A night in the Undercity
Ben Waldhoff

I wake up to the soothing sound of my mother's voice.

"Good morning dear. Breakfast is ready. Today is your big day and you don't want to be late, do you?" she chirps as she presses a button to open my curtains.

I open my eyes and stretch before taking a look out of the window. It´s a sunny morning and I can see the Citadel shimmering in the morning sun. Today is my big day. Today is my speech in front of the Council to hopefully become the youngest council member there ever was.

 I jump out of bed and storm into my closet. I have my outfit prepared already and just grab it before rushing into the bathroom and start my usual morning routine. Shower, drying, teeth, hair, getting dressed. I look at myself in the mirror on my wall. I look good in this uniform, it suits me. I flash a grin and turn around to get to the kitchen where my father and mother already sit discussing the news while having breakfast.

"Have you heard, some gang from the Undercity stole some gear from an academy student this morning. I said it and I´ll say it again, these people are dangerous and need to be stopped." my father then turns to me and gives me a big smile. "Good morning, smartest person I know. Big day to day, huh? Are you ready? You want some breakfast or just coffee?" he asks and raises an eyebrow.

He should know by now that I just drink some coffee in the morning and eat later, but I just shake my head. "I´ll just have a coffee, thanks. And what was that about people from the Undercity? A robbery?"

"Yes, a few kids broke into an academy kid´s laboratory this morning and stole some of his artificial intelligence cores." my mother said as she hands me a mug of coffee. "Seems like the Enforcers got the stuff back though. Except for some unimportant items. They didn´t get the intruders as far as I know."

"They didn´t" my father answers and stands up. "I got informed about that already. It looks like it´s a notorious group of criminals. I´ll look into it as soon as I am in the office today."

My father is the Chief of the Enforcers. My mother on the other hand is a council member and the head of import and export. I grew up to very high standards, as everyone who lives in the "City of Progress" called Piltover. I have the best grades in my class and applied for council as soon as my mother brought up the idea of me joining the council. I have some ideas to change our city for the better.

My father gives my mother a kiss and kisses me on the forehead.

"Good luck today Smarty, you can do it." he exclaims and waves goodbye as he steps out of the kitchen.

I frown at the silly nickname he keeps using for me, but my mind instantly goes back to what my parents said about that robbery. Why would they steal something from a laboratory, what could they possibly gain from that? Apparently they are all just criminals down there... just like everyone says. We are the city of progress, why do they have to ruin all that by giving our city a bad name through their criminal activities? I will stop that as soon as I get into the council, they have been unsupervised for too long.

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"...go now?" my mother looks at me expectantly. I have been distracted by my own thoughts so I didn't get her whole sentence.

"Sorry, can you repeat that?" I ask and she chuckles.

"I asked if you are finished and if we can go now?"

I nod in response and stand up to put my mug in the sink, where one of the servitors will clean it. I follow my mother out of the kitchen to one of our cars. Our driver bows and opens the back door of the car for me and my mother.

"Oh, hold on, I forgot something, I need to pay Vander a visit first, I promised him I´ll come by today after all the hassle he had last week. Sorry darling, go ahead and drive to the citadel, I´ll be with you as soon as I can, I promise." she looks at me with a guilty expression, but I just smile at her.

"Everything is fine mom, I´ll see you there." I hug her and she looks me deep in the eyes.

"I´m so proud of you, now go, before I start crying." she snickers and watches as I get into the car and drive off.

The way to the Citadel is quite a ride. We live in the northern parts of the City, near the coast, as where as the citadel is located more towards the center of the city. To get there we have to pass a huge bridge, which spans over a canal, the Pilt, which flows inland towards the outskirts of Piltover and inevitably into the Undercity. I look outside the window and see a small fisherman's boat floating down the canal. Two men are sitting in the boat, they look dirty and wet. No one I´d like to share a boat with.

I hear a loud explosion right ahead of us. I turn my head and see a flaming ball of fire burst up into the air. Then another explosion on the other side of the bridge. Then another one on our side closer to us and one on the other. Aphelis, our driver, turns to me and opens his mouth to tell me something but is interrupted by another explosion, this one, right next to us. The car shakes violently and I try to hold on to the seat. A part of the bridge breaks off and falls down into the canal. Our car is so close to the piece that broke off that one of the tires is not touching ground anymore.

 Me and Aphelis freeze for a few seconds and wait for something more to happen. 1... 2... 3... nothing happens. I relax visibly and sigh in relieve. Right when another explosion goes off and destabilizes the bridge completely, which causes the part of the bridge where our car is on to break off and we drop. Together with some other cars, we drop into the Pilt. I scream as we fall.

I feel the impact as we crush into the water below. The shock goes through my body and almost makes me lose consciousness. Almost. I try to orientate myself and I somehow have the bright idea to open my seat belt. I fall again, land on my head and back which doesn´t help my situation at all and only now realize that the car is upside down. I turn towards Aphelis and try to tell him that we have to get out of here. I turn... and look straight into his cold, dead eyes.

I yelp and almost jump backwards. He broke his neck... his head is hanging in a very unnatural position and his whole body is shattered... I try to hold back my tears and get back into the situation.

"I have to go, I have to get out of here." I whimper to myself.

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The car is already filling with water and I look at the door. When I open it, water will flow in. I´ll have to be quick.

"Deep breaths, deep breaths" I repeat and try to calm myself down... which doesn´t really help at all.

I lay my hand on the door, take one last breath and push the door open. Water starts flowing in and I push myself out of the car as it starts filling with water and sinking to the ground of the canal.

I try to hold myself up with swimming motions and pray to the gods that someone can hear me.

"HELP! HELP!!! OVER HE-" I try to scream, but the last thing I feel, before everything goes dark, is a sharp pain at the back of my head.

"Hey, wake up." I hear a faint voice with an interesting accent.

I am surprised by myself that I can still appreciate voices and accents in my current state...

"Wake up. Please, don´t die on me on this gods forsaken day... not you as well." again this voice.

I try to open my eyes... and it works, although barely, I open my eyes and see a seemingly young man bend over looking at me with a worried expression.

"Oh thank the gods you are awake. What happened to you?" he asks as I sit up and try not to puke from the stinging pain at the back of my head.

"I... honestly don´t know. There was an explosion... on the bridge... I fell into the water and then I think a rock hit me... wait, who are you, where am I and why am I telling you this?" I now ask trying to get away from the stranger.

"Hey, relax please, I won´t hurt you. I just want to help. My name is Victor, you are at a shore of the Pilt in the undercity and I don´t know why you are telling me all this, some people say it's my charm."

He says the last part in such an ironic voice that I almost have to laugh, almost. I look at him closely now, he is wearing a brown suit with a white shirt underneath, he has pale skin and a slim, almost bony figure. I just now realize he is holding a crutch. Not for me, he is leaning on it himself. His leg seems to be in a bad state.

"Are you okay? You don´t looks so well either." I ask him worried. He turns away and sighs.

"Yes, it´s just a sickness, not curable. It´s fine." He answers. His accent still amazes me, it´s so smooth yet so rough. I could see a muscled man from one of the colder regions have an accent like this, but hearing it on someone like him is... surprising, not to say odd.

It slowly dawns on me what he said just a second ago...

"Hold up, I am where?!?" I almost scream and he jumps a little at my sudden outburst.

"I-in the Undercity... at one of the Pilts shores. Why?"

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I follow Victor, who is moving surprisingly fast for a man with a crutch, through a few streets in the undercity...

Me, in the undercity. What is wrong with this day?

I barely accept his offer to guide me back to the entrance to the upper city, after I calmed down from my minor outrage. And by minor I mean almost punishing a wall and a cripple in the process.

Now he is actually guiding me through some dark streets and past some even darker alleys. The sun is already going down... I must have been unconscious for quite some time.

"Come here. We should first look at your head wound." Victor says and holds a door open for me. I go in without thinking, which I don´t do a lot today apparently and find myself in the middle of an undercity pub. I turn around instantly, but Victor is blocking my way back out.

"Why are we here?" I whisper scream and impale him with my glare.

"As I said, we need to take care of your wound and we should probably find some clothes for you..." he says first gesturing towards my head and then down my body, which makes him blush a little, if that's even possible with his pale complexion.

"I want to leave!" I whisper again.

"Not until you wound is taken care of. Or you can find you way back yourself." He insists with a similar glare which I gave him just a second ago.

"I... You... Ehhh..." I sigh in surrender. "Fine, but why here?"

"Because the owner is an old friend of mine." he says and starts slowly pushing me towards the bar, where a Bulky man is "cleaning" a wooden mug, with a towel that doesn't look all to clean.

I look left and right. Everywhere I look I earn nasty looks and vulgar gestures, especially from the male customers, but there is also a few people sitting in darker corners, coughing, shivering, alone.

We arrive at the bar and Victor looks at the bartender.

"Hey Sett, is Silco in the house? We need his help." The bartender looks from me to him and back to me. He looks me up and down and signals us to follow him behind the bar.

"Thank you" Victor says and goes around to follow Sett into a backroom, I follow shortly after.

"Victor! Old friend, what are you doing here? I thought you weren´t gonna come back that soon",

a man, apparently Silco, greets Victor and gives him a long hug.

"Hello Silco, I didn´t think so either, but I ran across a person in need and you know how I am." He gestures towards me and I step a bit closer.

"Ahhh, yes, typical Victor. Whaddaya need?" he asks and flashes a smile.

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"I-ii need a bandage, I think. M-maybe some disinfection... if you have something like that..." I say and instantly cover my mouth with my hand.

"I´m sorry, I-i didn´t mean..." I try to apologize, but get cut off by a laugh from the bear like man.

"No worries kiddo, I know what they tell you upstairs about us down here, no wonder you´re scared to death. You probably think we´re gonna kill ya, huh?" Silco laughs again and turn around to get something out of his desk. A bottle of a clear liquid and some bandages.

"If you´ll allow, I´ll apply the alcohol and the bandage." Silco offers and after a second thought, I nod.

Victor has been nothing but kind and this Silco seems to be one of the most warm hearted people I ever met... How come there are so many bad rumors about the people from the undercity?

After my wound got cleaned and patched by Silco, he gives me a coat to wear over my still wet clothes and let us out through the backdoor.

"He was kind..." I say hesitatingly, while pulling the coat tighter around me.

"He always is, unless someone makes a mess in his pub." He snickers and keeps moving.

We walk in silence for the rest of the way. I get to have a good look at how life is down here...

There is so much poverty, so much sickness and so many homeless people and I am pretty sure I saw three drug dealers giving out wares. No wonder, when you live here, there is not really any other way to have an income. I see some armored looking men every now and then, but they move past us without giving us another look. They seem to be more of a protection unit rather than a ravaging unit.

It´s not the people who are bad... it´s the situation, the rumors and the inexistent opportunities that are bad. How can there be such a big difference between what we own and what they own, yet such a small difference between our and their behavior and kindness...

I have to get back, talk to mum and dad and get the council to change the situation down here. It will take some time, but if we can change what´s happening down here, maybe we can stop the crime as well. I hope.. at least.

I am so deep in my own thoughts that I bump into someone.

"I am awfully sorry Cupcake, are you okay?" the woman I have bumped into asks. She is dressed in very little clothing and her hair is partly wet, yet perfectly styled.

"I´m fine, thank you, but I should be the one apologizing. I didn´t look where I went. I am sorry about that." I answer and nod my head in apology.

"Ah, don´t worry about it, my fine Cupcake. Have fun, you two." She turns and leaves with a wink.

I blush and keep on following Victor who is also blushing a little bit as far as I can see.

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Finally, we arrive at one of the gates which are the pathways between Piltover and the Undercity. There is a somewhat long row of people standing in front of the gate. They are trying to get into Piltover, but the enforcers are checking everyone thoroughly. Probably because of the explosions. Victor turns towards me and smiles.

"There you go. Piltover right in front of you..."

I nod and turn to look at him.

"Thank you. For everything." I said and pull him into a hug which makes him stumble a bit.

"OH, I´m sorry! I forgot!" I help him back on his feet and hold him for a bare second, before letting go and fiddling with my own fingers.

"I... would you like to come with me? To Piltover I mean. I could really use a person who can explain first hand what´s happening down here. Two voices are always better than one." I ask uncertainly.

His eyes widen as I ask this question and he visibly thinks about it for a moment. I am getting more nervous by the second and I don´t know why I am so relieved when he nods yes.

"I´ll come with you, maybe it will help the situation. And I´ve always wanted to see how the Uppercity works." he smiles after he says that and points towards the gate.

"Should we then? I bet your parents are worried sick, because of you" he smiles reassuringly.

"Yes, let's go." I said and walk towards one of the Enforcers.

"Excuse me officer, I..." I try to start a sentence, but as soon as I get close enough to the Enforcer his eyes widen and he grabs me by my shoulder.

"It´s you! Oh thank the gods, the boss will be so relieved. Come, follow me, we will bring you home right away." He tries to drag me towards the gate, but I stop him.

"Wait! He´ll come with us." I order and the Enforcer looks confused from me to Victor who waves with his free hand.

"He´s a friend and he´s helped me a lot today. He and I will talk in front of the council together." I continued and gestured Victor to follow us.

The officer shrugs and brings us through the gate and towards one of the Enforcer cars. We get in and drive off towards my home. We cross a different bridge on the way and as I look to the side, I see the still blocked off bridge and my heart stops for a moment.

Aphelis... he died, I lived... I lay my hand on the glass between me and the outer world. I´ll make the best out of it, I promise. I will try to save this city, this whole city, and the people within. I hope me and Victor can convince the council to make some strongly needed changes to the politics and the treatment of the people in the undercity.

"Oh, I just realized, I never asked for your name. What is it, if I may be so rude?" Victor asks me.

"Right, I never told you either, sorry about that. My name is ..." We get interrupted.