

Back in '84

The state-run retirement home emits an air of old crayons and "Type-2 Pudding Ration, Tapioca". The grandfather clock at the city entrance for the lobby rings across the halls as both hands reach the twelve o' clock position. Beyond that lobby, in the sterile white corridors is a young man with a navy blue baseball cap on his head.

He speeds down the hall with his delivery bag full of Liberas Gratis dirty water hot dogs on his back. The smell of beef franks slathered in sauerkraut and spicy brown mustard beats back the retirement home scent. In the sparse hallways filled with aides and seniors, this young man is a weekly novelty.

Passer-bys can hear the young man muttering to himself, "Room 451, room 451, room 451..."

The volunteer civil workers can't help but leak out a smile at him as the white Liberators baseball team logo passes by at a pace faster than most people power walk. Once he drifts around a corner, they go back to focusing on their duties.

The young man in the baseball cap eyes the numbers "451" and sprints down the hallway treating the door like it's home plate.

He gives a knock on the door and a gravelly voice peters out in a thick Sicilian accent. "Janice is that you! Lady, youse got my Type-2 ready yet?"

The young man gives a slight chuckle before responding, "Uh, I think Janice might be on break, Granddad. Mind if I come i-" The door swings open. "Nil! Oh good to see you, son. Plant yourself on a chair and toss me a frank while you're at it!"

Nil grabs an aluminum foil wrapped hot dog and underhand throws it to Granddad as he makes his way over to a knobbed oak chair. Granddad catches it with ease as he heads to a rocking chair with a window view. His wrinkled fingers unwrap the foil on his hot dog. Before taking a bite, he realizes he needs one last thing.

He grabs his dentures from a glass of water that was sitting on a nightstand near the rocking chair. Peering out the window, Granddad could see the piers lining the Liberas Gratis harbor; the Brooklyn bridge out in the distance; with a glimpse of the green rust on Lady Columbia on Liberty Island. After a relaxed sigh, he opens his jaw to slap in his dentures. When Granddad turns to sit, there's already bits of sauerkraut and mustard drops on the floor.

Nil grabs a hot dog from his delivery bag and unwraps the tip of the foil so as to not make a mess.

He takes a small bite before sitting down and asking, "Say Granddad, you think these hot dogs are just as good as back then? You know when the Union was still around?"

Granddad takes a look at the white "G" made of two curved "L's" on his grandson's baseball cap. His head turns to the ceiling as he sifts through his memories of the city before the nation's collapse.

He finishes the bite he took earlier. Crossing both arms before he says, "To be honest with youse, Nil. Things are about the same."

Nil raises an eyebrow as he finishes the first half of the frank. He says, "Huh, I guess the way they're made hasn't really changed even with all the military restructuring...you're not just talking about the hot dogs are you, Granddad?"

Granddad levels his head back against the rocking chair as it creaks back and forth. He ponders the question, letting the wood creaks fill the room. He fixates on the foggy picture frames and fifty year old baseball memorabilia scattered on dusty wood shelves.

With a heavy sigh, Granddad relents and says, "This city's birthed people like you and me. Different times; different reasons; different problems. In my time, it was a fear of the unknown, both inside and outside our borders. Back in '84, I was just an up and coming kid from the Bronx. Making it big in the Major Leagues with the team that's on your cap and jersey,"

He points at his grandson's apparel. Granddad stares at the mirror image of his younger self embodied in the next generation before him. He says, "What makes it on the papers is usually about who's gonna win the Continental Series. It's never interesting to look at how they live or what they do outside of that."

He eyes the .45 pocket pistol slightly sticking out of a concealed holster at Nil's hip before continuing. "At the height of the crime wave this city was going through, all everyone could think about was for anything to get their heads out of the gutter and the holdups outside."

The pair finish their hot dogs. Nil with a somber smile tucks in his .45. "Take care of yourself, Granddad." He gives his Grandad a hug before heading back out on his delivery runs.