

*Previously on Black Badge: After deducing the identity of one of Devin's attackers Lance brutally beat the man. A somber mood hung over Lance, Token and Leo as they gathered and attempted to figure out who else had assaulted Devin. They were all surprised when she showed up, having checked herself out of the hospital. When Token made an effort to tell Devin how he feels about her she informed him that she had asked Leo to take her home and care for her. Token and Lance stayed up late into the evening discussing the remaining three Sandpoint Slasher suspects when Lance came to a dark realization. Vanderbilt hadn't been showing up at the police station lately and neither had Officer Jack Tripp, the suspect that Lance assigned to Vanderbilt to investigate.*

Lance and Token walked towards the apartment door with their guns drawn.

Sandpoint Police Officer Jack Tripp lived in a small apartment complex on the edge of town. He had just recently moved there and it took them a while to track down the address. The morning was slowly melting into the afternoon by the time they arrived. As soon as they got to his door both Lance and Token knew what had happened. A strong smell was emanating from the apartment.

Lance looked to see if anyone was watching them and then kicked the door hard, breaking it open. The stench hit them with more intensity now and Token gagged. Lance walked in, knowing what he was going to find. The living room was empty but as he entered into the bedroom he saw him. Officer Tripp was lying in bed, shot to death. Lance

quickly looked around for any clues before exiting the apartment.

They closed the door behind them and Lance pulled out his phone and called Vanderbilt as they walked towards the car.

“Ah, Mr. Black Badge. I’ve been expecting this call,” the Internal Affairs agent said smugly.

“And what exactly were you expecting to hear from me on this call?” Lance asked as he reached the car and got in.

“Why a thank you, of course!”

“A thank you? For what, exactly?”

“You have to know by now, don't you?”

Vanderbilt said, laughing. “That little issue you told me about! I took care of it. You’re welcome.”

The man's good mood was pissing Lance off.

“You mean the ruthless murder of a police officer that you committed? That issue?”

Vanderbilt sighed heavily.

“Oh come on now, you can't possibly be that much of a prude about it can you? I just did what you and your colleagues do all the time. I took out the trash! You're just mad that you're not the only bad ass running around town anymore!”

“Is that what the people at the station are going to say when they find out about this? That you're a bad ass?” Lance asked angrily.

“Get with the program! I just killed the Sandpoint Slasher! They'll give me a damn medal when they find out! Hell, I'll probably get promoted.”

“We didn't know for sure if he was the Slasher! You were supposed to surveil and investigate, not execute!”

“Oh boo hoo. You’re breaking my heart,” Vanderbilt said.

Lance had noticed a strange noise in the background during their conversation. It sounded like some sort of a jingle that was repeating.

“Where are you at Vanderbilt?”

“Why, you wanna come shake my hand?”

“No, I want to come put a bullet in your brain.”

“See? Now there's the tough talk I'm used to hearing from you!”

“You think I won't find you?” Lance threatened.

“You've started to bore me Mr. Badge. Take care.”

Vanderbilt hung up the phone. Lance cussed loudly and hit the dash board.

“Nice conversation?” Token asked.

“The guy thinks he’s some sort of a hero,” Lance said, obviously frustrated.

“I hate to be the one to say it but, maybe he is.”

Lance shot him a look and Toke held up his hands.

“Look man, I’m not trying to be insensitive but the fact is that there’s a one in three chance that Vanderbilt did in fact just kill the Sandpoint Slasher.”

“Maybe he did and maybe he didn’t, but there’s nothing heroic about killing a man that

you have zero evidence against. That's not heroism, it's murder."

"Okay so what do we do now? Any idea where he's at?" Toke asked.

Lance shook his head.

"No, he wasn't forthcoming with that particular piece of information. Although..."

The jingle that had been playing in the background resurfaced in Lance's mind.

"There was a song repeating in the background."

Lance began humming the song. Just a few seconds into the tune Token interrupted.

"That's the carousel at the Sandpoint Galleria Mall!"

Toke started the car and took off in the direction of the mall. After a moment Lance spoke.

“You sure identified that tune fast,” he said with a smile.

“Shut up.”



**Created and Written by A.C. Hall**

**Episode 9 – (There's Gonna be a) Showdown**

Devin stirred in her bed, the smell of coffee pulling her from sleep. Her body was stiff and achy and she tried not to move it much. She opened her eyes and saw Leo approaching. He was holding a tray and he smiled as he saw her.

“Good morning, beautiful.”

He set it down on the bed next to her. There was a cup of coffee and a plate with some scrambled eggs and toast.

“I exhausted all of my culinary knowledge in preparing you this breakfast.”

Devin sat up.

“A girl could get used to being treated like this.”

“Did you get beat up just to get my attention?” Leo asked with a smile. “You know you could’ve just asked me to stay the night, you didn’t have to go through all that pain and suffering just to get me over here.”

Devin laughed and then gripped her side as it shot slivers of pain through her. Leo pointed at two pills on her tray.

“That should help with the pain.”

“You got my prescriptions filled?”

“Yeah. You owe me eighty bucks.”

She laughed again, bringing on more pain. She didn't mind it too much though. Devin looked at him and noticed that he was fully dressed. She frowned as she spoke.

“Are you leaving?”

Leo nodded.

“I've got a date with the Chief of Police.”

“Do I even want to know what you're planning?”

He shook his head.

“Probably not. This is it though. If this doesn't work then I don't know where we turn from here in our investigation into the Black Badges.”

“It'll work,” Devin said confidently.

Leo smiled. He leaned down to kiss her on the cheek. At the last second Devin turned

her head slightly so that his kiss landed on her lips. Neither of them was sure how long to hold it and after just a moment Leo pulled back slightly. They stared into each other's eyes and smiled, both slightly unsure of what to say. After another moment they both laughed and Leo stood up.

“Okay well, uh, don't overdo it today,” he said, jokingly shaking his finger at her.

“I won't. I'm just going to start looking into my suspect.”

He nodded and then left the room. He locked the apartment door behind him and then rode the elevator down to the lobby. He walked towards his car but paused before getting in, feeling like someone was watching him. Leo surveyed the street, looking for anything suspicious. He didn't spot anyone

and shook his head as he got into his car and pulled away.

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Token hung up his cell phone as he and Lance pulled into a parking space at the busy Sandpoint Galleria Mall.

“Okay, I’ve got my guys all over the mall looking for him. If they see him they know to call me right away,” Toke said.

They got out of the car and jogged up to the entrance. They had chosen the side of the mall closest to the carousel and moved towards it. The area was already swarming with shoppers and they slowed down, trying to pick out Vanderbilt among the throng of

people. Once at the carousel they split up, each circling around a different side, looking closely at all of the nearby benches for any signs of their prey. They met up on the other side, each shaking their heads.

“This is going to take forever,” Toke said.

Just then his cell phone buzzed.

“Maybe not,” Lance stated.

Token looked at his phone. He read the text message and smiled.

“He’s on the third floor. Food court.”

The two of them rushed deeper into the mall, fighting their way through the crowds. They reached an elevator and took it up to the third floor. It stopped on the second floor and more people got on. Lance frowned as he looked at all of them. With the mall so busy there were a lot of ways in which innocent

people could get hurt if things went sideways while they dealt with Vanderbilt. Token saw the look on his face and hit him in the arm.

“We got this,” he said with a confident nod.

The elevator doors opened and they moved out with the group of shoppers, careful to stay as hidden as possible. The food court wasn't far away and they could see Vanderbilt there at a corner table near the edge of it. He was facing them but was looking down at a newspaper, paying no attention. Lance smiled as he realized that Vanderbilt really believed that he was safe here. It made what was about to happen that much sweeter.

Lance led the way as he and Toke approached the table. They stayed among the other shoppers that were walking past until the last second. Lance broke from the crowd

and sat down across from Vanderbilt. Token quickly walked around the table to stand directly behind the internal affairs agent to block his escape. The man almost spit out his drink as he saw them.

“Hot damn! Well aren’t you resourceful,” he remarked.

Vanderbilt looked behind him to see Token and then turned back towards Lance.

“Come to put a bullet in my brain?”

“As promised,” Lance answered, a dark look in his eyes.

“Oh come on man, I was just doing what I thought you wanted me to! You Black Badges get to have all the fun, you get to break all the rules and take down the bad guys. I just wanted a taste!”

Lance just stared at him. Vanderbilt was getting nervous, sweat was running down his forehead and his eyes were darting around, looking for some way out of the situation. His sunglasses were sitting on the table and he reached for them. Lance slammed his hand down on the table. This caused Vanderbilt to jump slightly and he left the glasses sitting there.

“Listen man, just calm down okay,” Vanderbilt said, obviously growing desperate. “If I jumped the gun by taking out Officer Tripp too soon then that’s my bad, okay? I’ll own that.”

“Don’t try to negotiate for your life, Vanderbilt. It makes you sound pathetic,” Lance said.

The man looked down, the nervous smile on his face fading away. He nodded slowly.

“You’re right,” he muttered.

He picked up his sunglasses and put them on and then flashed into action. He flipped the table up onto Lance and then jerked his chair back as hard as he could into Token. He leapt to his feet and sprinted towards the elevator. Lance and Toke recovered quickly and chased after him. They were just a few feet behind him. The elevator doors were just now closing and Vanderbilt jumped, turning sideways in the air and just barely sliding through as the doors closed. Lance and Toke hit them hard just a moment too late as the elevator began moving down.

“Damn!” Lance yelled.

Token was looking around and spotted a set of escalators in the distance.

“There!” he said, pointing.

Lance looked at them and then at the elevator. The escalators were too far away and Vanderbilt would be long gone by the time they got down there. As he was staring over the rail he saw a nearby promotional banner advertising a local art festival. It was a long banner that stretched from the third floor down to the second. Token saw what he was staring at and let out a nervous laugh.

“You’re the craziest man I will ever meet,” Toke said.

“Go take the escalators,” Lance said.

Token took off.

“Don’t break your legs!” he yelled.

The banner didn't reach all the way up to the top of the rail. Lance had wanted to feel of it before committing to the maneuver but that wasn't an option. Without giving it any more thought he vaulted over the rail. He held onto it as his legs swung over. A woman passing by saw him hanging there and let out a scream. Lance released the rail and dropped about two feet to the top of the banner. He wrapped his arms around it tightly and squeezed, trying to slow his descent.

The glossy plastic material burned his arms as he slid down it. More people had seen him and were yelling out. Lance looked below him and saw that the elevator had arrived at the bottom floor. Vanderbilt came rushing out. Lance was almost to the end of the banner and he gripped it as tight as he could,

trying to slow himself. There was a small bar at the base of it that kept it anchored to the wall and he grabbed onto it, dangling fifteen feet above the floor. He took a deep breath and then let go.

He tried to roll when he struck the floor but instead just flopped forward onto his side. His feet were on fire. Needles of pain stung up through his legs and into his knees and he had to lie there for a moment to regain his breath. Horrified shoppers had started to approach him to see if he was okay but he ignored them. He got to his feet, trying to block out the lingering sense of numbness in them and took off after Vanderbilt.

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“And now, without further ado, I’d like to introduce to all of you one of Sandpoint Country Clubs most esteemed members and greatest contributors, the Sandpoint Police Department Chief of Police, Mr. Randy Brown.”

Polite applause echoed throughout the country club banquet hall as Chief Brown approached the podium. He smiled and waved as he waited for the applause to die down.

“Good afternoon. I can’t tell you how much of a pleasure it is to be asked to come speak at your luncheon. They say every great speech should begin with a joke, so first things first, what do an investment banker, a CEO and a

soccer player all have a common? They all...”

Brown paused as he saw his assistant approaching him. She had a worried look on her face and was holding a piece of paper in her hand. The Chief covered up the microphone with his hand and leaned towards her as she neared.

“What the hell are you doing? You’re ruining my joke!” he hissed.

Her eyes were wide as she held out the paper.

“You’d better take a look at this.”

Chief Brown snatched the paper out of her hands and unfolded it. A quiet murmur was growing in the crowd as they waited for him to continue speaking. He ignored them and read the note.

*We need to talk now. Exit the banquet hall through the east doors then enter the third door on your left. Once there take the first fire exit you see. Come alone and come now.*

Instead of a signature there was a drawing of a black badge. Brown stared at the letter for a moment, his jaw tightening as he tried to decide what to do. After a moment he walked off the stage and exited the banquet hall through the east doors. His assistant followed him.

“Sir, is everything alright?”

“Please inform the crowd that I’ll be back shortly,” he said without turning around.

He followed the directions on the note but stopped in front of the fire exit. He pulled out

his cell phone and called Vanderbilt. After many rings the voice mail picked up.

“Vanderbilt! Where are you at you idiot? This Black Badge character is waiting right outside for me. Why does he want to meet me? Call me back!”

Brown slammed his phone shut and nervously looked at the door. He was starting to perspire. He reached down and pulled his gun from his ankle holster. He had long since stopped carrying his regular weapon but couldn't break the habit of having his backup weapon on him. Once he had the pistol in his hand his courage was mostly returned and he pushed open the door and stepped outside.

The afternoon sun was shining directly down in his face and all the Chief saw was a blur of movement as someone knocked the gun out

of his hand and pulled him out of the doorway and pushed him against the wall. The fire exit door slammed shut as the unknown assailant put a gun to the back of the Chief's head.

“What do you think you're doing?” Chief Brown snapped.

“Shut up, I'm asking the questions here,” Leo said, doing his best to disguise his voice.

“Don't make a move and don't turn around. If you tell me what I need to know I will leave you alone for good. Do you understand?”

“Things don't have to go like this, son. Whatever's the matter we can talk about it and...”

“Don't!” Leo interrupted. “You think I'm the kind of person that your pathetic tactics are going to work on? You think I don't know what you're doing? Now I need to

know one thing and I need to know it now. Who gives the Black Badges their authority?”

“What?” Brown said, confused. “You’re one of them aren’t you? Shouldn’t you know?”

Leo pressed the gun hard into the back of the man’s head.

“Don't forget Chief, I've been inside your home. I know what side of the bed your wife sleeps on, I know the order of the family photographs that sit on the mantle. Now, who gives the Black Badges their authority?”

At the mention of his wife Chief Brown grew still.

“Are you threatening my wife?” he asked angrily.

Leo swallowed hard, fearing that he was close to losing control of the situation.

“I’m reminding you that a Black Badge doesn’t screw around and he doesn’t stop until he gets what he needs. And right now all I need is for you to give me this information.”

After a tense silent moment the Chief spoke.

“I only know what they told me,” he said.

“What who told you?”

“Several years back, two men showed up and they had... things with them that I’d rather not have made public.”

“What types of things?”

After a long pause Brown answered.

“Photographs.”

A dark notion was coming over Leo now. This wasn’t sounding like something that a legitimate organization would do.

“They blackmailed you?”

“They called it a suggestion. They told me to never interfere with the work that Black Badges need to do in my city. They were very persuasive that I do whatever I must to keep the department out of the way of their operatives and to keep their operatives activities under the radar.”

“So they offered you nothing official at all?” Leo asked.

“One thing. It’s in my wallet, in my back pocket.”

Leo pulled out the man’s wallet and opened it.

“Back right section, tucked underneath my business card.”

He looked and saw a small black card. There was one thing written on it in white text.

Pub. L. No.776, 100 Cong., 54 Stat. 592, 50  
U.S.C. ch.15

“What the hell does this mean?” Leo asked.

“I don’t know, they told me only to look into it if there was an emergency.”

Leo tucked the black card into his pocket and then dropped the wallet onto the ground.

“Do you swear that’s all you know?”

“Yes, I swear. They aren’t exactly a forthcoming organization.”

After taking a few steps back Leo spoke again.

“Please don’t turn around for thirty seconds,” he instructed.

He was about to run away but paused for a second.

“I’m sorry about bringing your wife into this. I never would’ve done anything to her.”

With that Leo turned and sprinted away as fast as he could.

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Devin was sitting in front of her computer tapping her desk. She was logged in remotely to the police station computer but found that it was overloaded with thousands of new reports that had just been uploaded that morning.

She remembered hearing talk of a team of temp workers that had been hired to process the overwhelming backlog of paperwork that had been generated since the Slasher murder took place inside the station and it looked like

they had finally completed the job.

Unfortunately that made researching her suspect an infuriatingly slow process.

As she waited for yet another document to load at a glacial pace Devin let out a long sigh. She looked over at the couch and thought about how nice it would be to lie down for a while. She was close to following through with it when she glanced back at the screen to see that the document had finished loading. It was a complaint filed against her suspect, Harriet Jeter, by one of her new partners that were assigned after the murder. Devin got a chill as she read it. The partner claimed that Officer Jeter had ditched her in the middle of a shift and disappeared for over two hours.

There was a link to a related document and Devin clicked it. Her heart had started beating faster and it felt like it took an eternity for this one to load. It was an identical complaint from a different partner. Again it alleged that Jeter had left her partner and disappeared for over an hour in the middle of their overnight shift. Another link lead to a supervisors report and Devin was breathing heavily by the time it loaded. She slowly read the words on the screen.

*Apparently Officer Jeter has been engaging in strange behaviors on night shifts. These behaviors include going radio silent for hours at a time and having several windows of time unaccounted for. Only after being assigned partners after the recent Slasher murder did*

*these behaviors become known. Will schedule a disciplinary interview once things calm down in the station.*

Devin had to remind herself to breathe as she clicked through to yet another complaint. It loaded and Devin's mouth fell open as she read it. This was from the night Token's grandmother had been murdered by the Slasher. Jeter's partner that night alleged that Jeter had ditched her.

The timing matched up perfectly with the time in which the murder had been committed.

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Lance and Token were running side by side in the mall, looking around for Vanderbilt. Several minutes had passed since they lost sight of him and they were growing desperate. They came around the corner into the largest section of the mall. It was a wide open area with a giant ice skating rink in the middle. There was a sea of people moving about in every direction.

“Well this is great,” Toke said.

“He stopped running. Now he’s trying to blend in,” Lance said.

“How do you know?”

Lance pointed at the mass of people in front of them.

“It’s too busy. If he was still sprinting he’d be cutting a path through them, knocking people over. He’s here somewhere.”

After turning in a slow semi-circle Lance looked back at Token.

“I’m going to need a very quick exit after this goes down,” Lance said. “Go find us some transportation.”

Token nodded and quickly disappeared into the crowd of people. Lance moved slowly, letting the tides of shoppers wash over him and bump into him. His eyes were darting everywhere, taking in every individual that passed. A man went past in a dark brown trench coat and a brown hat and Lance quickly looked elsewhere. After a second he froze and returned his gaze back to the man. Vanderbilt had covered up his slicked back hair and his pitch black suit but there on his face were his familiar sunglasses.

A smile appeared on Lance's face as he started following Vanderbilt. He was glad that the man's vanity had made him leave on the glasses; otherwise he would've moved past and gotten free. They worked their way through the crowd but Vanderbilt seemed to know he was being followed. He picked up speed, bumping into people as he got closer to the ice rink. He glanced over his shoulder and saw Lance. Vanderbilt immediately went to pull his gun but Lance rushed him before he could. He wrapped his arms around him and drove him backwards.

They crashed into people, knocking them out of the way. Vanderbilt was completely off balance as Lance was nearly carrying him as he continued to drive him back. They

slammed hard into the wall around the ice rink and flipped over it onto the ice.

Lance released Vanderbilt in mid air and tried to catch himself with his arms as he came over onto the ice. He hit hard and slid several feet while Vanderbilt had collapsed into a heap up against the wall. Some of the closest skaters cried out and skated away from the two men. Vanderbilt was able to use the wall to help get to his feet and was about to start climbing over it.

“Don’t you dare!” Lance yelled out from behind him.

Vanderbilt glanced behind him and saw that Lance had gotten to his feet and had his hand on his gun inside his jacket. He glanced at the wall and then at Lance, trying to decide if he could make it over before being shot.

“Step away from the wall,” Lance commanded.

After another second of hesitation Vanderbilt did as he was told. He slid slowly out towards Lance.

“Are you really going to do it here, in front of all of these people?”

“You sealed your fate when you pulled the trigger on a cop who may have been innocent.”

Vanderbilt pulled off his sunglasses and threw them down onto the ice.

“You hypocrite!” he yelled. “I just did what you do every single day.”

“No,” Lance shot back. “I don't pull the trigger until I'm certain that the cop is dirty.”

More and more people were staring at them now. Vanderbilt pulled his badge out of his pocket and held it high into the air.

“My name is Agent Vanderbilt! I am a police officer of the city of Sandpoint and this man is threatening my life!”

Those watching began to panic after hearing his words. Vanderbilt looked at Lance and smiled widely.

“Good luck getting out of here now,” he said.

Vanderbilt drew his gun and fired. He was fast but Lance was faster. Lance’s shot had struck right between the eyes while the internal affairs agent’s bullet struck the ice right in front of Lance. Vanderbilt fell to the ice, dead. The red blood pouring from his

head looked bright against the contrast of the ice.

And then all hell broke loose in the mall.

END OF EPISODE 9

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