of something bigger. The knowledge filled her with a sense of importance. If she had to leave one day, she would feel weak and unimportant again. She lived her own small life like all the people in the City who had no idea what it was really all about. But she stopped herself from admitting such thoughts. Her position was important. Very important.

Jacques knew that Della Torre was very devoted to Unifier. However, from his point of view, this was something he found disgusting. Actually he found her whole being disgusting, although he was unable to say exactly why. She always treated him politely. For that matter, she treated everybody with a great deal of tact and diplomacy which could be admired. He watched how Della Torre stared fixedly at the door which was to be opened by Unifier at any moment. Always helpful, well dressed, with a slight smile on her face. Anyway, as is to be expected from an assistant. Moreover, everybody knew that she was much more. She was the unappointed right hand of Unifier. Or at least the left hand. Based on his experience, Jacques held the opinion that people do not change. They could change, but it did not happen. There was no time for change. There were always many perceptions and facts that had to be absorbed. The City was living and something important was always happening. Why make things more complicated, if everything significant is served on a silver platter? Jacques knew that Della Torre disliked and partially also feared him. He could not blame her for it. In the environment where they operated, it was logical. But what he could not stand was her patronage. As far as he remembered, she never expressed scorn or superiority in her behavior. His intuition had never betrayed him. Inspections had developed his ability to empathize with the accused. It helped him to gain the information he needed. People were vulnerable and suggestible. They were easily manipulated. His conscience did not disturb his sleep. After all, they seldom showed the good will really to get to know someone or something. He could not imagine that such people might gain control of the City. The City could not be managed by a pack of timorous officers, soft and opportunistic. The idea that he could be subordinated to such people made him see red.

Frustrated, he stood up from the armchair and looked at her stealthily. Della Torre's energy was not high enough to deceive him. He did not sense any compassion or benevolence in her. She looked like a barely digestible cake with pink icing, which you are also certain to feel in your stomach the following day. Perhaps if she just spilled her coffee at least once, he might consider her human.

Unifier entered the room and greeted Jacques. Della Torre put the kettle on. Jacques observed how carefully she arranged the sugar lumps on the saucer and aligned the cup handles to the right side. Not today it seems, he thought to himself.