

“He who fights with monsters  
should look to it that he himself  
does not become a monster.  
And when you gaze long into an abyss,  
the abyss gazes also into you.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche -

# 1: Agent Samurai

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CIA, Langley, VA  
September, 2009, 2:05 AM

**M**ichael Cameron, Special Agent *Samurai* of CSIS, was not normally given to anxiety or tension during the course of a mission, unless it was for the safety of someone else, but then, he was used to invading the territory of enemies, not allies.

He crouched, still as a statue, a shadow in the night. As he scanned the rooftops, his vision flickered on something that almost startled him. Since returning from Europe the previous fall, few of his missions had required night surveillance, so the flashes of red and orange that assaulted his eyes took him by surprise. It took a moment for him to register the reality — he was seeing the heat signatures of armed sniper sentries posted on the roof — he was seeing in the infrared spectrum.

*Tony and Jonathan said my vision would be amplified, but they never mentioned this!* With the thought came the consideration that perhaps neither of them had realized the specifics of it, or possibly didn't even have the trait. After all, as a human, Mike had been unusually light-sensitive, with abnormal night vision.

Now that he'd located the sentries, he reached out, entering their minds, forcefully projecting the suggestion: *You see nothing. There is no sign of movement on the roof. You hear no unusual sounds.*

With his ability to move too fast for human eyes to

follow, and move as silent and stealthy as a shadow, the vampire mental manipulation might not have been necessary. Still, his nerves were keyed up just enough that extra precautions increased his confidence.

He tore the padlock off the AC access, entered the ductwork, and had soon dropped down into the hallway of the top floor. At this level, security was reduced to heat sensors. That made him smile.

The smile faded as he read the sign on an office door — Sam Larkin, Assistant DDO. He continued on past the office of the DDO (Deputy Director: Operations) to reach his target location — DDI (Deputy Director: Intelligence).

For a vampire, especially one with Shaolin training, Samurai training, and a practical knowledge of Ninjutsu, the security safeguards at the Langley headquarters were little more than an interesting challenge.

*I must tell Sam to have them adjust their thermal sensors to less than 92° F,* he thought, smiling to himself. *The current settings might detect human presence, but I'm not human; I haven't been human for almost a year.* This last thought caused him a pang of regret.

Using a device invented by his friend and colleague Nigel Worthington — Tony Dewhurst's colleague, really — he accessed the DDI's computer, the simple USB device running a routine that hacked the master user password from the hard drive, then fed it back to log him in as the DDI. It took but a moment to locate and download the files he needed.

He left the way he came in, then paused, glancing across to the rest of the building complex, wondering, with a mix of humour and amazement, how many people knew that there were two L-shaped swimming pools with adjacent lounge chairs on the roof of CIA headquarters.

He was tempted to ask Bruce Mason if MI6 had something similar, or if the Americans were unique in their employee benefits.

Evading the snipers was simple: he'd already commanded them not to see him. He avoided the lasers the same way he avoided the pressure-sensors. No human could have made the leap from the air conditioning trunk to the edge of the roof and beyond. Vampires can't fly but, diving forward, his dive amplified by vampire strength and speed, sure felt like flying.

He flipped into a twisting summersault at the edge of the roof, catching the edge as he was dropping past it. He paused, adjusting ninja claws on his hands, pushing away from the building far enough to clear the next roof section a storey below, then let himself fall.

After dropping four-storeys, he drove his claws into the side of the building, lurching to a halt. This time the expanse of roof was much larger — about sixty feet — and the remaining storey to this section of roof was recessed in, designed to make it difficult for a human to scale the outside of the building.

He didn't want to drop — not with pressure sensors and lasers scanning the roof. The flat roof only projected thirty-five to forty feet out at the front of the building.

*You might have thought of this before you left the roof, he chided himself. You were too relieved to get away from Sam Larkin's domain. Can't have friend Sam knowing we did this. Okay, Samurai, deal with it.*

Using the claws, he hung by his hands, working his way to the left and around the corner. A stand of hardwood trees towered above the roof, branches rich in late summer foliage.

He studied the situation, gauging the distance, then climbed back up two storeys for a better angle. He took a series of slow, deep breaths — *Chi Kung* power-

breathing. With a sharp expelling of breath, he hurled himself away from the side of the building, turning in midair, arms outreached, looking like he was flying toward the trees.

He hit the branches, catching a limb and dropping, limb by limb, feeling like Tarzan from his favourite books as a kid, until he alighted on the grass.

He heaved a sigh. *Just two more checkpoints with machine-gun-toting Marines, and I'm home free.*

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The Director of the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service looked up and frowned.

"Megan should have called me before sending you in," he commented. "Isn't she at her desk?"

Mike smiled. "My apologies, sir. She's at her desk, just unaware that I'm here. Uh, sort of keeping in practice, sir."

The Director rolled his eyes, then smiled. "Your file is impressive reading, Samurai — referring, of course, to the encrypted one in my computer, the one not blacked out all over the place. When Jim gave it to me on a flash drive and had me over-write the drive after downloading it — well, I wanted to laugh at him after I read it — thought he was retiring on a Section Eight clause. Then I met you. I've got to say, Samurai, even knowing your ... ah ... unique traits and abilities, you take some getting used to.

"So, did you learn anything about this Amahd fiasco? I've got people in External Affairs chomping at the bit. Do they go to bat for his release — the Americans are dead-set against it — or do we leave him there?"

Mike handed him a duplicate USB thumb drive — the files, without Nigel's hacker utility.

The Director plugged it in to his computer and

scanned the files.

“Damn! This changes everything. This is nothing like the Arar case; this guy’s been using his business to funnel money to Al Qaida. No wonder the Americans didn’t want us to know what they knew or how they learned it — they weren’t exactly using the kid gloves on this guy, were they! My God, Samurai, how in Hell did you get this?”

Mike’s guilty grimace prompted a raised eyebrow from the Director.

“I lifted it from the hard drive of the computer of the DDI at CIA.”

“*You broke into CIA at Langley and raided the computer of the Deputy Director of Intelligence!*” the Director blurted. “Sweet Jesus, Samurai; is this going to come back on us?”

“I don’t leave calling cards, sir. And, since no one shot at anyone, which would have been all over CNN, no one saw me. Generally speaking, sir, I’m rarely seen when I don’t want to be seen.”

“Hmm, yes; part of your — er — condition, no doubt. So, what do you think of how the Americans questioned our Syrian immigrant?”

Mike frowned, then shrugged. “Mixed, sir. The Geneva Convention is great if everyone plays by the same rules. Al Qaida and their extremist friends declared war on us in 2001. It’s time some people woke up to that fact. When I have to protect myself and those closed to me, there are no rules; there’s just the enemies that aren’t dead yet.”

The Director tried to hide a smirk. “I trust you won’t be applying for a UN post any time soon.”

This time it was Mike who smiled. “Probably not, sir. If that’s all, sir, my vacation was interrupted by this, and I did leave my wife aboard our boat, even if it is docked in one of our favorite towns.”

“Off you go. Enjoy a well-earned rest of your

vacation. After that mess in Europe last fall, the vampire front has been quiet. Perhaps Cesare Borgia has enough respect for you to leave you alone.”

Mike frowned. “I highly doubt that, sir. He’s more likely to come at me in some sneaky, devious way when I least expect it.”

The Director raised an eyebrow. “Is that why you left him alive? I still don’t understand your reluctance at the time to killing him.”

Mike sighed. “You, too, sir? I get enough of that from Tony — Lord Dewhurst. The reality of that situation, is that I was in a large hall, surrounded by close to a hundred vampires, most of whom were intensely loyal to Borgia, with about a hundred more in the outer hall. I could have taken Borgia out easily and gotten away, but I also needed to get Tony and Radu Dracul out of there alive. Leaving under friendly terms seemed the best course of action.

“Should Cesare continue to be a nuisance, I know where he lives and, since he neglected to return my wife’s phone, and since Nigel Worthington has relabeled that signal as ‘Borgia’ on our GPS apps, I should know where he is most of the time.”

“If he resumes his activities against you, Samurai, I’ll want him eliminated. I can’t have your effectiveness crippled again by another round of hitmen coming after you.”

Mike nodded. “I fully intend to deal with Borgia eventually; I just prefer to do it when he’s not expecting it. Besides, I’ve had a lot to adjust to over the last half-year, mostly under less than relaxed circumstances.”

The usually business-like Director of CSIS’s smile was more sympathetic than Mike might have expected. Then, “Let’s hope he’s not working under the same plan: coming at you when you’re not expecting it.”

## 2: Blood in the Dark

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**Dartmouth, Nova Scotia**  
**Monday, October 12, 2009, 9:45 pm.**

**I**t was the seediest bar on Portland Street; indeed, it might have been the most disreputable dive in all of Dartmouth. The nature of its clientele could be summed up by the three specimens hanging out in front of the entry. They were dressed in leather jackets, biker chaps, and wearing spiked wristbands. One was toying with a stiletto, balancing it on the tip of his finger, then flipping it and catching it by the handle. If he bathed once a month, then that day of the month had yet to arrive. Several passers-by were accosted, though most knew to avoid that side of the street.

One young lady wasn't so lucky. She was walking up the street, seemingly from the ferry terminal, when one of the three stepped out in front of her. The other two closed in from behind. They made a game of *oozing* and *ah-ing*, as if admiring her, feeling the cloth of her coat, the texture of her hair. One snatched her bag and began a game of keep-away.

The young lady cried out, hoping to catch the ear of a cop, but there were none nearby. In fact, the punks knew to the minute the timing of the regular patrols in the evening.

The game began to get rougher. They pushed her harder. The one with the purse tried to rummage through it, only occasionally adding a hand to the terrorizing of the young woman.

Soon they had her jacket half off around her

shoulders, her blouse torn at the shoulder, upper buttons torn free. Her fear made her numb to the chill of the autumn air as, fueled by panic and adrenaline, she flailed about with her arms and kicked at them with her feet. They just laughed. They seemed well-practiced at staying out of the way just enough while one of the others harassed her from behind.

Her outraged cries were now reduced to hopeless whimpers, but her tears meant nothing to these predators of the darkened streets.

There was another who had been watching from the shadows. He, too, knew the frequency of police patrols. He came from out of the darkness, wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat and a black trench coat. Something flew from his hand, smashing the streetlamp overhead, casting partial darkness over that part of the street.

“Let her go,” he warned in a low tone.

“Or what?” one of the punks asked.

“Or this!” The man moved fast. The butt of something very hard drove into the punk’s gut.

The punk with the knife threw it.

The stranger snatched it out of the air as if it were a ball thrown by a child. He dropped it to the sidewalk and smiled.

The punks were frightened by the smile. It was something about the teeth — how impossibly sharp they looked. Then they noticed the eyes. They seemed very bright at the edges, with enormous black pupils.

Seeing her chance, the young woman grabbed her bag and ran, crossing the street as she fled. She paused more than a hundred feet away.

The punk who’d been hit in the gut was just struggling to recover when something shiny flashed in front of him. It was a long blade. The biker blurted an epithet in a shocked tone. What the stranger was wielding, the butt of which had hit him in the gut, was

a Samurai sword.

The man moved in a spiraling motion; the katana made three flashing moves, swishing as it passed through the air at high speed.

The three punks fell to the pavement, dark pools of blood spreading out on the sidewalk.

The young lady cowered in a doorway, watching in horror as the stranger knelt down, bringing his face close to one of his victims. What was he doing? Surely he wasn't biting him! Coming to her senses, she ran up the street as fast as she could.

### 3: Another Case

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**Gold River Marina, Chester Basin, NS**  
**Monday, October 12, 9:45 pm**

**M**ike Cameron paused in the middle of fitting a new flooring panel in the bottom of a settee cupboard where *Windward's* water heater used to be. The little-used device had rotted out, taking the floor with it. The svelte form of a Blue Point Siamese cat hopped up onto his shoulder, purred, rubbing a whiskered face against his cheek, then hopped down onto the seat top in front of Mike. As his eyes focused on Kato's sky blue orbs, a series of images flashed into his mind. They were black-and-white, with some blues and greens, as the cat saw them.

"Yes, that's Tony coming," he agreed, then straightened, stretched, and went to the companionway to see the familiar compact Cadillac approaching the dock. He resumed his work until he'd pumped three screws into the aft side of the panel and three into the cleat that held it down on the forward side, then went topside. Kato gave a harsh cry and leapt to the cockpit bridge-deck, then hopped up onto his shoulder.

"Hey," Mike greeted, giving his friend a hug.

"I say, bit late for carpentry, old man," the Brit commented in his precise Oxford tones; "One would think the neighbours might complain."

Mike smiled at Tony's irony. *Windward* wasn't the only boat on the dock, but the parade of vessels being

hauled out had begun. ‘King of the dock,’ Cindy, the delightfully cheerful Scottish lass who managed the marina office had joked when he was the first boat in last spring. He wouldn’t be the last one out. He’d wanted to have this chore out of the way before his haul-out scheduled for the end of the following week.

“I must say, this spot always impresses me with its isolation and serenity,” Tony said. “I love the trees, the woodiness; reminds me a little of the area around Isabel’s lodge in France. The colours are splendid this fall.”

“There’s still a few things to do before hauling out,” Mike said, “but we got a lot done this season.”

“I should say,” Tony agreed, looking at *Windward*. “New mast, new canvas work — no wonder you and Carrie tried to spend most of the summer down here.”

“We’ve discussed the possibility of someday moving down here. This is where I would have bought when I first came home but, well, with Dad’s condition... And, now that Sean’s found his career...”

“How’s the lad doing?”

A proud smile crossed Mike’s features, features that seemed to have aged. “He was here on the fly for a day — on the way back from a mission in Afghanistan, something very hush-hush. He seems to like what he’s doing; tickled that much of it is classified, not unlike what his old man is doing.”

“Speaking of his old man, old man, how are you managing? You’re certainly looking older.”

“No change in sleeping habits, though,” Mike replied. “I thought I might sleep longer, but it hasn’t had that effect. I tried your suggestion of just prolonging the time between feedings, but that wasn’t working for me. So, I went cold turkey for three days, then drank a pint of blood — did that cycle twice, then two cycles of two days followed by a cup and a half. Now I can manage on a cup a day, skipping a day

every now and then. I've also found that partaking after dark is better. Drinking during daylight hours doesn't seem to nourish me as much, though it would obviously be beneficial if I needed healing. When I go longer, I have to drink more — I bet that's got something to do with haemoglobin levels or something."

Tony gave a slow nod. "Have you kept Jonathan apprised of all of this?"

Mike nodded.

"I thought I heard a car." Carrie Cameron, Mike's wife, appeared on the dock. "I was up talking to Cindy. I came down to make myself a mint tea. Can I make you a mug of tea, Tony? The boys will want coffee."

Tony gave Carrie a hug.

"I must look a bit grubby. Most of our stuff is still in town," she continued, "and we've been sleeping on the boat since late March."

"So, you like it here?" Tony asked.

She nodded, her face fairly glowing as she smiled. She looked about forty, though Tony knew her fiftieth birthday had passed. Her eyes, always an attractive green, now sparkled hypnotically like emeralds.

"We're away from the city, Mike feels better getting things done on the boat before winter — it's painfully slow going at times — and, since our South Shore cruise of four weeks, I've been doing some home-care work in the area."

Tony gave a wince. "Did they really dismiss you from SeaView?"

Carrie laughed, a musical sound, it's glamour enhanced by the vampire blood slowly working it's magic in her still-human veins.

"Let's just say they gave me enough of a hard time that I enjoyed saying 'I quit!'"

"And your new patients — that's going well?"

Carrie smiled. "They seem to like me a lot."

Tony gave her mesmerizing eyes another glance, then added, “I have no doubt.”

“So, is this social or business?”

“Both, my dear. Who are ‘the boys’?”

This time it was Mike who chuckled. “Remember Andrew — he called himself Vlad until he found out he really was a vampire? — well, one of the town thugs, leader of a small gang of bullies, was giving him and his friends a hard time. I was tempted to let Drew rip his arms off, but my adorable social-worker-wife came up with a better plan. I drafted them both to help me out here for a few hours at night. Making them work together has been paying off. Each is forced to see sides of the other they wouldn’t otherwise see. Nick, the bully, almost freaked the first time he saw Drew pick up the new mast, walk several feet to one side, then ask Nick to reposition the wooden horses for him. I reached the stage where I could let them go and things would be more peaceful in Mahone Bay, but it seems they like helping out around here, not to mention the night pay. We got the bottom sanded and painted in record time, letting me launch early. Now they’re helping repaint the cradle before we haul out.

“So, Tony, what’s up? I’m not about to pry into your brain, but I’m getting enough to guess that it’s a mission. Are we back to Montreal? Are there better leads on Chernov’s brother?”

“There’s a slim lead, but it’s not Montreal; it’s Seattle. CSIS knows nothing about it. This came from the Seattle Police Chief, indirectly. Apparently the FBI’s Behaviour Analysis Unit picked up on it and knew to contact Sam Larkin at CIA. He called me. If you’re onboard, we have a red-eye flight before dawn — a few hours before dawn, actually.”

Mike glanced at Carrie, then nodded to Tony.

“With a little luck, this might be just a couple of days,” Tony suggested.

*Is she aware that her mere glance almost hypnotizes people?* Tony projected the question telepathically so that only Mike would receive it.

*And here I thought she only had that effect on me,* Mike joked. *No, I don't think she's aware; and I think it might trouble her. I was about to ask why she'd develop that trait so strongly, but the answer is obvious: she's spent a career being persuasive with patients. It's her gift. Whatever talents we had as humans, the vampirism amplifies.*

“So, once more into the breach, dear chap?” Tony said aloud.

Mike and Tony were vampire-hunters — Mike representing the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, Tony as a special case profiler for Interpol. It might be one of the world's best ironies that these vampire hunters were vampires themselves.

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**Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, Seattle, WA  
Tuesday, October 13, 8:30 am**

Detective Lt. Bob Chang eyed his partner, Sgt. Carl Bronson. He looked bored. At thirty-nine, Bronson was the youngest detective in the Seattle PD. He obviously didn't like being saddled with what he'd probably describe as *the bogus job of picking up outside help* at the airport. He also thought his current case was crap. He'd said it several times.

As if reading Chang's thoughts, Bronson went into the well-worn gripe. “Some deranged crack-head, pretending to be a vampire, is killing homeless people — God knows Seattle has enough of them,” he complained. “That's about the only aspect of the case that's intriguing. So what if this chump case has been dragging on for weeks; that's no excuse for the big brass to call in outsiders; and not just out of town or

out of state, but out of the Goddamned country.”

Chang, three years his senior, just gave a patient smile.

“Okay, Mr. Logic;” Bronson ranted on, “it’s obvious Mr. Calm-Cool-and-Collected has no problem with the chief bringing in some Limey from London’s Interpol Office or his sidekick from Canada. Canada! Who the hell gets help from Canada?”

“Relax, Carl,” Chang said. “If they get the case closed any faster, it means we get to start a new case. Frankly, though, I don’t know what your problem is with this one.”

“They’re just homeless riff-raff,” Bronson retorted. “Who gives a rat’s ass? And that just makes it tougher. Some dirt-bag is just killing at random, choosing these guys because no one cares — you know — no family, no one keeping track of them.”

“And being a cop, being in the service, so to speak, that doesn’t bother you?” Chang challenged. “Most of them were war-vets. It was the psychological issues they came back with from Nam that put them on the street. The fact that they ended up there isn’t right and neither is what’s happening to them. The hardest killer to identify is the one who kills at random, selecting people who won’t be missed. You need to lighten up; these guys are here to help.”

Bronson just grunted.

“Maybe that’s them,” Chang suggested, pointing to two men just leaving the terminal with minimal luggage, glancing about as if looking to be met by someone.

Getting out of the car, he called, “Dewhurst and Cameron?”

The taller man, mid-forties, dark blonde hair, broke into a smile and nodded. Reaching the car, he set down a well-worn nylon suitcase and shook hands with Chang. “Tony Dewhurst,” he said; “formerly of MI6,

now with Interpol.”

His companion seemed more reserved. He carried a long tubular case, like what architects used to carry plans, and a large gym bag. He fixed Chang with piercing sapphire-blue eyes, then nodded. “Mike Cameron,” he said.

Chang felt a buzzing in his head. Random thoughts and images flew by, as if his mind were being rifled like a filing cabinet. It took him a moment to recover. Puzzled, he nodded back, then commented. “You’re with CSIS, your CIA, so-to-speak.”

Cameron gave an indifferent nod. “And I help Tony with certain Interpol assignments.”

Chang liked what he saw: the Canadian was his height, stocky, muscular build, and looked about the same age as Dewhurst. He had a young man’s body with an older man’s face. There was a hint of haggardness to the face — Chang couldn’t place it — maybe it was just a reaction to the red-eye flight.

He also noted how both men didn’t boast their credentials. According to his file, Tony Dewhurst was actually Lord Anthony Dewhurst. Yet he introduced himself as just Tony; and Cameron wasn’t saying much at all, though his eyes moved about as if memorizing every detail of everything around him.

“The chief said you’d want a few hours at a hotel before the briefing,” Chang commented. “You’re booked at a decent place just a block from the station. Can you make a 1:30 briefing.”

“Sorry, old chap,” Dewhurst drawled; “better make it 2:30. We’ve been dealing with airplanes and airports since about 2:00 am. I’m so exhausted I’m about to lapse into a coma.”

Cameron seemed to find this amusing and tried to hide a smile.

Chang just nodded. He tried to ignore Bronson’s huffing grunt.

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After the briefing, Chang sat patiently as Dewhurst spent a lot of time on a Skype computer link with a black man in London. The older man sounded like Artful Dodger from Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, but he also talked like an I.T. wizard.

"It must seem odd that a man in London would be used to gain local property records, lease agreements, and such, but Nigel will get results faster than the mayor of Seattle could. He sort of ignores regular channels and just hacks into what he needs."

Bronson, slouched petulantly to one side, quipped, "Oh, that sounds legal."

Cameron smiled. "I took you for more of a pragmatist than a proceduralist. We won't be using any of this in court, so it doesn't have to be admissible. We just want to find the perp as soon as possible and put an end to the killings."

Bronson just grunted.

"Come on, Carl; get over it. We're in over our heads here. We could use the help." Chang kept his voice low.

"And I suppose you two need help all the time, often getting in over your heads," Bronson jibed.

Dewhurst and Cameron glanced at each other, trading knowing smiles.

"More than you know, old chap; more than you know," Dewhurst commented.

Dewhurst's knowing smile said much less than the sudden dark, reminiscent look that came over Cameron's face.

"You're gonna love this one," the Cockney on the computer screen chirped. "On the evening of the first killings, a basement flat was rented by one Gregor Chernov, last known address given as Montreal, Quebec."

“*Sink me*, that is a bit against the odds,” Dewhurst declared.

“Well, I for one wouldn’t a’ bet ten quid on it, but there you are, gov’nor,” the Cockney replied.

“Well-done, Nigel, as always. Can you give us background on him — when he arrived in Montreal, what he did in Russia? — That is, assuming it’s the same Gregor Chernov.”

“You think it’s really Vladimir’s brother?” Cameron asked. “From Montreal to here is a curious jump.”

“Wait a minute. Are you suggesting that the brother of a guy from one of your prior cases is our perp here, in a totally different country? I think that’s stretching things to the max.” Bronson’s attitude was both sour and unconvinced.

“You tell me, Sgt. Bronson,” Cameron rebutted. “You nail a perp for raping women in the park, using a butcher knife as a threat. Now, two thousand miles away, it’s suggested that his brother is raping women, using a pocketknife as a threat. If you could place the brother in town, would you consider him as a suspect?”

Bronson just grunted.

“So his brother was killing people the same way?” Chang asked.

Cameron nodded. “He was part of a larger issue but, as his own sideline, he was killing randomly on the side, lone passers-by late at night. He also killed the operators of a crystal-meth operation and took over their turf — he was ex-KGB with Spetsnaz training, turned Russian Mafia, then came over here as the chief enforcer and bodyguard of an even nastier creep.”

“Is this Gregor ex-KGB?” Chang asked.

Cameron shrugged. “Nigel will get that for us. All we know is that Vlad Chernov had a brother named Gregor, and used his name on a lease in Halifax, Nova Scotia, over a year ago. This may be a coincidence; he

might be a different Chernov, and not our man — but I doubt it.”

“Next time yer over ’ere on God’s turf, it’s off to the rub-a-dub-dub for a gold watch, me lads,” the Cockney sang out from the computer screen. “Gregor Pietro Chernov, brother of one Vladimir Ivanovich Chernov, arrived in Montreal with his brother. He was believed killed in a shootout, taken to the morgue, then the body disappeared from said morgue thirty-six hours later, just as the night M.E. was about to perform an autopsy. The M.E. was found with a broken neck and a wicked case of exsanguination — sucked the poor buggler dry, ’e did. Police report speculates that the ME’s throat was ravaged by a wild animal.

“Anyway, Gregor was not KGB. It seems little brother didn’t ’ave the smarts for that — he drifted into the darker side of Moscow life. That’s ’ow big brother Vlad got connected to the Russian Mafia. Gregor was a leg-breaker and made the odd lad disappear whenever the big boss needed it done. Seems ’e ’ad enough of a conscience that ’e always tried to be humane about it — imagine that: a softhearted thug. Anyway, ’ere’s ’is mug from ’is passport photo, an’ a couple o’ portraits from when ’e got nicked a few times in Moscow. In those cases, ’is brother always pulled strings an’ got ’im sprung from porridge.”

“What the hell is porridge?” Bronson complained.

“I’m still working on rub-a-dub-dub for a gold watch,” Chang said in a dry tone.

“That’s going to the pub for a Scotch,” Cameron explained. “Porridge is slang for prison, a reverence to the oatmeal once served as a regular diet.”

“Why didn’t he just say that?” Bronson grumbled.

“Ah, well,” Dewhurst commented, “that’s what makes Nigel so uniquely Nigel — that and his ability to hack into anything, including the CIA’s database, as well as MI6’s.”

“He’s also good with locks and a fair shot with a handgun,” Cameron offered.

“Well, if you blokes are through singing me praises, and a sweet song it is, our Gregor stayed in Montreal for about another month, then moved to Vancouver. Looks like ’e got into some Barney in Vancouver — muscled into Triad turf — an’ moved to Seattle just in time for the start o’ the killing spree that the Seattle coppers ’ave been dealin’ wiff. Perhaps Vancouver to Seattle is a leap whot sits better wiff your sense of logic, Michael.”

“If he was softhearted as an enforcer in Moscow, that might explain his choice of the homeless here,” Cameron suggested.

Chang was nodding. “Aside from satisfying whatever fantasy leads him to kill, he may actually think he’s putting them out of their misery.”

“Yeah, but what kind of nut-job goes about draining blood out of the dregs of society, risking anything from hepatitis to aids?” Bronson challenged. He glared at Dewhurst for a moment. “Wait a minute; you clowns don’t really think this guy is a vampire — an honest to God, blood-sucking, Dracula-type vampire!”

“This isn’t about what we think or believe,” Cameron offered in a dry tone, “so much as what Gregor Chernov thinks he is.”

“Exactly,” Chang agreed.

“By the by,” Nigel announced, “I got two possible digs for yer Count Yorga. ’Ere’s the second address comin’ at you now.”

“I’ll check out the first one; Tony can take the second,” Cameron said.

For whatever reason, Dewhurst seemed to find this somewhat amusing.

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The detectives insisted on accompanying their out-of-town advisors. Chang quickly offered to accompany Cameron, leaving Bronson to go with Dewhurst. Cameron was dressed in black jeans, with a black knit sweater, and a black Columbia jacket. His sneakers were also black, very light in construction. Chang, a martial arts practitioner himself, recognized them as *Otomix* combat shoes, used by tournament fighters.

The sun was just setting outside the house with the basement apartment. Cameron caught Chang by the arm, forestalling him as he was drawing his Glock and approaching the building. As Chang met his gaze, the blue of Cameron's eyes seemed to flare a brighter blue, the whites seeming to fill with a glowing red.

*You will remain here, a voice commanded in his mind. You are invisible. You will not move from this spot. You will see nothing; you will hear nothing from within the building.*

A deep sense of calm filled him.

*If someone approaches and asks what you're doing, show your badge, tell them it's police business, and send them on their way.*

It seemed such an agreeable suggestion that Chang just nodded.

His sense of time seemed to float dreamily. It may have been minutes; it may have been hours.

Cameron returned. Chang felt like he might have dozed off on his feet, like he'd been abruptly awakened. Cameron was looking at him. Whatever weird notions Chang might have had about Cameron's eyes, they were normal now, though the irises did seem unusually large. Cameron seemed troubled.

"Is he there?" Chang asked.

There was a faint glow coming from a painted-over basement window.

"The moron attacked me," Cameron said. "He had blood on his lips and hands; you can probably get a

sample off the shoulders of my jacket. When I fought him off, he ran to a corner, stabbed himself with a weird-looking knife, then doused himself with a can of gasoline and set himself alight.” Cameron was shaking his head. “He had a two gallon jerry can there, as if prepared to do it.”

“Clearly, Chernov was psychotic; who else would kill like that or delude himself into believing he was a vampire?”

Cameron just shrugged.

“I was hoping to just catch him off guard, then have you come and get him cuffed and down to the station,” Cameron said. “I had no idea he’d be so off the wall. Of course, I might have known; his brother was a complete psycho.”

## 4: Vigilante Strikes Again

Dartmouth, NS

Tuesday, October 13, 10:48 pm

Colleen MacPherson was tired. She'd worked late at her office job in Halifax, had dinner there, caught the ferry, and now had almost a mile walk around Alderney Drive to Pleasant Street and then home. The day had been windy and rainy, driving more of the leaves from the trees. It saddened her a little, watching the trees become barren. She thought of it as the death of summer.

The trudge past the abandoned Dartmouth Shipyard was always depressing; her father had come over from Scotland to work there, only to be laid-off a month later when the place was bought out and shut down in an effort to remove competition. Her parents had returned to Aberdeen, but she'd remained. The location was now a hangout for teenage layabouts with nothing to do. They didn't bother her; they often made tentative, almost joking, efforts at harassment, but she knew most of them and most of them knew her. It was almost a rehearsed farce.

She'd only been in HRM for six years and her Aberdeen brogue was as thick as if she'd just stepped off the boat. She pronounced her own name as *MacFearson*, with liquid Rs.

"Ah, gwan ye pack o' buggers, 'fore I tell yer mothers wha' a bunch o' punks they've raised."

She was laughing, as were they. Their laughter stopped abruptly.

He came out of the darkness, as if he'd dropped from the sky, dressed all in black, sporting a broad-brimmed felt hat and a black trench coat. Against the chest of his plain black T-shirt, the light of the streetlamp illuminated the dull gleam of a Celtic pendant, cast in pewter — she recognized the variation on a Celtic knot called a *Love Arrow*.

The dark figure lit into the kids with a blur of fists and feet, knocking them about like so many rag dolls, his movements almost too fast to follow. Within seconds, four of the seven were lying on the pavement, as still as death.

Without looking in her direction, a hand lashed out, catching Colleen by the lapels of her coat, pulling her in so that the vigilante's eyes were locked on hers.

"Run," he said in a hoarse whisper.

She ran, but, once she'd gone maybe a hundred feet, she paused, pulled out her cellphone and snapped a photo, then took off as fast as she could go. She'd seen the streetlamp reflect off something long and shiny in the stranger's hand and heard a metallic sound. She'd seen enough movies to connect it to the improbable act of someone drawing a sword in modern-day downtown Dartmouth. Fear lent speed to her feet as she resumed her efforts to escape. She was at her front door when she finally called 911.

## 5: Homeward

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Seattle, WA

Wednesday, October 14, 2009, 2:00 am.

Mike studied the file before him, looking at both blood type and a shared allele chart. In four hours he was hoping to be on a pre-sunrise flight home.

“There’s no doubt about it,” Chang said. It was 2:00 am and the lab report had just come back. “The blood sample we got from your jacket belonged to the last victim.”

Cameron didn’t seem to find this comforting.

“You still disturbed by the way the perp torched himself?” Chang asked.

Cameron shrugged. “Every now and then there are aspects of this job I hate.”

“Hey,” Bronson said, “look at it this way: it’s one less piece of garbage on the streets.”

Mike looked at him as if making an assessment. “You like thinking of yourself as waste management, taking out the garbage?” he asked.

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“Was it as simple as your attitude implied?” Tony asked.

Their plane was in mid-flight between Montreal and Halifax, after a connecting from Seattle and a two-hour layover. They traveled under assumed names, using the passports Bruce Mason had provided the

previous fall.

Mike had torn a small piece off the corner of a newspaper and was making gestures with his hand. Teasing motions of his fingers caused the scrap, about the size of a dime, to move away from him.

“How are you doing that?” Tony whispered.

“I’m using the force,” Mike joked. “Seriously, years ago, during power training, I could use chi or *qi* as the Chinese now call it — everything seems to have gone officially Mandarin — to put out candle flames. I once saw this old guy, my instructor’s instructor, knock over a workout dummy by thrusting at it with his hands, never touching it.

“Since last fall, most of what I do has been about vampire strength and vampire speed. It occurs to me to get back to some of the things I did as a human and see if they’ve been enhanced. Extending chi to push things away from me is easier than pulling toward me; that’s a whole different kind of focus.”

As he spoke, he flared his fingers, making a magician’s gesture at the paper. Slowly the tiny scrap drifted off the table toward his hand, then glided back. It took several attempts before the paper touched his hand.

“Sink me!” Tony declared, still whispering.

Mike smiled, then made a dismissive gesture, “I didn’t do much — it’s a really small scrap of paper — but it’s a start.

“Coming back to Chernov,” Mike said, “he didn’t exactly set himself on fire as I told the Seattle police, but, yeah, it was simple enough. Gregor was about the same size as his brother, but that was about the extent of the similarities. Gregor was slower, in more ways than one.” When Tony raised an eyebrow, Mike added, “Let’s just say he wasn’t the sharpest pencil in the box. He must have relied on his size as a Mafia enforcer. He was both slow and stupid, though he wasn’t fully

awake when I burst in on him. He had vampire speed but, even with that, he was not much faster than an athletic human. He was strong, though — strong as an ox. I broke both his arms — he was swinging those huge fists at me — it was like trying to break a leg of beef. I used a mantis block and broke his elbows from the side, then I drove a holly dagger into his heart and a *sgian dubh* into his throat. Once he was incapacitated, I doused him with a pint of kerosene I carried for the purpose, then set him afire. After he was burning, I rescued my blade from his neck, then pulled the holly dagger out of his heart — burnt my hand in the process, but it's starting to heal."

"I've a flask of blood if you need some," Tony offered, but Mike just shook his head.

"Now that I'm down to a cup a day, I'm starting to almost look my age — well, sort of. I'll heal more when I sleep next, though it might take a few days to fully heal. Still, it's better than when I was human; it would have taken a week or more. Right now I'm more interested in the discipline than the rapid healing"

"We're almost there," Tony commented, looking out the window. "I hate long west-to-east trips; you arrive hours later than your body expects — very disconcerting."

Mike smiled. "In another two hours we'll both be oblivious to it for a few hours. By the way, what day is it?"

"It is Wednesday, the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, my dear chap, as if you didn't know."

Mike gave a shrug. "I've been flitting back and forth between trying to enjoy a summer on the boat and missions for CSIS and Interpol. One day is the same as another, except for Carrie's days off. She likes what she's doing — nice clients, and none of the personal politics of SeaView."

"Speaking of the boat," Tony said, "how's the new

mast? I gather you also replaced the jib.”

Mike nodded. “It’s great — the main winds in even better than it did on the old mast. And, yeah, it was time to throw the old jib in the dumpster. I think it might have been twenty years old. You should have come sailing with us when you had the offer.”

Tony smiled. “I was tempted, but, well, after that fiasco you call a honeymoon, I thought you two deserved the time alone.

“By the way, according to the various factions keeping tabs on Cesare Borgia, it seems the Duke has faded from sight recently. Nigel is trying to track him down and Bruce Mason has a couple of MI6 lads poking around but, so far...” He shrugged.

Mike frowned. “Wait a minute; what about the GPS app in his iPhone — Carrie’s old iPhone?”

Tony shook his head. “He may have figured it out and had it disabled; it may be turned off. Nigel insists he can identify the phone’s signature based on the replaced SIM card. However, in the meantime, Michael, our Duke de Valentinois has become a veritable will o’ the wisp.”



Carrie met them at the airport, a copy of the Halifax Chronicle Herald in her hand. A page three article described the finding of three bodies outside a sleazy bar on Portland Street — leather-clad biker types, cut up by a large blade, possibly a sword. There was an eyewitness account of an athletic man in a dark trench coat and broad-brimmed hat, possibly wielding a Samurai sword. The young woman told of being accosted by the thugs on her way home, rescued by the mysterious vigilante, whereupon she made her escape. The vigilante then seemed to turn on the thugs, leaving them dead on the sidewalk.

“The worst part,” Carrie commented, “is that the

paper is making comparisons with the mystery hero of last year, wondering if the Samurai vampire killer hasn't started running amuck. Four letters to the editor presume that it's the same person; only one makes an effort to defend him."

Mike let out a sort of whistled sigh, frowning as he handed the paper back to her. He gave her a quick kiss.

"May I see that?" Tony asked, gesturing for the newspaper. He studied the letters page, his frown deepening. "I say; this is most curious."

He handed the paper to Mike, who balanced it on the luggage trolley.

"While the letters all seem to use different words, the tone and syntax are identical, as if they were written by the same person," Tony pointed out.

"So, it's either a deliberate smear campaign or someone is so strong in their opinion that they had to voice it more than once."

Mike felt a minor wave of dizziness and glanced at his watch. "It's 10:00. We need to hurry to the car and get Tony home before he fades into oblivion — before we both fade out. By the way, we won't make it to Gold River before I drift out completely. Are we covered on that? I'd hate to have to explain to Darren why he had to carry me aboard."

Carrie smiled. "It's clouding over, threatening rain again. If you can just hang on long enough, I can probably walk you aboard. You'd be surprised at how manageable you are before the real coma sets in. Down the steps might be tricky. Once you're in the deep coma, though, it's another story. You'd think rigor mortis had set in."

Mike gave a smirk. "Have you been experimenting on me, using me as a play toy when I'm out of it?"

"Something like that," Carrie giggled.

"What about this clown on Portland Street? Has Legendre called?" They'd reached Mike's Grand

Cherokee in the parking complex. Mike was heaving their bags into the back.

“I called Dave across the street yesterday,” Carrie said. “The call-forwarding is supposed to be in place; I guess the power went out — that would reset the phone. Dave said he’d check it today. All calls to the home phone will route to my cell. The last thing you need is a telemarketer calling you while you’re closing in on some nasty vampire. And, speaking of nasty vampires, was it really Chernov’s brother in Seattle?”

Mike nodded. “Another off the list. All I need now is for Nigel to locate Cesare Borgia and the mysterious Torok. I’m still hoping Cesare’s buying into the olive branch scenario, but I doubt it. I think his whole approach last time was to save his ass. He knew I could have had his head lopped off before anyone else in that room blinked.”

They pulled out of the parking complex and were on the way out of the airport area, headed for Highway 102, their route to Dartmouth and Tony’s house. Carrie was at the wheel.

“I think he also read your concerns about trying it in a roomful of less-than-friendly vampires,” Tony commented.

There was an element of chagrin as Mike nodded. “I suppose that’s why I took his offer of peace and left things unfinished,” he confessed. “I really am tired of always having to kill in these situations, though I do realize that reforming a predatory vampire isn’t likely to happen. And the idea of imprisoning someone for eternity on a pint of blood a day isn’t practical, either. That’s a facility that would be hard to keep secret. It wouldn’t be long before the world knew all about our kind and the panic would begin.

“I don’t know how many of the vamps in that room would have turned on us but, with just Tony, Radu, and I, and maybe Countess del Florio and a few of her

friends, we were vastly outnumbered. There must have been at least fifty people in that room, and more than a hundred elsewhere in the building. I figured I'd do what I could and get out. Who knows? Maybe I could have taken out Cesare and made it out quickly, but that isn't how it played out."

"Perhaps we should contact Detective Inspector Legendre after our respective naps," Tony suggested. "It might put his mind at ease to know that you were out of the country when this latest villain struck."

"Traveling under assumed names with fake passports," Mike commented. "It's hardly an airtight alibi, though, if worse came to worst, Chang would vouch for us."

"And Bronson," Tony added.

Mike gave a snort. "Bronson's just as likely to say he's never seen us before," he quipped. "However, there were plenty of surveillance cameras at the airports."