

1: From Before

QEII Emergency and Morgue, Halifax
Sunday, Feb. 3, 2008, 1:45 am

Mike Cameron pulled his Jeep Grand Cherokee up in front of the morgue entrance and leaped out. Running to the back, he raised the hatch and helped Tony Dewhurst out, getting an arm about the vampire under his armpit.

“Get going,” he told Carrie. “Get Sean to Emergency. I’ll catch up soon as I can.”

“What about you?” Carrie argued. “Damn it, Michael, you’re bleeding and pale as a ghost. You need help as badly as Sean.”

“Go,” Mike ordered, and slammed the hatch, banging his palm on the back to emphasize his last words.

Carrie pulled away, watching Mike in the mirror as he struggled to the doors with his pale and struggling friend.

The entrance to Emergency was a scene of chaos.

“This is Sean Cameron, my boyfriend’s son,” she told the receptionist. “His father is on the way, as is probably Detective Inspector Peter MacDonald. Sean’s throat has been cut by an associate of that vampire slasher killer that’s been in the news. He needs immediate attention.”

“And his father’s on the way?” the nurse asked in a bored tone.

Carrie lost it. “Want to nit pick details?” She pulled the cloth away from Sean’s neck just long enough to display the blood, then clamped it back in place.

“Here’s a detail for you. Now get us to a trauma surgeon before I call ATV and have your face all over *Live at Five* by suppertime! Here’s his health card.”

Three minutes later, Sean was on his way to surgery.

Mike got Tony through the doors and into the morgue. At that time of night the place was deserted. He checked the contacts on Tony’s Blackberry, found the Jonathan’s name, and called him.

“Jonathan.”

He expected a Canadian voice, maybe even a British one, but not the thick Scottish brogue that assailed his ears.

“Emergency, Jonathan. I’ve got Lord Dewhurst out here at the entrance. It’s bad, and I need to get elsewhere.”

“On my way, laddie.”

It wasn’t even a minute.

“Lord have mercy!” the Scot declared as he burst through the doors. He was a huge bear of a man with a reddish-brown beard. “Let’s get him inside,” he said.

Jonathan grabbed a gurney and, picking up Tony as if he were a child, placed him on it. “I’ve got his blood type on hand. We’ll have him right as rain in no time, laddie.”

“Great,” Mike said with a smile. With the wave of relief came a roaring in his ears. The world seemed to turn grey. He collapsed to the floor.

“Good Lord, mon, what have ye been through?” Jonathan stooped over Mike, looked him over, then pulled the piece of wetsuit fabric out of the wound in his shoulder. At the welling of blood, he immediately clamped a palm to the wound.

“Ach, laddie, ye were so intent on saving poor Tony that ye’ve half killed yerself.”

“How bad?” Tony had propped himself up on an

elbow.

“Whatever stabbed him cut into the brachial artery, mon. He’s well on the road to bleeding out internally.”

“Put my blood in the wound,” Tony insisted. “Save him.”

“Ach, don’t be daft, mon, ye need all yer own blood ’til I can get more into you. This is Michael, then? The one ye’ve been braggin’ on all these years? Well, if it’s savin’ him yer after, then that’s what we’ll do. And since I’m a tad older than you, —”

Jonathan’s canines enlarged. He bit into his wrist and sucked out a mouthful of blood, which he then blew into Mike’s wound, making sure the blood was forced inward.

“That’ll save him, old friend,” he said. “He’ll need a few pints of his own blood type, but that’ll seal the artery in a minute or two. Push over, Anthony.” He heaved Mike up onto the gurney next to Lord Dewhurst, and continued down the hall.

“It’ll also accelerate what’s been happening to him,” Tony said.

“Is it that profound?” Jonathan asked. “Ye said he’s showing hints of vampire traits, but it’s so unheard of I was hoping you were exaggerating.”

Tony shook his head. “He’s almost as fast as I am.”

Jonathan nodded. “Are ye still with us, Michael?”

“Yeah, I’m here. I got woozy, but I never fully lost it.”

“That’s good,” the Scot commented. “Yer a Cameron, a stout Locheil Cameron, no doubt – good highland stock. And ye know what Lord Anthony’s blood’s been doin’ to ye these many years?”

Mike nodded weakly. His strength was returning, but he still felt drained.

“Well, Michael Cameron, the blood I just put into ye is either a blessing or a curse. It all depends on how ye view all this. It’s a notch above the well-intentioned donation our friend here gave you all those years ago. I

was the personal leach, as he called me, of King David II, that pretentious son of our great Robert the Bruce. I was turned in the Year of Our Lord 1367.”

“Well, it’s as heady as a triple shot of Glenlivet,” Mike joked. He sat up and slid unsteadily off the gurney.

“Whoa, laddie, go easy. Ye may want to set a spell.”

Mike shook his head. “My son’s in Emergency with a cut throat. Tony saved the artery, but he’s still bleeding from a host of minor arterioles and venules. I’ve got to get to him.”

“Ach, so yer an educated man to boot! Well, off with you then, but mind you go easy.” He pointed to an elevator. “That lift will take ye up to the inner bowels of Emergency. They use it to bring their failures to me. Make sure you get some attention for yourself.”

Mike staggered out of the elevator, and was intercepted by a nurse.

“And just where do you think you’re going?” she demanded.

He felt over his person for the CSIS ID that, feeling his wetsuit, he realized was probably with his clothes in the Jeep.

“I’m Michael Cameron. I work with the police. Detective Inspector MacDonald is probably on the way. My son was brought in with a knife wound to the throat. I need to find him.”

He fell against the elevator door, grabbing at it for support.

“You look in need of trauma care yourself,” she said, staring at the bloodstained rent in the upper left chest of his wetsuit. “Here.” She grabbed a wheelchair and made him sit in it. “I should get you to admitting, but let’s see if we can find your son first. Knife wound? That’s probably Doctor –”

“He’s in Trauma 3,” a voice intruded. “I’ll take him

there.”

Both Mike and the nurse turned toward the voice. Pete MacDonald advanced, badge in hand, and took charge of the wheelchair.

“And you say this was a thrust from a samurai sword?” the doctor asked as he tied off the stitches.

Pete nodded. “He was assisting us in a case as sort of a special operative.”

The doctor nodded. “Well, Mr. Cameron, you’re a very lucky man in many respects. Your lady-friend here raised holy hell to get your son in quickly. It worked, and your son is doing fine. His wound looked worse than it was. From all the dried blood I thought the carotid was cut, but it wasn’t. Same with yourself – a lot of blood, but the main arteries are intact. From what I can see, you either have great reflexes, are one hell of a healer, or your attacker was a weak swordsman.”

Mike shook his head and muttered, “You have no idea.”

“Well,” the doctor continued, “the wound seems awfully shallow for the amount of bleeding. I think we’ll keep you at least overnight. We’re putting back two pints of blood and that’ll take a bit. Eat plenty of iron-rich foods for the next few days. If the stitches look good tomorrow, maybe I’ll release you midmorning.”

Mike put a hand on Carrie’s, where her hand rested on his arm. “Hear that? Now we really have to make new reservations at the Aussie Steak House.”

Carrie smiled and kissed him. “Whatever you say. Just promise me no more battles with nasty villains for a while.”

Mike grinned. “That’s an easy promise. All the bad guys are dead.”

2: The Offer

Halifax, late May 2008

Sails flapped as Carrie brought the bow through the wind. Mike's arm muscles knotted as he cranked hard at the winch handle, pulling the starboard jib sheet tight. The jib snapped smartly into shape, and *Windward* settled into a broad reach, heading up into Bedford Basin. Mike returned to his seat next to Carrie at the helm. Grabbing a bottle of water from the holder, he took two big gulps, popped two Excedrin Migraine from his pocket, then swallowed more water.

He pushed his wraparound sunglasses more firmly against his face, and pulled the bill of his white Panama hat lower.

"Tell me again what the doctor said about your headaches?" Carrie said. "I was pretty done in when I got home from work yesterday, and didn't take much of it in."

Mike shrugged. "No recognizable cause. I've always been sensitive to sunlight. Usually it's sinus pressure – allergies – but my sinuses are unusually clear, especially for this time of year. I've got better shades coming – special order."

"Well, I hope they come soon. I hate to see you like this." She leaned over and kissed him.

Mike smiled. "I'll be okay."

"Did you use sunscreen like I told you?" she asked.

Mike rolled his eyes. "Yes, Mother," he droned.

"You need more. Your neck's getting red."

“Yeah, right,” Mike argued. His skin was already on the way to a mahogany brown. From his years in southern waters, he retained much of his tan through the winter. However, he frowned as he felt at his neck. It did feel sensitive.

He stepped to the companionway, grabbed the edge of the hatch, and swung below, pivoting into the head as he landed on the cabin sole. Sure enough, his neck was showing blotches of red. This time, instead of SPF 30, he used Carrie’s SPF 45, making sure he got the backs of his hands as well. He grabbed another bottled water from the fridge before returning to the cockpit.

“Maybe I need to see a different doctor,” he mused.

Carrie was beaming as he took his seat beside her. The breeze blew her hair into his face. Her eyes shifted between watching the sails and watching the landmark in Bedford that she was steering by. She used to grip the helm in a tight grip, but her hands had adjust to a more relaxed grip over the past several weeks.

“I love this,” she said, “especially now that it’s getting warmer. August should be great, and I have three weeks straight. We can sail to Mahone Bay.”

“You’ll love Deep Cove,” Mike began, then was interrupted by his cellphone. He made a face as he read the number.

“Don’t you ever give up, Monahan?” he demanded. “The answer is still ‘no.’ It was ‘no’ on Thursday, it was ‘no’ last week, it was ‘no’ last month, and it’ll be ‘no’ in the future. So why don’t you just give up.” He snapped the phone shut and shoved it back in his pocket.

Carrie kissed his cheek. “Don’t let them get to you, and don’t let it spoil our day. Besides, they’re probably scared.”

“I don’t think the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service gets scared,” he said.

“Well, anxious then,” she corrected. “They see the existence of psychotic vampires as a threat to national

security. They're pleased that you've agreed to help Tony remove the nasty ones, even more pleased that you're doing it in Canada. But they're not comfortable with being out of the loop. They just want to be kept up to date, and they see having you working for them as the best solution."

"Then they shouldn't have sent Monahan to piss me off, should they," he retorted. "Just the thought of that self-righteous prick raises my blood pressure. However, he can't reach me out here, and I won't be taking any more calls from him, so let's enjoy what's left of the afternoon."

It was late afternoon when Mike backed into the slip. There was a man on the dock waiting to pass dock lines. Mike didn't recognize him at first. Jeans, sneakers, and a golf shirt can be an effective disguise for someone who wears a three-piece suit every day.

"So now Monahan's resorting to sending you?" Mike asked. He shook his head, then smiled and offered his hand. "Comment ça va, Monsieur Charbonneau?"

"I am well, Mr. Cameron, though much busier these days."

Mike secured the rear lines while Carrie did the bow.

"Busier?" he asked as he reconnected shore power.

"Yes. My responsibilities have increased somewhat. You'd know that if you'd taken my call instead of unloading and hanging up – or if you'd stopped at the car instead of ignoring me."

"So Monahan sent you this time instead of coming himself. I won't deal with him. You can tell him that."

Charbonneau shook his head. "I would but I haven't seen him in a month. Our paths don't cross much any more."

"Really? So who's your supervisor now?"

The CSIS man smiled. "I'm my own supervisor," he said. "There's a section head above me, and the director above him. I've replaced Monahan. They tell me it's a promotion but some days it feels more like a penance."

"Come aboard. Have a drink," Mike said, then stepped easily into the cockpit.

"You move like a cat," Charbonneau observed, "but I suppose that's to be expected. You have a very nice boat."

"Carrie, this is M. Charbonneau of CSIS."

"Enchanté, mademoiselle," Charbonneau said, taking her hand briefly. "You are a very brave lady. I read the reports. You showed great courage and resourcefulness in how you escaped from that house. And, of course, our friend here – well, it goes without saying."

"So you don't agree with Monahan's assessment of that night?" Mike asked, handing him a diet 7-Up. "You see the Soutzos affair as something other than a 'massive body count'?"

Charbonneau smiled. "You left at least three men alive. I assume killing the others was self-defense. They were all well-armed – more so than you. They were also social predators who seemed to be voluntarily aiding a group of monsters. No, Michael – may I call you Michael? No, I have no qualms about your actions in the Soutzos-Chernov affair. By the way, my name is Jean."

Mike caught Carrie's eyes and gave her a questioning glance. She nodded.

Jean lowered his eyes and smiled. "You two do that well. One might think it was telepathy." Charbonneau's smile faded when Mike and Carrie repeated the action, then Mike laughed.

"So, Jean, is there a particular problem, or are you just anxious to get me back on the pay roll?"

"Both," Charbonneau replied. He removed a leather

ID folder from his shirt pocket and handed it to Mike.

“Ra-o-o-o-ow.” The drawn-out cry of a Siamese cat interrupted as Kato dropped to the seat from under the canvas dodger, stretched, and walked across the cockpit seat. He gave Carrie a rub with his head, paused just long enough to give Charbonneau a looking over, then hopped over him and onto Mike’s lap, where he settled, watching the CSIS supervisor with unveiled suspicion.

Mike stroked his head, eliciting a very loud purr, then, without opening the ID folder, held it for a moment, as if entertaining second thoughts, then slid it into his back pocket with his wallet.

“It’s not a vampire case, Mike,” Charbonneau began. “That’s why you’ve heard nothing from Lord Dewhurst on this matter. However, it is possible that both he and Mr. Worthington might be of some assistance. A young aid worker was abducted near the Afghan-Uzbek border this morning, about a hundred kilometres east of Qunduz. Actually, the young lady was posing as an aid worker, but is, in fact, one of ours. Miss Pamela Benning was investigating the diversion of Canadian Red Cross shipments. We aren’t sure if it’s insurgents or some Afghan warlord behind the thefts of the shipments – food and medical supplies. We fear they may have made her as a CSIS agent. However, it could as easily be Taliban or an Al Qaeda cell hoping to gain prestige, possibly ransom, by abducting a westerner.”

“In the north? I thought things were quiet there, with the south being the hotspot. So, why me? Why not special forces or someone?”

Charbonneau shook his head. “Our investment in that area is not as extensive as that of the Americans or the Germans,” he said with a trace of chagrin. “In the strictest sense of our mandate, we shouldn’t have anyone there at all. The CIA and MI6 are cooperating, of course, but so far there are no leads. You and your

friends seem rather gifted in your, shall we say, hunches.

“Mike, I trained this young lady and sent her on this mission. Perhaps she was not ready. Then again, perhaps this is just blind chance. Either way, I don’t expect to sleep much tonight. Perhaps I’m clutching at straws, but, if there’s even a chance you can do or learn something that no one else can, I need to take advantage of that. You’ll have to be extra careful, however. We aren’t supposed to spy in other countries.”

“That must curb our effectiveness as a spy agency.” Mike didn’t try to hide the sarcasm in his tone. “So, if I’m caught, the agency will disavow any knowledge of me.” He grinned as he quoted the line from *Mission: Impossible*.

Charbonneau nodded. “And my neck will be in a noose.”

“Why do I get the feeling that Ms. Benning is more than just a field agent to you?” Mike asked.

The sudden blush of Charbonneau’s face was all the answer he needed.

“After the gossip and speculation in the local newspaper, I’ve decided to code-name you *Samurai* for the sake of the files. Your real name will not appear in them. That includes the files on the Soutzos case.”

Mike called Tony while he and Carrie were walking to the car. Kato held onto his shoulder with great anxiety. Except for excursions on the boat, which he seemed to enjoy, he was an indoor cat, and was not comfortable in the great outdoors. As soon as Mike opened the car door, Kato leaped inside and settled himself on a blanket on the back seat.

Tony always seemed happy to hear from Michael. “Well, old boy, I was actually thinking of heading over to England for most of the summer. Bit less sunlight

than here, you know. However, I'm sure we can help you look into this. Why don't you and Carrie come over this evening? Nigel has shown me how to use this Skype program, so we can talk to him in England. Eight o'clock good for you?"

Mike glanced at Carrie, who nodded. "Eight's fine."

They weren't out of the parking lot when Mike's phone intruded again. "Pete?" he said, recognizing the voice. "What's up? How's retirement?"

"Today I'm temporarily out of retirement and need a favour," former Detective Inspector MacDonald sighed, "a big favour."

"What's the problem?"

"Ever hear of Stan Michaels?"

Mike thought a moment. "Rich industrialist, lately gone from building factories to creating low-cost housing for low-income people, both rental and for sale."

"That's him. Donald Trump turned Albert Schweitzer. His new office building in Clayton Park is still under construction. He's being held hostage on the eighteenth floor."

"Isn't there a tactical response unit? I got drafted to whack the heads off vampires – just the nasty ones. Now you expect me to fill in for SWAT? Come on, Pete, let's keep it real, okay?"

"You want real, Michael? Okay, here's real. We've got tactical, but they're not SAS. You want something like *Flashpoint*? The nearest unit like that is in Montreal. We don't have the budget, and, frankly, we've never had the need. Sure we have guys trained to deal with hostage situations, but not like this."

"Not rich guys in high-rises?" Mike challenged.

"Not hostages held almost two hundred feet in the air with nothing but frames underneath them. Besides, he asked for you."

Mike shook his head. "I don't believe this," he muttered. "The hostage asked for me? How did he

manage that?”

“The chief’s phone rang – his personal cellphone. The voice said, and I quote, ‘Stan Michaels, eighteenth floor. Hostage. Automatic weapons. I need a samurai.’ The number traces to Michael’s cell. The chief thinks he recognized Michaels’s voice, though he was whispering. Someone in the background was barking orders: ‘stay down and be quiet,’ that kind of thing.”

“Geeze, Pete, am I listed in the yellow pages under samurai now? No one knows about that. I didn’t even think you knew?”

“You’re kidding, right?” MacDonald shot back. “You went through the grounds of that place like a ninja, then took on a vampire with a samurai sword and decapitated him. Half the force are talking about you as the samurai ninja. It was even in the papers that the bad guys were dealt with in samurai fashion. For a week they couldn’t decide what to call you. When it was all over they settled on *Samurai Vampire Killer*.”

Mike nodded. He’d seen some of the papers. He knew that the general public couldn’t be bantering about the fact that he was the reincarnation of a sixteenth century samurai. Still, the coincidence was unsettling.

“Look, Mike, I appreciate your frustration, I really do, but we’re in a fix here. You really are the best man for the job. I was hoping we could put something together right away – say in an hour?”

“Pete, we just got off the boat. Carrie’s in the middle of three days off. Charbonneau just showed up and talked me into taking a CSIS assignment, probably in Afghanistan.” He glanced at his eyes in the mirror – his enlarged bluer-than-ever irises. “There’s a lot going on right now, Pete. I’m feeling pulled a bit thin, not to mention without much warning.”

“I can meet you at seven, with two of our best tactical planners. They can provide equipment, even a helicopter, if that helps.”

“Okay,” Mike sighed, nodding. “I need a shower. Call Tony.” He glanced at his watch. “Fill him in, and meet us there at seven, and you can bring dinner.”

“What did he mean about Michaels being almost two hundred feet in the air with nothing but frames underneath him?” Carrie asked as they drove to Tony’s. They’d been home to shower, change, and drop Kato off.

“My guess would be that he ordered the top floor or floors with his offices and personal living space finished first. It’s not unheard of, especially when the owner plans to live and run his empire from that building. Aside from the elevator, the lower floors would have basic wiring and plumbing rough-in, but they’re still open to the elements – the enclosing glass is not in place. It makes it easier to hoist framing, flooring, and drywall materials into each floor as they’re working.”

Carrie nodded. “Is that the kind of stuff you watch on Discovery when you can’t sleep and come sneaking back into bed after three?”

Mike shrugged. “That and the *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* dvds you gave me.”

3: Once More Into the Breach

Ah, Michael,” Lord Anthony Dewhurst greeted his friend at the door. The handshake lingered and hinted at the deep affection the former cohort of the Scarlet Pimpernel held for his human friend.

“Lovely to see you, my dear,” he said, giving Carrie a hug. Then, turning to Mike, “I gather a pleasant day of sailing ended with an unexpected return to duty. Inspector MacDonald has yet to arrive, but I expect him momentarily. Do come in and make yourselves at home. I have tea on.”

He looked Mike up and down, taking in the black Levi jeans, black cotton and Lycra turtleneck, and ninja boots with the isolated big toes. “I see you’re dressed for a night’s adventure. Inspector MacDonald said he’d be bringing dinner. I shall, of course, have to abstain.”

When Tony adjourned to the kitchen, Carrie whispered, “It’s like in ‘Dracula’ – he looks about twenty years younger.”

“No point in whispering,” Mike replied in a normal tone, “he can probably hear you. It’s all about feeding. He usually takes just enough blood to maintain the appearance of a healthy and active sixty-year-old. My guess is that, with all that he went through last winter, Jonathan probably thought it best to have him rejuvenate an extra amount for a while.”

“Just so,” Tony commented from the kitchen. “I must say, though, this extra youthful exuberance means I sleep even less. I’ve become rather adept at playing

mahjong and backgammon on the computer.”

Mike excused himself and joined Tony in the kitchen. “I may need to see a special doctor myself,” he confided, barely breathing the words.

When Tony’s face took on a concerned and questioning look, Mike widened his eyes for Tony to examine them, then gestured to the redness of this neck and the backs of his hands.”

“I haven’t burned since I was a kid,” he whispered, “not after eighteen years between Bermuda and the Bahamas. Today I was using SPF 30, and burned through it in about two hours.”

Tony nodded. “Your iris diaphragms are larger, making your eyes look unusually blue. Larger irises allow your pupils dilate to a much larger opening. Of course you’ve always had exceptional night vision, but, with this change, bright light would be most uncomfortable.”

In response, Mike pulled a small bottle of Excedrin out of his pocket. “I’m going through about six a day for the headaches. I’m still waiting for those custom shades you recommended to arrive.”

Tony nodded. “I spoke to Jonathan about that. He has a spray chemical that can add an extra coating to your current sunglasses. I’ll call and see if he can come over. He can speak to you about some of your other symptoms.” He took an impulsive grip on Mike’s arm. “I really am sorry about this, Michael. I was in rather poor straits that night. I wanted Jonathan to use my blood – that would have been bad enough. I should have thought of the effects of his stronger blood on you. It seems to have rather accelerated the process. Still, he probably knows more about these things than anyone.”

“You two are as thick as thieves,” Carrie said in the doorway.

Mike lowered his eyes, then met her gaze. “Something happened at the hospital last February. I

should have told you but, with all your worries, I didn't want to add to them." He took a deep breath. "When Soutzos stabbed me in the shoulder, he cut into the brachial artery. I was slowly bleeding to death right there in the morgue."

Carrie's face paled. She stepped closer and put her arms about Mike. "So Tony had to put more of his blood in you to save you. That's why you're more sensitive to the sun."

Mike nodded. "Except that it wasn't Tony's blood. Tony was slipping in and out of consciousness. It was Jonathan's."

"Tony's friend at the morgue? How old is he?" she asked Tony. "Will this turn Michael?"

"He's 64 years old," Mike told her. "Tony's going to get him to come over. He may be able to answer some of your questions, but not in front of the police."

Carrie nodded and hugged closer to Mike. "I love you," she whispered, "and I'm here with you, no matter what you become."

The ringing of the doorbell was accompanied by a deep bellow of, "Police. Open up!"

Mike grinned. "It's open, come on in, Pete. Leave the battering ram outside."

MacDonald entered, followed by two men in black pants and T-shirts, carrying several large aluminum cases. Pete was carrying a cardboard carton piled high with paper bags.

"Good, I'm starving," Mike said. "Looks like your friends have some toys for me to look at."

"O'Brien and Jackson," MacDonald said, gesturing to his companions. "We can bring up the lay of the land on Lord Dewhurst's computer while we eat, then, once we have a game plan, you can pick and choose from the gear they've brought. I thought of grabbing pizza, but Mildred's been on my case about diet, so I ordered take-out from Wong's."

"Any General Tao's chicken is mine," Mike

declared.

Pete handed him a paper bag. "I heard a voice in my head saying something about General Tao and fried rice," he said, "and my gut told me that the lady would prefer something with more vegetables. So how's life living with a writer?" he asked, handing Carrie a bag.

"I thought you retired, Pete. Have you been keeping us under surveillance?" Mike commented. "Who's Mildred – wait a minute – wasn't Mildred your wife's name?"

"I'll bring plates and utensils," Tony offered.

"Mildred never remarried," Pete explained. "She called me when she read about your father's passing. I told her I had just retired. That's where it started. Now she's back with me. Until today I was losing what little remains of my hair in frustration on the golf course. Mildred loves golf. I suck. Technically I'm just a liaison between the department and you, Michael – you have gone back to CSIS, haven't you?"

Mike nodded, chuckling. "Did you have a man with binoculars on Magazine Hill, or have you bugged the boat?"

"Neither. Charbonneau has been calling me regularly, hoping I could persuade you back into the fold. All I did was tell him your slip number at DYC. You'll have to ask him how he got past the security gate at the dock ramp."

"So Michaels had them finish his top floors first, am I right?" Mike asked.

Pete nodded.

"And the suspects have cut power to the elevator?"

Pete nodded again. "It's becoming fashionable to call them 'unsubs' but, yes, that's the assumption. Unsub, that's –"

"Unidentified subjects," Mike finished.

"He also watches *Criminal Minds*, in addition to all the *CSI* shows, and *Numbers*," Carrie added with a smile.

“Coming back to your previous question,” Pete said, “I’ve made a hobby of keeping routine checks on you and Carrie, aside from social calls. It occurred to me that our European friends may have friends who’d like to avenge their deaths. So far no sign of that, but I can’t help but notice how often Carrie answers your home phone. Hers is not disconnected, but the recording refers people to your number, and her house is on the market. I’m a detective, Mike. I may be retired, but the instincts are still there. So, are you two getting married.”

“Maybe.” Mike’s tone was evasive.

“We’re taking our time and making sure,” Carrie volunteered. “We’ve both been burnt by bad relationships. Caution is sensible at this point.”

Mike smiled. “Now, getting back to the case at hand—”

O’Brien helped himself to Tony’s laptop and accessed a federal program that, like Google Earth, provided satellite views of terrain, but the views were up-to-date from the last satellite pass, and offered three-dimensional panoramas.

Tony brought in a tray of plates, bowls, and utensils, then a tray with a large tea pot and several cups. “I also have some English beer, a preference of Nigel’s, should anyone care for that.”

Jackson’s dry demeanour took on an enthusiasm that seemed almost uncharacteristic.

Michael, in the meantime, had taken a bowl, covered his fried rice with chicken and spicy sauce, and had dug in with chopsticks he’d found in the carton. Carrie beamed a proud smile at him as he handled the chopsticks with an expertise that was rare in Occidentals. Mike shrugged it off, then whispered to her, “Hey, I’ve been using them for two lifetimes. Give me a break.”

Looking over O’Brien’s shoulder, he studied the layout.

“What’s the distance between these two buildings?” he asked, indicating a high-rise apartment complex, the only building near the Michaels edifice that looked higher than three storeys.

“Almost two hundred meters,” O’Brien replied. “Too far to shoot a grapple and tightrope in.”

“What about height – like a fulcrum?”

O’Brien nodded. “I saw *Mission: Impossible 3*. Too far and not high enough. If you managed to reach the other roof, you’d break half the bones in your body on impact. You’ve got a hell of a rep, Agent Cameron. Can you Spider-man your way up the outside?”

“Not without being seen,” Mike replied. “If the building was enclosed, I might disappear against the sides. As it is, I’ll stand out in silhouette against the framing. So, that leaves the elevators.”

“There are three,” Pete said. “The center one is the only one that goes all the way to the top.”

“Which doesn’t work with the power cut,” O’Brien said. “And, if we resupplied external power, the unsubs would hear the elevator, and the doors would *ding* when the elevator reached the floor.”

“That *ding* is an electronic chime that will be inactive with power to the elevator disabled.”

“But the elevator still doesn’t work,” Pete argued.

Mike smiled. “I’ll climb the cables.”

“Perhaps you can ride up the cables,” Tony suggested. “Nigel has been gathering a collection of gadgets that he thought might be of use to you in a future mission. You know how Nigel is with technological toys. I’ve been rather loose with the budget in that area and, lately, you’d think I put him in charge of Q-Branch at MI6. One of his toys is a motorized car that clamps onto a cable and can lift one hundred fifty kilograms.”

Mike did a mental calculation. “That’s about three hundred thirty pounds. So I can let that pull me up a cable.”

Tony nodded. "If the cable is too thick, we have a gun that can shoot a piercing grapple with a thinner cable. What Nigel wanted was something out of a Batman movie that attached to a belt and used two-hundred-test monofilament. He's yet to find a supplier."

"Maybe he can ask Warner Brothers where they got theirs," Mike quipped. "Okay, so I have a way up, in theory. Once on the floor, I need to tell hostages from bad guys. I need to take out the bad guys quickly, with no room for doubt. Monahan blew a gasket when I killed some murderous hard cases last time. He'll shit his pants if I throw a knife into a hostage."

"Actually, we have something for that." Tony went to a locked cabinet and pulled out what looked like a large semiautomatic pistol. "This was developed by the MOSAD, with some help from MI6. They deal with identical situations, having to rescue Jewish hostages from HAMAS and such. It uses CO2, and holds sixteen small tranquilizer projectiles in a magazine. They'll drop up to a two-hundred-pound man in under two seconds."

"So, if I run into Richard Kiel, I'll shoot him twice," Mike joked. He turned to O'Brien. "And what toys have you brought?"

O'Brien opened a case and pulled out a mask with a device attached at the center like a giant cyclops. "Night vision goggles," he said with some enthusiasm.

Tony tried to hide a smile.

Mike shook his head. "I won't need those. Anything else?"

O'Brien looked incredulous. "You don't get it. If we knock out the lights, you'll be the only one who can see."

Mike smiled. "Not only do I have exceptional night vision, Mr. O'Brien, but I'm trained to fight blind. With the lights out I have something akin to the advantage of a blind man and, as I already said, I see

well in the dark – well enough that I need special sunglasses to prevent migraines from sunlight.”

O’Brien looked disappointed. “We have a Heckler-Koch automatic with silencer. It holds fifty rounds in a magazine, and you can easily carry four spare magazines on a belt.”

Mike shook his head. “Are any of Michaels’s staff up there with him. If so, will the subjects be using them as shields when the lights go out? In spite of what one CSIS supervisor thinks of my methods, I’ve yet to experience collateral damage.” He shook his head. “My style is to go in like a ninja. I use low-tech weapons that I can trust, and rely more on my judgement and reflexes than firepower. I like Tony’s dart gun. If I make a mistake, I just have to wait for the mistake to wake up.”

Jackson decided to take a turn. “How about smoke grenades and flash-bangs? The flash-bangs in particular will complement your style. You know to plug your ears and close your eyes before they go off. The unsubs don’t. Now they’re deaf and blind and, as you’ve stated, you can still see like a cat.”

Mike nodded. “Sold. What about the smokers? Are they grenades, or have you something more like magician’s flash powder?”

Jackson grinned and held up an orange globe smaller than a ping-pong ball. “That would be these. Slam one on the floor in front of you, then duck into a doorway or up into a ceiling duct, and you’ve disappeared with style.”

“Excellent. What else?”

O’Brien said to Jackson, “If he can plant three or four of the XR-297 senders, we’ll have eyes in the infrared spectrum. Using an earpiece, we can tell him where body heat signatures are, though differentiating hostages from unsubs will be unreliable.”

Jackson looked at Mike, who nodded. “I assume this involves a neck mike like what SEALs use.”

Jackson nodded. "The earpiece is also the same as what SEALs use, so you can roll and tumble about the floor without fear of losing it."

"Thank you, gentlemen," Mike added. "Tony, is there an extra magazine for that dart gun, just in case I hit a few of the wrong people or miss with the first shot? I haven't been to a handgun range since Air Cadets, though I was reasonably proficient."

Tony nodded.

"What about Michaels?" Mike asked Pete. "Have you a photo, and do you know how many staff he might have had with him at the time of the intrusion?"

Pete passed Mike a black and white press photo. "He's a strange man," he added. "At any given time he might have one or two assistants, up to six staff, or no one. He works alone a lot and often sends his people away so that he can think uninterrupted. I'm afraid we can't be of much help there."

Mike studied the photo. The man had a stern face, strong facial lines indicating central European roots, dark hair of medium length, swept back away from his face. He looked like the classic image of a successful Type-A personality, a man who expected to succeed and didn't tolerate failure easily.

He glanced at Tony, who was staring at the photo over his shoulder.

"What is it?" he asked, sensing increased tension in his friend.

"He looks like –" Tony shook his head. "Can't be. The eyes would be different." When Mike's brow furrowed in puzzlement, Tony went on, "He looks like someone I met *a very long time ago*. But – no, look at the eyes. It can't be him."

Mike looked at the eyes in the photo. It took him a second to get what Tony was referring to. The eyes were normal. There were no enlarged irises, the enlarged irises that Mike was already developing. He was not a vampire; he could not be someone Tony had

known *a very long time ago*.

Carrie leaned her head against his shoulder when he resumed his seat on the sofa next to her. She'd finished her supper; he was still working at his, picking through with his chopsticks. She read the meaning in his glance and smiled.

"While you were talking and looking at toys, I was eating. That's why I'm finished and you've barely started."

He shrugged. "And I'm probably not through with the toys." Then, to O'Brien and Jackson, "Okay, guys, show me how the toys work."

In five minutes he was comfortable with how to use the com-set and how to set up the sensors that would feed heat-source information back to an infrared processor. The smoke balls were similar to ones he'd been taught how to make, mostly sulfur, and the flash-bang grenades were straight forward.

"Why don't you head over to Lacewood and get set up?" he suggested to Pete. "There's one more person I need to talk to – independent of this case."

As luck would have it, Jonathan and an assistant carrying a case were coming up the front porch steps as Mike was seeing the police out the door. The assistant seemed sluggish, as if in a daze.

"Ah, Michael." Jonathan's brogue was as thick as he remembered. "You're looking better than I had anticipated from Lord Anthony's call. Still, I can see the change in the eyes."

He followed Mike into the parlour. He greeted Tony like the old friends they were, then turned to Carrie.

"Pleased to meet ye, lass. It's a good man ye have there. Dinna worry yerself, we'll do our best to help."

"It's keeping him *human* that worries me most," Carrie confessed. "These changes seem rather a lot in so short a time."

Jonathan nodded, his expression one of sympathy. "Aye, lass, I can well imagine yer fears. What I did that

night – it wasn't to *change* him, it was to *save* him. He was dying before my very eyes – bleeding out, as the Yanks say.”

Carrie placed a hand on his arm, gratitude in her face. “I know, and I thank you. It's just that – well –”

“Ach, lass, I know. Now, Michael, lets have a look.”

“Forgive my asking, but just exactly how much of a doctor are you? The world has changed since 1367.”

“Aye, so have hiring practices. You have to show papers that can be traced. So, if it sets yer mind at ease, I graduated from Oxford Medical School in 1928, then from Johns Hopkins in 1950. Most recently, I was first in my class at McGill Medical in 1993.” He gave Mike a wink. “Once it was determined that illness was not a disturbance of the humours in the body, I set about to keep current with discoveries. Besides, I like schools. Now, open yer mouth, lad.”

He examined Mike's canine teeth, then pressed his thumbs against them.

“Yer teeth show no change.”

He pulled a small corked test tube from his pocket, masking it's contents in his hand.

“What's this?” When Mike shook his head, he passed the cork under Mike's nose.

“Blood,” Mike said.

“Vampire or human?”

“I can't tell.”

Jonathan removed the cork.

“Human,” Mike said.

“Are ye sure, lad?”

Mike smiled. “I've shed enough vampire blood to tell the difference by smell. The blood-smell even makes vampires smell different from humans.”

“Is that a fact? So you could tell if someone you just met was a vampire by his smell?”

Mike's smile broadened. “You mean like your friend over there? Is he drugged? His thoughts are

confused, almost absent.” He glanced at the young man still lingering near the door. “You can come in. If Jonathan trusted you enough to bring you here, then you’ve nothing to fear from us.”

Jonathan shot Tony a questioning glance, but Tony just shrugged.

“His deduction may have been reinforced by several observations, rather like Sherlock Holmes,” Lord Dewhurst commented. “He’s rather clever that way – unusually high IQ.”

“So I see,” Jonathan replied.

“What’s your real name?” Mike asked. “Jonathan wasn’t a common name in the highlands in the 1300’s. Your accent is definitely highland.”

“Ewan, originally, then Ian, then Jonathan. I may go back to Ewan next time I have to reinvent myself. The name has come back into use in recent years. My friend is rather new to his condition, and I forced him to rise too early. He had a bad experience a wee while back, and I’m making sure he’s safe by keeping him with me. Now, about your sunglasses. Let’s have a look at them.”

Mike caught Carrie’s eye, and she produced two pairs from her purse, identical wraparound sailing shades.

Struggling to function, his assistant approached with Jonathan’s case.

“I’m Mike.” Mike extended his hand to what he recognized as a fledgling vampire. The young man hesitated, then shook hands, relaxing noticeably.

“Jason,” he murmured, almost sleepily. “Got mugged on the way to work about a month ago. Got stabbed – barely alive. Jonathan found me trying to crawl to the hospital. My heart was about to quit.”

He opened the case and handed Jonathan a paint sprayer powered by a large CO2 cylinder. He then placed a stand on a table and set up a curved screen behind it to catch overspray.

“Thank ye, lad,” Jonathan said. One at a time, he clamped Mike’s shades into the stand and sprayed the lenses with a fine, even mist. The spray seemed to dry in just a few seconds.

Mike tried the first pair and nodded. “They’re almost twice a dark as before,” he announced. “If I’d known you could do this, I wouldn’t have ordered the others.”

He glanced at his watch.

“I hate to say ‘thank you’ and run, but I should get going. Pete and his crew will be waiting for me in Bayer’s Lake. Can you run Carrie home, Tony?”

“You will not!” Carrie declared. “I’m coming. I’ll wait with Pete, wherever he’s waiting. I’m sure there’s some sort of command van or trailer or something. They have to monitor those infrared sensors from somewhere.”

Mike could see from Carrie’s demeanour that there was no point in arguing.

“I’ll tag along and keep her company,” Tony said.

“And we’re off to work,” Jonathan announced. “Poor Jason’s not fully awake yet. He’s the first I’ve seen who can arise so early, so young. Mind ye, there’s my ancient blood in him.”

Mike gathered up the various devices provided by Tony and the police, and started carrying them to his Grand Cherokee. “I guess we can call Nigel later,” he said.

Tony clapped a hand on Mike’s shoulder. “In the words of Henry V, as per the Great Bard, ‘Once more into the breach, dear friends.’”

4: Surprise

A homeless bum in a large, ragged overcoat shuffled along through the construction site, rummaging in dumpsters and piles of rubble. He was stooped and hunchbacked, sporting a moth-eaten stocking cap on his head. His face was grimy, almost black. Finding nothing but off-cuts of lumber and drywall, he displayed an air of disappointment as he continued to meander along, his path gradually straying in the direction of the unfinished high-rise.

Once in the shadows of the framing girders his demeanour changed completely. Ducking behind a large girder, he shed the coat and stocking cap, checked in all directions, then made for the elevator shaft in the center of the large concrete floor.

The hunchbacked look was created by a black nylon backpack. A shoulder holster supported a large-magazined air pistol under his left arm, a spare magazine under his right arm, and two flash-bang grenades at each side of his muscular chest. At his waste was a wide belt with a pouch at each hip and four holstered devices, each about the size of a deck of cards, only three times as thick. Tucked into the belt were three Celtic knives called *sgian dubh*, with three-and-a-half inch blades, all sharp.

He slipped off the backpack, forced the elevator door open with his hands, and, leaning against one side of the aperture, took out a motorized device, then shouldered the pack. He glanced down the shaft for a second, noting the black depths of the basement levels,

then, taking a deep breath, leaped out into the blackness and caught one of the cables with a gloved hand. Gripping the cable with his feet, he clamped the device into place on the cable, tested his weight on it, then clipped a line from the device to his belt.

Once he'd activated the device, he relaxed his grip and let the motorized car lift him up the shaft. When the battery power of the car began to show signs of fading, he pulled an LED flashlight from his belt and shone it upward. The bottom of the car was just twenty feet away. Once at the bottom of the car, he shut the device off.

You were expecting a trap door in the floor of the car? he chided himself.

Gripping the cable with his feet and one hand, just like before, he unclamped the car and, gripping the cable between the toes of his ninja boots, reached out. He couldn't reach the other cable. He took a deep, patient breath, and retreated ten feet down the cable. He tried swinging toward the back of the shaft, but there wasn't enough give in the cable. He tucked the clamp of the device into his belt, shone his light on the lift cable at the back, memorized the location, then turned out the light. He kept the image of the lift cable in his mind, then, surging with his arms and feet, threw himself away from the cable and into darkness. *Just picture Tarzan leaping for that next branch in the dark,* he told himself.

His hands caught the lift cable, and his feet struck the back wall, bracing him. Gripping the cable with his feet, he clamped the motorized car into place and turned it back on. It went about three feet, then died. Then the car slipped downward an inch. Mike's hand shot up and grabbed the cable.

Great, I get to play Spider-man again. What the hell, it's only a two-hundred-foot drop.

He unclamped the car, let it hang, then, pulling with his right hand, heaved upward, grabbing the cable with

his left. Three times more he repeated this. There was a tingle in his head and a dazzling before his eyes. He forced his eyes shut.

Relax, he told himself. Well, as much as anyone can relax in this position.

He opened his eyes. His vision was clear, sharper. He expected to be in the shadow of the car, between the car and the shaft wall. The car wasn't there; it was about a foot below his feet.

Shit! How did I go that far in three hand-pulls?

He could easily make out the descending portion of the lift cable that attached to the car roof. With another Tarzan-like leap, he made it to that cable and lowered himself onto the roof.

"What's your progress, Mike?" It was O'Brien's voice.

Mike lay back on the roof and closed his eyes, letting his nerves settle.

"Mike, are you there?" O'Brien hissed.

"I'm here," Mike whispered. "Don't get anxious. Who knows whether the perps can hear me. I'm atop the elevator car, considering my options. Out."

He power breathed a few more times, forcing extra oxygen into his blood, then checked the roof for an access hatch. He eased the hatch up just enough to peer inside the car. It was empty, no lights. He unclipped the motorized car and stowed it in his pack, then eased himself down into the car, and lowered the lid.

To his eyes, the interior wasn't very dark – he could make out the button panel. He examined the rubber edges of the double doors. There was something attached near the bottom on the other side. He could just see the inner edges of something small on each side, but he had a hunch. He unclipped a flick-blade knife from his belt. The blade was carbon steel with a minimal nickel content. It would respond to a magnet. He flicked it open and eased it toward the two objects and felt the tip of the blade pull toward the left object.

He smiled and closed the knife, clipping it back on his belt.

The left side was a permanent magnet. That meant the right was a switch, probably to an alarm, hopefully not to a detonator. He rooted in his backpack and found the device he sought. It had been provided by a fledgling vampire, a police detective named Kamensky. He'd been sent to frighten Mike's son and force Mike home along a predicted path that would enable Kamensky to waylay him. Things had gone badly for Kamensky. Now Mike had the device used to trigger his alarm system, using magnetism to open the switch.

He activated it, and placed it so that it held the switch open while he eased the doors open just a crack.

Shoes – legs – someone was standing across the hall from the door, waiting. As expected, when Mike raised his glance, he saw a Glock handgun.

Now what? he thought.

He went back to the roof of the car. The front edges of the car rode in a track. Standing atop the car, he was almost in line with the safety doors on the next floor. He checked – no magnetized switches – then forced the doors apart. The nineteenth floor was also finished. Boy was it finished! The entire top floor was a palatial residence for the multimillionaire entrepreneur. He drew his dart pistol and advanced, exploring silently. He'd been hoping for a stairway to Michael's offices below, but was doomed to disappointment. The only access was the elevator and another private elevator.

Perhaps this floor uses the same ductwork, he hoped. The heating vents were in the floor. In a corridor wall he found a large, filtered return vent. He pulled off the grill and removed the filter. Peering with his LED light, he found that the duct dropped below floor level and T-ed into a horizontal duct. He removed his backpack, climbed in, and eased himself down until he was lying prone in the duct. There was just enough

room for him to move. Ears alert, he crept along, moving in the direction of air suction to keep any possible airborne debris out of his face, all the while watching for another opening. He wasn't long in finding it. This one was in the floor of the duct, meaning it would be in the ceiling of the floor below – just what he needed.

Prying the filter out took a moment. He laid it aside and listened. There were distant voices, but nothing near. Getting his fingertips into the grillwork, he increased his palm pressure until the grill swung downward. He listened again. No noise nearby. He took a deep breath and lowered himself until he was hanging by his hands, then dropped lightly to the carpeted floor.

He was just outside a conference room. Through the glass doors he had a view of the room and three walls of windows. The glass was tinted grey, blocking out almost all the UV light, almost like looking through dark glasses. The outside view told him this was the eastern end of the building. Good. If Michaels wasn't here, that meant his offices were most likely in the opposite location. Any perps on this floor might be spread out, but they'd be more numerous near Michaels. He could now approach that area confident that there was no one behind him.

He moved along the hall, ears alert, his mind questing the minds of others.

"I'm in," he said, "advancing toward the estimated location of the hostage. No one in sight yet. There's a guard near the elevator."

Partway along the corridor he pulled one of the infrared sensors from its holster, peeled off the strip, and stuck it on the wall. He doubled back, went around to the back corridor, and advanced to the corresponding location. A man wearing a shoulder holster came out of a room, coffee cup in hand. Mike took aim and dropped the man with a shot to the back

of the neck.

Holstering the gun, he dragged the man into a small kitchen, and secured his hands and feet with thick plastic ties the police had provided. He removed the man's weapon, a Glock, ejected the clip – steel-jacketed, armour-piercing rounds. Someone wasn't kidding. He stashed the gun and clip in a heating vent. Upon leaving the room, he positioned another infrared sensor.

“Two sensors in place,” he said. “You getting anything?”

“One more, closer to the action, would be nice,” O'Brien said. “It looks like one man on the other side at the elevator, two coming toward you, and five or six in the big office on the end.”

“I'll keep planting them as I progress,” he promised.

Two coming toward me. Need cover – let them pass, and take them from behind.

He could hear conversation down the hall. He ducked into the next room. It was a small washroom.

“Who was that?” he heard one ask. “He didn't look like Jacobs.”

Mike eased the door shut until the latch clicked. He waited, then tried to ease the door open a crack to peek. The door was locked. He checked the knob. Turning it to unlock didn't help. A trap?

Shit! You get suckered too easily, he thought. *Some commando you are!*

Searching the cabinet under the sink, he found a can of air freshener and a bottle of rubbing alcohol. He snatched a hand towel from the rack, rapped it around the aerosol can, and used his flick knife to press the cloth into the door jam. He could hear the sound of the two men chuckling outside the door.

“Some commando,” one said.

Mike agreed, then poured the bottle of rubbing alcohol all over the towel. He pulled a Zippo lighter

from his pocket. He paused, glancing at the scrimshaw decoration of a brigantine sailing past a lighthouse. It had been his father's, an accessory to the crime of him having died of lung cancer. He lit the towel, then retreated away from the door. He drew the air gun and waited.

"We both shoot through the door on three," a voice said. "One..."

BOOM! The blast blew the door out of the door frame – way more than he expected.

He stepped to the doorway before the air cleared, spotted the two men, and dropped them with two shots. He took a moment to drag them inside, secure their hands and feet with plastic ties, then propped the door in place as he left.

So much for the element of surprise, he thought.

"What was that!" O'Brien demanded.

"An IED," Mike said. "I got locked in the can and had to improvise. Two more down. Anyone approaching?"

"Two coming, same path as the previous."

Mike ducked into the kitchen and waited, gun drawn, listening. He hadn't long to wait. Footsteps came running down the hall. He waited until he heard them moving the propped-up door, then stepped out and fired two darts.

"Two more down," he announced.

He secured them with the other two, then doubled back the way he'd come. Perhaps, if they expected him in the other hall, this would provide some element of surprise.

There were two men at the elevator.

"There," one declared, pointing at him. *Bang.* Mike felt the bullet wiz past his ear, then dropped both men before the second could aim.

"Hey!" An unexpected third came out of a second bathroom, gun aimed at Mike's head.

Mike looked chagrined, but just holstered his

weapon and folded his arms.

“Get ’em up,” the man ordered, but Mike shook his head.

The man advanced closer, positioning his Glock just inches from Mike’s face.

Mike’s arms unfolded at high speed. Right palm struck the Glock, left palm chopped into the wrist, leaving the Glock in Mike’s hand. Mike drove the gun into the man’s forehead, dropping him like a stone.

“Six down,” he said, then planted another infrared device. “How’s the imaging now?”

“Not five-by-five, but better.”

“Your ‘one by the elevator’ was two by the elevator and one in the can on this side.”

“Somebody must have moved. We’re now showing three in the room at the end. Assuming one is Michaels, that leaves you with two unsubs remaining.”

“Unless there’s another in a third bathroom,” Mike quipped.

He checked the washroom and found it clear. Nor did he encounter further obstacles before the large office at the end. He dropped down and wormed his way along the floor until he reached the corner wall. The double doors in the middle were glass but, unlike the conference room, there were no glass walls. He moved close to the door and planted another device.

“Way better!” O’Brien said in his ear. “We’ve still got three in the room. One seated near the outer wall, maybe at a desk, and two standing between him and the center of the room. Uh-oh – we’ve got another coming out of a room in the other corridor, coming back toward the office.”

Great! Mike thought. He considered waiting for him, but liked the idea of approaching the office door from the other side. Rolling away from the junction, he ran back down the hall, moving fast and silent. Halfway down the back hall he spotted his quarry. He maintained his pace, drawing his weapon. He was ten

feet from him when the man stopped and turned. Mike dropped him with a dart in the chest. This one he left in the hall after securing him, then he headed for the office.

At the corner near the doors he planted his last sensor.

“Now we’re cooking,” O’Brien declared. “It’s almost HDTV. I still say Michaels is at the desk and the two remaining unsubs are standing in front of the desk, maybe leaning against it.”

“I’ll let you know,” Mike whispered.

He brought the air gun up in classic police approach stance and edged toward the doors. He paused to note that the hinges were inside – the doors swung inward. He shouldered the closer door open, threw a smoke ball, and stepped into the room. Muzzle flashes blazed in the smoke, but Mike wasn’t where they’d briefly seen him. Two shots dropped the men to the floor in front of the desk. As the smoke cleared he recognized Michaels, seated at the desk.

“Well-done, Mr. Cameron,” Michaels said. He seemed shaken, possibly surprised by Mike’s success. There was a hint of an accent – Baltic region?

“You know my name?” Mike asked.

“Come now, Mr. Cameron. In our local circles, the sword arm of Lord Dewhurst is something of a celebrity. There’s an entire community, albeit a secret community, ready to step in and help you as the need arises. You are ridding us of a dangerous nuisance – these renegade killers.”

Mike’s senses came alert, triggered by the words, by the accent, and now the smell. He reached for the mind, the thoughts, and hit that foreign wall he’d come to know. He stared at the eyes – normal eyes. It took a moment. He moved to one side, waiting for Michaels to follow him with his eyes. All the room lighting seemed designed to either light up Michaels or light up his desk. Mike suddenly realized that the light

wouldn't illuminate him very well for Michaels. But the light hit Michaels's eyes just right, outlining the contact lenses.

"Would you be more comfortable removing the contacts?" he asked.

Michaels smiled. "I'm quite used to them, but, yes, it is a relief to be rid of them. It also allows for greater honesty between us. I'm sorry for tricking you here. And I thank you for using tranquilizer darts instead of bullets. I was expecting – I should say hoping for – fists and feet against my security people. Had you killed any of them I would have been disappointed, but it was a price I was prepared to pay."

"Is he saying what I think he's saying?" O'Brien asked in his ear.

"The mission was a ruse," Mike confirmed.

"Not a ruse, Mr. Cameron, a test," Michaels said. "I wonder if you could turn off your communicator so that we might speak in private. I'm sure you can fill them in later. Some of what we say may be more than CSIS would want certain people on the other end to hear."

Mike nodded. "I should be out in fifteen minutes," he said, then shut off his transmitter.

Michaels removed his contacts and placed them in a small container of fluid. As Mike suspected, the contacts were trimmed in white, with brown inner ring, making his irises and pupils seem smaller than they actually were. Michaels was a vampire.