

*She lay awake, staring at the ceiling wondering for the umpteenth time if she should go out to the kitchen for a glass of warm milk. Pulling back the blankets she swung her legs onto the icy floor. Shivering, she pulled a threadbare peach terrycloth robe about her. She slipped her feet into a pair of fuzzy lamb slippers. Wriggling her toes, a smile tugged at the corner of her mouth. She made her way into the kitchen, walking through the pitch-dark halls by rote. She opened the refrigerator and retrieved the milk. As she was reaching for a glass, a cold hand came across her mouth. The glass tumbled from her fingers, shattering on the floor around her feet. She felt several shards dig into the soles of her slipper covered feet as she was dragged from the room.*

*The sound of tearing cloth shattered the silence of the secluded house. Screams rent the night, echoing for miles yet reaching no living soul.*

Michael Taggart stood just inside the room. The heavy wood furniture had been overturned and even turned into splinters in some cases. In one corner someone had already lost his lunch. Several more looked like they wanted to. He crossed the floor of what had once been an elegant bedroom, surveying the crime scene. "Dr. Montoya?" He gestured to the mutilated body. "What have we got?"

"Caucasian female. Mid to late twenties. Been dead less than twenty hours, if I had to guess. I'll be more exact when I get her back to the office. She died from severe trauma. Her neck is broken."

"She sustained several lacerations as well." He murmured thoughtfully.

"Where's all the blood?"

Michael looked up. He met the county coroner's deep green eyes. "Where's all the blood," he echoed. "I don't suppose there's blood anywhere else in the house?" He took in the shaken head with stoicism. "Another one for the serial killer." He rubbed the back of his neck. "Just great!" He dropped his hand to his side with a sharp slap. "Get back to work. I need that report on my desk tonight."

"Tonight?! Tonight when?"

"Top priority Maggie. Tonight!" He turned and left. Moving deeper into the house, he found the master bedroom. It had been tossed. Clothing was torn and strewn everywhere. The scent of perfume wafted up from broken bottles, overpowering any other scent that might be there. Taking a handkerchief from his pocket, he covered his nose and mouth before stepping inside. Coughing, he pulled a pair of rubber gloves from his pocket and donned them. Running his finger over each surface he passed. When he reached the bedside table he found a book lying face down on its surface.

"She was neat as a pin. An artist, according to her financial records."

He looked up and found a lieutenant in the doorway. "Does she have a name?"

"Madelaine Grey, Detective Taggart."

"Grey?" Michael dropped his head into his hand. "This just keeps getting deeper. Thank you lieutenant. Get back to work." He lifted the book from the table and idly flipped through the pages. His attention was caught a few pages into the book. Backing up a page, he scanned the careful script again.

*He followed me to the gallery again today. I don't know what he wants. I wish he'd stop following me.*

Reading further he found several more entries talking about a mystery man following her.

*He was in the west hall again. I ran into him coming out of the exhibit hall. His hands were icy as they bit into my shoulders. Made me wish I had worn my jacket. He scares me.*

A sound outside the room startled him from his reading. Snapping the book shut, he slipped it into a glassine bag. Glancing at his watch he hurried out of the room. Pointing at the cop guarding the front door, he gestured with the book. "I'm returning to the station." Handing the book to the uniformed officer, he frowned. "Have this booked into evidence and see that I get copies ASAP."

"Yes sir."

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A single lamp burned in the darkness illuminating a snifter of amber liquid. A slender white hand appeared from the shadows and lifted the glass from the table. Ice clinked hollowly as the empty glass was set back down. A phone rang and was answered. "Yes?" Silence reigned for several moments. "I told you, she's dead." Another silence

reigned. "I'll take care of it. No! Don't ask me that again!" A dark shadow detached itself from the rest and moved swiftly away from the light. Moments later a door slammed.

He stood on the narrow ledge. His keen eyes watched the lighted window more than fifty feet away. He watched the shadow's moving on the wall. His patience was unmatched. When the light went out, he waited three minutes. One step forward and he was in free fall. His body plummeted towards the ground, even as his spirit acquired wings. He almost lost himself in the joy of his death defying flight. He let loose a high-pitched squeal, which echoed off everything around him. He bunched his legs up in preparation to land. His feet hit the sidewalk moments before the elevator reached the ground floor, his long black coat flapping and settling around him. Fading back against the building he waited for his quarry to appear.

The seconds were ticking slowly by when he caught a whiff of the target's cologne. "Mmm. A little spice always adds to the flavor." He watched closely as the door opened. His foot was kicked up on the wall and he was studiously looking at his fingernails when the man came out of the building. He smiled nonchalantly and nodded. "Good evening detective." His voice was like liquid smoke, hanging in the air. "Got a few minutes?" He pulled the collar of his coat up around his ears and pushed away from the wall. The cop was eyeing him suspiciously and he almost smiled.

"I'm sorry, I don't have any change."

"I'm not interested in your change detective. I have information for you." He smiled slowly. "I know who your serial killer is." *That got his attention!* He almost chuckled as the cop's eyes widened. "Interested?" He stuffed his hands in his pockets and started down the street whistling a jaunty tune.

"Wait! Just a minute! What do you mean you know who the killer is? Where'd you get the information?"

He stopped and let the cop come abreast of him. "It's a long story. Walk with me and I'll tell you." Gesturing forward, he started walking again. "It was a dark and stormy night." He chuckled as the cop fell into step with him. "Corny line, I know, but it's true. He approached me about six months ago when we had that really nasty storm." His mind flitted back to the stormy night he'd been on this same bridge. "He approached me on this bridge. I was out walking, minding my own business. Called himself Fletcher. Tiberius Fletcher." He turned to look out at the water. "Was right here that he asked me to help him kill his first victims."

"You turned him down, I assume, since you are coming to me with this information?"

"Naturally. I don't go in for that kind of business. I told him as much. He said he'd heard my name mentioned in connection with the Harper killings." He shrugged elegantly. "I simply told him that I'd been exonerated and left it at that. All I know is that he left me with the same calling card as he leaves on his victims." The pale man pulled an object from his pocket and handed it to the cop. "He leaves a silver hatpin on each of his victims. He gave me one that night and told me if I ever changed my mind to look him up."

"Mind if I keep this?"

"By all means detective. It's why I gave it to you in the first place. I just want vermin like this to be removed from the streets. His kind are dangerous for society."

"I understand completely, sir. If you could just tell me your name and give me an address where you can be reached. Also, you'll want to stay in the area. I'd like to confirm your information and may need to question you further."

"I understand detective. My name is Adeo Sidonius. 7312 Overton Rd."

"You're a local?"

"I have been here for many years, if that is what you are wondering." He felt someone watching him and turned casually. A feral smile crept onto his face as he recognized the man he was setting up. "Detective, what would you say if I could tell you where Fletcher is right now?"

"That'd be fortuitous. Why?"

The pale man gestured. "Because he's standing right over there watching us." When the cop turned and started after the suspect, he leapt into the air and disappeared over the railing.

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Michael started off after the man that his informant had implicated. Turning back, he spoke, "Mr. Sidonius, please..." He trailed off as he realized that the man had disappeared. With a frown, he turned back towards the suspect. Crossing the street, he walked up to the short, balding man. It surprised the detective that the man just stood there waiting for him. He stopped before the man and noticed a spicy aroma. "Tiberius Fletcher?"

"That'd be me. S'pose he told ya that I was responsible for the killings?" The detective nodded and pulled the pin from his pocket. "Thought so. Damned foreigner. I knew I shouldn't a got mixed up with the likes of him."

“Mr. Fletcher, I’m Detective Michael Taggart. Are you trying to tell me that you know he implicated you in the killings?”

“Well duh!”

“I see. Mr. Fletcher, would you mind coming down to the precinct? I’d like to fill out a statement and get your side of the story. You do realize that he’s implicated you as the murderer, right?”

“Yeah, I understand. You arresting me, or am I goin on my own volition?”

“I’m not arresting you, so long as you cooperate.” The detective gestured back down the street. “Shall we?” They got up to the fifth floor and he opened the door to an office. “Step inside and take a seat.” Switching on the lights, he moved around the desk and sat. Frowning at the balding man, he gestured to a seat again. “Sit down, Mr. Fletcher.”

“You got a swanky office here detective. What’s a desk jockey like you make?”

“Mr. Fletcher,” Michael steepled his fingers. “Perhaps you should sit down and start at the beginning. Tell me what you know about the Atropos Killings.”

“That freak you were just talking to, Trimmer, he approached me several weeks before the first killing. Said he was looking for someone to do the dirty work for him. Couldn’t get his lily-white hands dirtied with someone else’s blood. I says to him, that I’m not in that line of work no more. Did my time in Sing-Sing for it. Don’t want nothin more to do with that work. I’m an honest man now.”

“And just what **do** you do, Mr. Fletcher?” Michael tapped some instructions into his computer and brought up the Criminal Investigations database. He searched for Fletcher’s record and nearly gagged when it came up.

“I’m a commodities broker now. I deal in art mostly.”

“I see. And Mr. Fletcher, when was the last time you spoke to your parole officer?”

“Six months ago. Don’t see him for another two weeks. Why?”

“Just gathering as much as I can. Now, Mr. Fletcher, when this man approached you. What exactly did he ask you to do?”

“Well, see. He asked me to ice a couple of broads that had solicited him. Said they were too... independent, if ya follow me? Wanted me to do em while I did it. Said it was a reward for being good at my job.”

Michael Taggart felt his stomach churn at the images of defiling women came to him. “And you didn’t report him to the cops when the women were found dead?”

“Shoot! Now why would I do that? You think I want my name linked with more killin? You gotta be outta your ever lovin.”

Michael watched carefully as the seeds he’d planted began to take root and the man’s tirade lost steam. “Mr. Fletcher,” he said quietly. “An honest citizen would have reported the crimes. He would have helped bring the killer to justice.”

“Detective, I ain’t sayin that I’m in on this, but what do you think it woulda looked like to my parole officer? He woulda had em throw me back into the clink! Stupid copper! Never have trusted you smarmy bastards.”

Michael pushed a button hidden under the edge of his desk. “Sit down Mr. Fletcher. I’d like to hear your story from beginning to end but you have to calm down. Remember, you’re here of your own volition.” He watched the agitated man pace. Shaking his head, he gave no outward sign of the relief he felt when the door opened and two uniformed officers stepped in. Rising from his desk, he came around the edge and... “Oof!”

“You lied to me copper! You said I was here at my own volition!”

“Mr. Fletcher, you were... until now.” Michael straightened and gestured to the two cops that had stepped in to restrain the man. “Arrest him.” He rubbed fingers over his still tender stomach. “Book him on charges of assaulting a police officer.”

“Yes sir, Detective Taggart. You need a doc?”

Michael waved the officers away. “No, I’ll be alright. Watch his right hook, though.”

“Yes sir.”

Michael walked back to the computer and hit the print button. Following the officers out the door, he locked his office and joined them in booking. He took notes on what came out of the suspect’s pockets. When the silver hatpin came out of his jacket, the detective grimaced. “Damn!” He threw his notebook across the room, hitting the two-way glass in the observation room. “Smarmy bastard indeed!” He stomped out of the room and into the booking area. “I also want this man charged with homicide. We’ve found our serial killer.” Sickened by the smug look on the prisoner’s face, he turned and stalked from the room.

*The shadows concealed his face; his hands were sheathed in black leather. He watched the woman through the trees. Her red hair picked up the moonlight. His breath caught as her dress dropped and her alabaster skin was revealed. A predatory grin spread across his lips. Moving as silently as the breeze, he slipped through the trees. He watched her move towards the water and licked his lips. At the edge of the trees he shed his coat and gloves.*

*The moonlight glinted off his snow-white shirt. He stepped slowly across the sand, dressed like a buccaneer of old. When he saw her emerge from the water he glided to its edge. His eyes glittered, jewel bright. A song, ancient in origin and tongue spilled from his lips. He drew her as a siren draws ships in the sea. He opened his arms to her.*

Detective Michael Taggart stared down at the body. It was bloated and unnaturally white. Disgust burned the back of his throat as lack of sleep burned his eyes. He turned away from the scene and trudged back to his car. Lifting the radio microphone from its cradle he called dispatch. "Lucy run a check on the cell block. Find out if Mr. Fletcher had any visitors last night or today."

"Will do."

He waited several minutes listening to the general chatter coming across the line. Accepting the cup of coffee that was thrust under his nose without looking up.

"Michael? No visitors but he did make a phone call."

"Thanks Lucy." Dropping the microphone he turned to look out over the beach. Uniformed officers dotted the sand like ants marching to a picnic. Several more filtered through the edge of the trees like hummingbirds searching for nectar. Shaking his head he pushed away from the car. "Dammit! Who is your accomplice? Who are you working with?"

"There was no calling card this time, sir. All we found was this."

Michael looked up to see the uniformed officer that had handed him the coffee holding out a glassine bag. Inside it was a scrap of cloth. He took the bag and examined it. The material was very old, the lace exquisite, and embroidered in the outside corner were two small letters. He couldn't quite make out what they were. "I'm going to take this back to the station. Give it to the lab boys. Thank you, sergeant." Nodding absently, he turned and slid behind the wheel of the car. Starting it up he turned to the officer. "Get this crime scene buttoned up."

"Yes sir."

The drive back to the precinct was filled with thoughtful silence. Broken only by the static and random chatter of the radio beside him. His mind was slowly processing the information it had been fed. *Fed... food. I need to eat something. Mom always did tell me that I thought better on a full stomach.* Pulling into his slot he switched the engine off. Lifting the glassine bag from the seat beside him the detective tapped it against the steering wheel. Deep in thought he didn't see the pale man dressed in a long black coat and a wide-brimmed hat approach. A sharp rap on the window jerked him out of his reverie.

"Detective Taggart?"

Michael recovered from his shock and gestured the man back. Opening his door, he stuffed the glassine bag into his pocket and got out. "Mr. Sidonius, what can I do for you?"

"I heard you caught the killer. Does this mean that the murders will stop now?"

The detective shook his head. "I'm sorry Mr. Sidonius. I'm not at liberty to discuss the details of this case. If you have any further information for me, I'd be happy to speak to you in my office. Otherwise, if you will excuse me? I have a great deal of work to do and my day is just beginning."

"Forgive me, detective. I am just worried about my own safety and yours."

"I'm trained to take care of myself in any situation. As for your own, did Mr. Fletcher ever threaten violence against you?" He eyed the man carefully. There was something niggling at the back of his brain something off color.

"Once or twice. I am glad he is behind bars again."

"Again?" Taggart took a step towards the door. "Why don't you come to my office, Mr. Sidonius? We can discuss what you know about Mr. Fletcher." He opened the door and gestured for the pale man to precede him. "I think it's time we had a chat, don't you?"

"I don't know that I can really tell you anything at all, detective. I don't know Fletcher all that well. Just what I was able to dig up about him in old newspaper archives."

"Well then we'll have a nice short chat. I'd be interested to see if my information coincides with yours." He watched the man shrug and reach under his coat. Michael's eyes were alert, his body tensed in an instant. He felt a bead of sweat trickle under his collar. His hand itched to reach under his jacket. When the pale man's slim hand came out from under his coat holding a plastic baggie and a folder, he relaxed marginally.

"This is everything I was able to dig up and the letters he sent me."

The detective frowned. "Come on. We can discuss this in my office." He led the way to his office and unlocked the door. Going around the desk he brought up his computer. Seeing a flashing window, he gestured to the visitor's seat. "Give me just a minute and we'll get down to business." Opening the window he read the message and blanched. "No!"

"Detective?"

“Huh?” Michael looked up. “Sorry. Inner office memo.” He cleared his throat. “Now, where were we? Ah yes. You had more information for me. May I?” He gestured across the desk for the folder and baggie.

“Of course. I don’t want to sound rude, but you look like someone just walked over your grave.”

Michael shrugged his shoulders. “I’m all right.” He took the folder and flipped through its contents. There were several old newspaper clippings concerning the trial and Mr. Fletcher’s eventual incarceration at Ossining prison. There really wasn’t anything new. He’d read court reports on the case until his eyes bled. His head ached just remembering the midnight oil he’d burned the night before. Flipping the folder closed he set it on the desk between them. “This matches the information I have. Now,” he gestured to the baggie, “why don’t you tell me about those.”

“These are the threatening letters I was telling you about. He sent them from neighboring townships, even as far away as New York City once. Never signed them, but I could tell his handwriting.”

“Hmmm...” Michael dumped the contents of the baggie on his blotter. He picked up the top sheet and read it carefully. The letter was done in a looping script. It requested that a man named The Trimmer meet him. The next letter added a threat. There were seventeen letters in all, each one more viscous than the last. “How long have you been receiving these? And who is the Trimmer?”

“Since he first approached me. I was saddled with the name years ago.”

“Mr. Sidonius, I have to ask. Why didn’t you come to the cops before now? Why did you wait six months before you reported these letters? Were you planning a little vigilante justice?” His eyes narrowed when laughter spilled from the man’s lips.

“Now why would I do something that stupid? That would imply that I thought I could get away with it. We no longer live in the colonies. Time has marched forward. This is no longer the time when one can safely be a vigilante.”

Michael’s hand crept under the edge of his desk, his finger hovering over the button embedded there. “You haven’t answered my questions?” He kept his voice carefully schooled, despite his growing trepidation. “Why did you wait for so long before coming to us with this information?”

“Detective, I am a private man. I do not go out seeking trouble.”

Michael nodded. “Very commendable sir, but the point remains that you did not come to us with this immediately. Do you realize how that looks to us? For my part I’d be willing to give you the benefit of doubt. However, you need to be straight with me right now. Why didn’t you come to the cops when you got the first letter?”

“I wasn’t worried about the threats. I have received threats before. I have survived.”

“Mr. Sidonius, I am inclined to believe that you can take care of yourself. What I really want to know is why, when you knew this man had asked you to help him, didn’t you come to the police and report it? You could have saved those women.”

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*He is pathetic! Look at the way he scrambles to understand without pointing fingers. How long should I play with him? He is weak.* An almost feral growl erupted from his lips as the detective continued to probe. “Detective Taggart.” He held up a hand. “I understand how suspicious it looks. But you have to understand something. I am from a very influential family. For as long as I can remember there have been threats against someone. It is not something I have ever really worried about.”

“I’ve never heard a name like Sidonius before. What is that, Russian? Italian? French?”

“Roman.” Adeo almost laughed at the incredulous look the cop gave him. “I come from a very old family.”

“After the first women died, which it’s apparent you knew about. Why didn’t you come in and report it?”

Adeo rose. “I think we’re done here. I would keep Fletcher under watchful eyes if I were you.” With a swirl of his long coat, he stole out of the office before the detective could even blink.

*I lie here awake every night wondering what its all for. Shadows surround me always. I never feel the warmth of the sun. Why do I keep killing them? They didn’t do anything to me. What is it about these women that compels me to kill them?* Adeo lay stretched in a patch of moonlight. Through the skylight directly above his bed, he could see the stars their pale cold orbs winking billions of years in the past. The weight of his crimes crushed in on him from all sides sending a spike of pain from ages past lancing through him. His eyes closed like the curtains of a stage are drawn after the last act. Waves of pain rolled over him. Crashing like an ocean at high tide, then easing to gentle swells. Relief came when he slipped away into oblivion.

Six hours later he rose. Gone were the fleeting questions. Gone was the doubt. He showered and dressed in denim jeans, a ragged t-shirt, and leather. An anticipatory grin formed for an instant before it was replaced by a look



The detective nodded. "Been a few years since I had someone sneak into my bedroom. Call it reflex. What's your message?"

"Close the file on this one. Give up the chase. Just let the women die. The alternative could be detrimental to your health."

"That's supposed to frighten me? Come on. Surely you can do better than that."

"You don't want to listen?"

Michael shook his head. "I can't do that and you know it." He found himself lying flat on the floor in the next second. The man kneeling on his chest looked familiar yet for some reason he couldn't place him. "What are you going to do about it? If you kill me another cop will just come in and take my place. Turn yourself in and save us some trouble." Darkness stole over him, a cruel chuckle following him into a disturbing nightmare scene.

"You should have listened to me Michael. It would have been a simple thing. Just let the women die and leave me alone. But no, you have to be the hero. Well... There is a price for your heroism."

The face of something beyond the grave loomed out of the darkness. Light glinted off of its teeth, all of which were razor-sharp. The face loomed over him for a second and then buried itself in his throat. There was a soft slurping sound in his right ear that made Michael sick. The last thing he remembered was the sharp lancing pain up his arm.

His head throbbed. Without opening his eyes he knew he was alone. There was a cold burning sensation in his arm. Putting a hand to his right arm, he sat up and opened his eyes. The lamp still burned on his night table. Looking around, he noticed nothing out of place. The gun still lay on the bed. The only difference was the curtains billowing before the open bedroom window. He looked down at his arm. His eyes grew wide and he scrambled to the light for a better look. A long, thin, red line ran from his inner elbow to his wrist. "What the hell?" Surging to his feet, he shoved his legs into his pants and pulled on a shirt. "Damn," he hissed.

His head swam as the fire shot up his arm. Leaving his shirtsleeve unbuttoned, he slipped his holster on and slid his gun home. Stumbling out the door, he managed to make it to his car and crawl behind the wheel. He reached for the radio with his left hand. Dropping the microphone, he hit the power switch. It took him two more tries before he managed to retrieve the microphone. "Lucy," he rasped keying the mic. "Lucy, its Michael. I need medical assist..."

"BP seventy over forty! Heart rate sixty-two and falling. If we don't get him stable now, we're gonna lose him!"

*White light filtered around the edges of his vision. Shadows rapidly flickered past.*

"BP forty over seventeen! We're losing him!"

*"You wanted to play the hero Michael. Was it really worth the price? Don't you want to go out in a blaze of glory, rather than on an operating table?" A cold chuckle filled the air. "I could make the pain go away."*

*"What did you do to me? You bastard! What did you do to me?" The angry yell echoed through his head. "What did you do?"*

*"You will soon see."*

"He's flat-lining!" A monotonic hum filled the room. "Get the paddles. Charge to one-fifty." Electronic whirring reached a harmonic peak. "Clear!"

One hundred fifty joules of electricity coursed through his skin and straight to his heart. Michael reared up off the bed and flopped back like a dead fish.

"Charge to two hundred." The harmonic peaked again. "Clear!"

Two hundred joules of electricity coursed through Michael's skin and into his chest cavity. He reared up off the table and flopped back. Rhythmic beeping filled the tense silence and a cheer went up in the room.

"All right. Monitor his vitals. Someone get Laboratory up here to take some blood. I want a complete panel done on his chest. Move people!"

Twenty-seven hours later, Michael opened his eyes slowly. "What the hell happened to me," he muttered.

"It appears you had some sort of foreign substance introduced into your bloodstream. It caused you to have a mild heart attack." A white-coated doctor held out a hand. "Good evening Detective Taggart. Frank Delaney. I operated on you."

Michael shook the man's hand. "Dr. Delaney... Delaney? Frank G. Delaney?" His eyes scrutinized the man before him. A sudden thought flickered in his mind like a candle. "Persian Gulf, '91."

The doctor nodded. "That's right. Do I know you?"

Michael cracked a wry smile. "Second Lieutenant Michael Taggart. You operated on my leg when we found that landmine. I was a Sergeant at the time."

"The stoic!" The doctor took his hand and pumped it up and down enthusiastically. "Sixteen years! Been a long time son. What happened to get you into the ER?"

"Someone attacked me in my bedroom last night. Gave me this." He showed the doctor his arm. "Knocked me out, did this, and disappeared."

"You want me to get an officer in here to fill out a report?"

Michael winced as the doctor prodded his arm. "I'll fill one out eventually. What exactly did you find, Doc?"

"Foreign agent introduced into your blood. Seems that whatever it was breaks down real easy and leaves no trace. I suspect from the amounts of broken down material we found in your system, that you weren't supposed to survive though." He stepped away for a moment. "I'm going to have to clean this up before it turns septic. Looks like it was done by a razor-sharp blade. I'll want to test it of course, but I'm pretty sure that's how they got the substance into your bloodstream."

"Likely," Michael agreed solemnly. "You better send an officer in. This is going to be a long night."

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Adeo smiled into the darkness. His visit had been fruitful. His stomach tightened and he sighed. The hunger was upon him. He growled softly and rose from his bed. Slipping his leather jacket on, he drifted into the night. The hunger drove him, sinking its teeth into him like it rarely did anymore. He searched the darkest parts of the city for his meal. He found her struggling with a large man, who m reeked of bourbon. A devil's smile twisted his lips as he started forward. "Hey pal! Let the lady go." He sauntered up to them and stopped. "She doesn't want your help man. Let her go."

"Beat it shrimp! This ain't yer concern."

He smiled wider. "But it is." His words flowed over the large guy like honey. Raising his left leg high, he planted his foot in the man's side. Ribs cracked and a howl of pain rent the night, followed by a scream that was abruptly cut off. He scuffled with the man for a few more minutes. When it was all said and done, the man lay on the sidewalk in an undignified heap, bleeding from the nose and ears. His leather jacket torn, Adeo turned back to the frightened woman. "Are you all right?"

"Please don't hurt me!"

He crouched down and put gentle hands on either side of her face. "Shh..." He smiled encouraging her to relax. "I'm going to walk you home now, all right? I wouldn't want you to be attacked again." He raised her to her feet and wrapped a protective arm around her shoulders. "It's all right miss. I'll make sure you get home safely."

"Stephanie."

He smiled at her murmur. "A very pretty name for such a nice lady." He pulled her close and walked down the street. When they were several blocks from where she had been attacked, he led her to a door. Lifting her hand, he caressed her flesh with his lips. He felt her shiver and smiled against her hand as he lingered. "May I call upon you again?"

"I know I don't know you very well, but would you come inside for a moment? I'm still scared. I mean what if he knows where I live? What if he breaks into my house? I'd be all alone... defenseless!"

Adeo raised his eyes to hers. Tightening his grip on her hand, he smiled. "Of course, my dear. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if that man came after you again." He followed her inside and closed the door, suppressing a chuckle of satisfaction. He dutifully inspected the house, looking for intruders. Finding none, he returned to the kitchen. "No prowlers," he said coming up behind her. "I'll be going now. You're safe. If you hear anything odd call the police." The hunger gnawed at him, robbing him of speech for a moment. *She smells so good.* His mouth watered and his teeth descended.

"Stay for coffee? It's the least I can do to say thank you."

He nodded in agreement, not trusting himself to speak yet. The change was still happening, the animal coming to the fore. His senses sharpened acutely. He smelled her musky scent and smiled. *She's turned on by me. Even better than I'd hoped.* His eyes picked up her every movement, right down to her trembling. He moved up behind her, his own body exuding a scent that would appeal to her. He gripped her shoulders and pulled her back against him. Weaving a web of erotic promise around her, he bent his head and pressed his lips to her flesh. His spell took firmer hold with each touch to her skin. He felt her submit and turned her to face him. He took her lips in a passionate kiss, losing himself in the flavor of her.

As the sun was rising, the woman reared up off the bed, lost in the pleasure of mating, oblivious of the man sucking the life from her body. He pulled away as she slumped back on the bed. A satisfied smile formed on his face

as he continued his assault on her lifeless body. A growl of animal pleasure rumbled from his throat several minutes later. The warmth bled from her body as he pulled away. He stared at her body as he dressed. Buttoning his shirt, he leaned down and placed a reverent kiss upon her lips. "Such beauty. Thank you for sharing it with me." The sun shone through the window making him sigh. "Another beautiful beginning to a beautiful day." He was whistling a jaunty tune as he stepped out the front door a minute later.

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Detective Michel Taggart felt like he'd been run over by a semi. He ran a hand down his lean face and found the sandpaper roughness of a day's growth. His eyes felt like they'd been dipped in coarse sand. He stared at the white walls of the hospital room. Splashes of color, from flowers sent by well wishers, broke the monotony. He ground his teeth in frustration. When the door opened, he smoothed his face into placid lines. The man in a dark suit that came through the door gave him pause.

"Detective Michael Taggart?"

"Can I help you?" Michael crossed his arms over his chest, feeling decidedly naked without his gun.

"Detective, I'm Lieutenant Stevenson, from Internal Affairs. I'd like to speak with you about the recent incident. Normally," Michael gestured the man to a seat. "Thank you. Now, normally we'd have you come down to the office. But given the circumstances, I'm here. Detective can you tell me, in your own words, what happened on the night of October twenty-third?"

Taggart leaned back against his pillows. "I was attacked in my home in the middle of the night."

"Mmhmm. And Detective, is it true that you were in the Marine Corps?"

Michael frowned. Mention of his military service rankled him. "That's correct. Now Active Duty Reserves. What is this all about Lieutenant?"

"Standard procedure, Mr. Taggart. Sir, can you tell me why you were removed from the..."

"I'm sorry Lieutenant. My military record is both classified and irrelevant here. Now if you wish to know what happened the other night I will tell you, otherwise get out." His eyes rested calmly on the man's face, though he felt less than calm. "I received a call that my suspect for the Atropos Killings was murdered in his cell. That is still under investigation. A man I could only identify as the serial killer I've been tracking broke into my house just after I received the call. He managed to knock me unconscious. When I came to I had this," he held up his arm revealing the gash. "I struggled out to my car and called dispatch. The next thing I knew I was waking up in the recovery room."

"I see. Detective why are you reluctant to talk about your military career? This is relevant, I assure you. It would seem that you are hiding something. Your behavior of late and the company you have been keeping have drawn the attention of IA. We just want to get to the bottom of this mystery. I hope you understand"

Michael's mouth set in a grim line. "Oh, I understand. I'm telling you right now. I have no connection to the killer. He's some twisted sociopath that we're hunting. My military career is not relevant here and requires particular government clearances to view. Are you telling me," he paused suddenly. "Are you telling me that I am under investigation because I have been talking with witnesses?"

"Not witnesses, Detective. The man that you arrested dies in a jail cell. You, in the thick of a high profile case, are assaulted and nearly killed in your home. Too many coincidences for our taste."

He shrugged. "Lieutenant, I'm not inclined to argue that point. Conduct your investigation. It isn't going to affect me one way or the other. I'm innocent. Now, if you don't mind, I need a nap. Good day."

"We'll be in touch."

The detective nodded. "I've no doubt you will." When the door closed behind the man, Michael swore under his breath.

"Now what has you so worked up soldier? Surely you conducted yourself well."

Michael sat up straight and snapped off a salute. "Sir!"

The salute was returned. "At ease soldier. How are you feeling?"

"I've been better Major Davidson. Definitely been better. Not sure how he overpowered me. I shot him before he managed to." He shook his head. "It doesn't make any sense. None at all."

"I talked to your doctor. He said there was some sort of foreign agent introduced into your bloodstream. Nearly killed you from what I hear."

"Yes sir. Whatever he did, he did it here." He bared his arm so the Major could see the wound. "It was the serial killer I've been trying to catch."

"Hmm... I might as well tell you. Internal Affairs was snooping into your background."

Michael's head came up and he opened his mouth to speak, a hand forestalled him.

"They were told nothing of your current assignment. Just that you are Active Duty Reserves. Tell me more about this man that attacked you."

Michael shifted into a more comfortable position. "He's about my height. Slender but apparently well muscled. If I had to guess I'd say that he's about my age. Quite pale, and blonde. I don't know much beyond that. Though I have my suspicions. I don't have any real evidence yet, but I suspect this man that's been feeding me information. He knows an awful lot and he knew about the one suspect that I had."

"Interesting. I'll look into it for you."

"Major, I don't want to put you at risk. This man is good."

"Do you have a name of your suspect? Strictly off the record?"

Michael sighed. "Adeo Sidonius. This stays strictly off the record?"

"It does. What else do you have for me?"

"In the nightstand on the far side of the bed. There's a hidden compartment in the back of the top drawer. Inside you'll find a disk with all the data I've collected so far. I still have a few leads out there. I just have to tap them."

"Understood. You're making progress?"

"I am." He pinched the bridge of his nose. "I want retribution for this crime. I just have to keep on this case too. Benny was a good woman. She didn't deserve to go out that way."

"We'll get em. Now, why don't you get some rest? I'll have something for you in a day or so. Get well soon Mike."

"Yes sir." He saluted tiredly. His head hit the pillow as the door closed.

Michael stared at his computer screen. He ran his hand through his hair again. He'd been back in the office for a week and still had no leads. "How did you get into that cell?" He rolled through the video camera footage again. He slowed it down to watch each frame separately. One minute his prisoner was alive, preparing for bed. The next he was lying in his bunk with a silver hatpin sticking from his forehead. "Through the bone," he muttered with a shudder.

A knock sounded on his door. He reached into the half open top drawer next to him and flicked the safety off. His hand rested on the blue-black steel of the Berretta 9mm it contained. "It's open!"

The door opened. A tall skinny boy with acne stepped in. He held a package in his hand. "Lieutenant Taggart?"

Michael's eyes narrowed as he took in the obvious bearing of a raw recruit. The delivery uniform the boy wore was obviously two or three sizes too large for him. "What can I do for you son?"

"I have a package for you, sir. Special delivery, needs your John Hancock."

When the boy pulled a sealed envelope and a scanning device from under his bulky clothing, Michael nodded. He pulled his hand out of the drawer and reached for his wallet. "I have the necessary clearance." He produced a special military I.D. and swiped it through the scanner. After giving his digital signature, he took possession of the package and dismissed the delivery boy. "Must be important if I'm getting it here." He slipped a knife under the edge of the envelope, then hid it away again. The contents weren't quite what he expected. Dumping them on his desk, he sifted through the data discs and other debris. Lifting out a key ring he grimaced.

*The shutter closed with a snap. "Did he take it?"*

*"Yes sir."*

*"Good."*

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Water splashed. Laughter spilled from the lighted doorway. A louder splash and more laughter followed a shriek of indignation.

Adeo smiled softly. *I love a challenge.* He listened for several moments pin-pointing each woman's laugh. *Five! My lucky number.* His smile became a feral grin as he sauntered towards the open doorway. He surveyed the room for a moment. White tiles surrounded the large kidney-shaped pool and deep-set circular hot tub. Crème-colored strap lounges littered the room. On the opposite side of the pool from his stood a circle of women laughing and talking excitedly.

He drifted into the room a cloud of steam converging on the floor around him as the door whispered closed. He nonchalantly laid his towel on one of the chairs and dropped his robe beside it. Raising his arms above his head, he stretched like a cat. His stomach muscles rippled and flowed as he moved. He studiously ignored the stares he got

from the women and moved towards the diving boards. Climbing to the highest one, he took a rearward facing position and fell backwards. His hands came up above his head to form a sword point before him as he entered the water.

When he broke the surface of the water moments later, he swam to a side and hauled himself from the water. He climbed to the top board again. This time he leaped up into the air and did a quick triple somersault before disappearing beneath the surface. He took several minutes to come to the surface this time. When he did finally break through a layer of fog covered the water and obscured the view of the women. He swam silent as a shark, towards the wall of the pool and slithered onto the deck. He emerged from the mist like some glistening Adonis.

The women were gathered near the side of the pool and gasped as he materialized from nowhere. He flashed a cocky grin. "A new record." He moved his hand lazily and the door slid shut the lock tumbling into place without a sound. He bowed slightly. "Forgive me for frightening you ladies. I have been trying to break my record time for breath holding. He noted that the one who had been tossed in the pool simply nodded and turned away. Her cheeks pink with embarrassment. *I wonder what it is that embarrasses her?* The others were cooing and pawing at him as he tracked her movement. Ignoring them he started off after her. When she sat on the edge of the pool, he sank down next to her. "Hi."

"Hell...hello."

"I saw them throw you in earlier." He paused as her embarrassment grew. Linking his hands nervously, he continued tentatively. "I could teach you how to swim...if you like?"

"You'd do that for me? But you don't even know me. Why would you do that for me?"

"I like you." He looked down at his hands. "I just don't like to see a pretty girl cry." He smiled a soft reluctant smile and started to his feet. "I'll just go."

"No, wait! I'd like to learn!" He noted her blush again and felt his stomach turn. "If you'll still teach me?"

He hid his grimace of disgust and slipped into the water. Proffering a hand, he gestured for her to join him. When she showed a touch of trepidation he fairly ground his teeth in frustration. "It isn't deep. We're only in three feet of water. Come my dear. I will teach you to swim like a fish." He helped her into the water and held her steady with a hand at her waist. "Ready?" He let go for a moment and felt her sway precariously. His hand shot out and wrapped itself around her hip. "Come into deeper water. It will help you stabilize."

"I don't know. I'm afraid of deep water."

"Nonsense. There's nothing to worry about. I'll be right here with you. See?" He slid his arms around her and pulled her deeper into the water. Their heads disappeared beneath the eerie fog. He smiled more personally. "Now that we're alone," he whispered in a velvet voice, "I can do this." He pulled her against him and took her lips in a passionate kiss. He threaded his hand into her wet hair, pressing against her scalp. He felt her arms come around him and had to hide a shudder of revulsion. He drew her deeper into the web of deceit he wove. When he had her firmly under control Adeo sank beneath the water.

He felt her begin to struggle and held her more firmly plundering her mouth; stealing her breath. He felt her struggles intensify and opened his eyes to watch her fear change to terror. His eyes narrowed and he bit down. He saw the pain shoot into her gaze and felt the sweet tasting blood hit the back of his throat. His eyes closed as his pleasure built. He drank deeply until he felt her struggles weaken to nothing. Releasing her, he surged to the surface. He broke the surface and swam to the edge. He leapt from the water, his muscles bunching like a feline's as he landed.

The other four women were in the hot tub, talking. He approached as quiet as a mouse. Crouching down he spoke into the ear of one woman. Her head came around and he helped her from the hot tub. "Come with me." He led her through the fog to the edge of the pool. "I want to ravish you," he murmured against her lips. He felt her succumbing and growled. *Damned women! Towering strengths until they get in a man's arms. Weak willed bitches! Just like Faustina!* He savagely bit into her neck spraying hot blood all over his face and the tiles. He held her hair in one hand, bending her neck until it snapped. He felt her body twitching against his as her death throes gripped her. Disgusted by what he'd done, he cast her into the pool to join her companion. Glancing at himself, he dove into the pool after her.

Clean again, he climbed out of the pool. Slipping through the fog, he took the hand of another of the young women and led her away. He took her to one of the lounge chairs. In moments he had her writhing beneath him, as he slaked his lust for blood. When she was limp, he rose and crossed to the hot tub. This time, he slipped into the water with the two remaining women. "Ladies."

"Hello there handsome. What brings you here this evening?"

He shrugged. "Just trying to relax." He openly ogled both women. "I must say the view is very nice." He turned on the charm and licked his lips. "Not often I get to see two beautiful women in here." *Perfectly matched blondes. I wonder if they are as much fun as their friends were.*



He stopped and turned back to her. His eyes searched her face like it was a radar screen with a phantom blip on it. Their eyes met and he felt his breath stolen from him. "Maggie?"

"Later."

He nodded and turned back to the job. Stopping beside the paramedic, he spoke in a low tone. "Is she coherent enough to answer a couple of questions?"

"I don't know. She seems to be pretty deep in shock. The police shrink is supposed to be on his way. You can try, but we haven't been able to get her to talk."

"Thank you." Michael knelt down beside the woman. "Miss?" Her eyes swung toward him and he smiled gently. "Miss can you tell me your name?"

Her mouth opened but nothing came out at first. After several seconds she closed her mouth and licked her lips. "Zoe Sanna."

"Zoe? That's a very pretty name. Can you tell me what happened here?"

"Thank you. I don't really know. I went into the locker to use the bathroom. The floor was wet and I fell. When I came to I found this." She gestured to the bodies as she began to sob. "They were all my friends. What happened to them? Who would do such a terrible thing?"

His heart went out to the young woman. "There's a serial killer on the loose ma'am. I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to ask you to stay here a bit longer. Stay with the paramedics. You'll be all right." He pulled a folded page from inside his jacket and opened it. Holding it up in front of her, he spoke gently. "Miss Sanna, I have one more question for you. 'Have you seen this man?'" When she shook her head in the negative he put it away. Resting a hand on her shoulder, he patted it gently. "Try to remember what you saw, if anything before you went into the bathroom."

"Yes detective."

Michael looked up and saw the station shrink coming in with another man he recognized. "Excuse me a moment." He strode across the room. "Hi Frank. Thanks for coming."

"No problem Mike. What's the situation?"

"Victim's name is Zoe Sanna. She was knocked out in the locker room. She says she fell. The lacerations on her arms and the bruise on her temple tell me another story. Says she doesn't know what happened out here. I believe her, but she's holding something back. See if you can't work with her, huh?" He turned his attention to the other man who came in with the shrink. "Lieutenant Stevenson. What can I do for you?"

"I'm here to get first hand information on how you handle a crime scene. You don't mind if I tag along do you?"

Michael Taggart rarely lost his temper but at this moment he felt like Mount Vesuvius. "Lieutenant," he began with deadly calm. "I am trying to investigate a crime scene. Your presence jeopardizes the containment of evidence." He felt a hand on his arm and swallowed his anger. "You may stay Lieutenant, just make sure it's out of the way. And for God's sake man, don't touch anything!" Turning his attention to the hand's owner, he nodded. "What is it Magdalene?"

"Mike, you need to come look at this."

Her voice carried a tone he rarely heard from her. It set the hairs on the back of his neck on end. "What have you got," he asked forgetting the Internal Affairs lieutenant completely.

"The last woman, the one we found in the hot tub. She had an interesting set of marks on her chest. They're somewhat similar to a set of marks that were found on your throat when they brought you in to the ER."

Taggart stopped dead. "What do you mean? I wasn't told about any marks on my throat." He watched as she turned a chalky shade of pale, the color heightening on her cheeks. "Maggie?"

"Just come look at this Michael."

He frowned and followed her closely. "Have you found these marks on any of the other victims?" He crouched down as he awaited her response.

"The marks are here on her breast. And yes. I have found these marks on other corpses. I noted them in my reports, didn't you see?"

He noted the impatience in her voice. "Probably," he answered carefully. "I've had a lot on my mind recently." He fingered two identical marks. They were two perfectly round blemishes approximately an inch apart. "I had marks like these as well?" He felt fingertips on his throat.

"Here."

"This complicates things, doesn't it?" He looked up and sought her eyes. "It means that I'm compromised. And it makes this personal," he said in a low growl.

"Is there something amiss, Detective?"

Michael's head swung around and he regarded the Internal Affairs official with an almost venomous stare. "No, Lieutenant Stevenson, something is **not** amiss! Everything about this case stinks to high heaven and here I am with

four more murders and a victim that can barely remember her own name.” He trailed off as a thought occurred to him. “Maggie. Talk to the paramedic and examine the woman. See if she bears the same strange marks anywhere.”

“Yes sir. And if she does?”

He pushed to his feet. “Then we have a new lead. If they ask be honest. Tell the paramedics that you’re checking her for signs of strange markings.”

“Yes sir.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose and shook his head. “This thing just keeps getting more and more complex. What the hell am I going to do now?” He absently ran his fingers over the scars of his own bite mark. His mind suddenly sharpened and he focused on his fingertips for a moment. Running his fingers over the marks again, he looked down at the body lying at his feet. “I’ll be damned! It can’t be!”

“What can’t be, Detective?”

Taggart looked up, his eyes wide. “It’s nothing Lieutenant Stevenson. I just had a bit of a thought. Gotta go do a little digging before I divulge it though. Good evening Lieutenant.” He strode across the room and spoke to the uniformed officer in charge. Then he crossed to the paramedics and conferred with the coroner. He glanced pointedly at the Internal Affairs guy staring down at the bodies. “And Maggie? Don’t let the rubberneck touch anything. This is a crime scene, after all.”

“Sure thing. Mike…”

He felt her hand on his arm and covered her it with his own. “Don’t worry Magdalene I will. Once a marine…”

“Always a marine. I remember.”

He squeezed her hand and pulled away. “I’ll be on the radio.” He hurried from the scene. In his car he picked up the radio and pulled into traffic. “411639 to base.”

“Go ahead Detective.”

“He smiled at the tired feminine voice. “Lucy, I need an address on one Adeo Sidonius.”

“Okay Mikey. Give me a minute to run it down for you.”

“Sure thing. I’m headed for the city library at the moment. Call me as soon as you get it.” Racking the handset, he pulled into a parking lot. Finding an available slot he switched the engine off and pulled his jacket out of the backseat. Slipping it on, he closed the car door with a thud. He shivered and zipped his coat. Shoving his hands into the pockets he steamrolled across the sidewalk. Stepping into the library a few moments later, he headed towards the archive section. He stopped at the desk and asked for access to the special section of newspapers.

“Detective Taggart, how nice to see you again. Yes, yes. Come this way.”

“Ms. Higginbottom, I’m working on cracking this serial killer case. Do you remember a similar story about, oh, twenty years ago?” He saw her spine stiffen and knew he’d hit pay dirt.

“My daughter-in-law was killed in that crime spree. Why do you want to dig into that information? I thought that case was closed years ago.”

Michael hedged a bit. “It was closed ma’am, but I need to compare this crime with that. If I find connections you can bet I’ll have that case re-opened. Truthfully, I remembered reading something about it in the papers not too long ago. Something happened in one of the murders that triggered a memory. I want to cross-reference my facts before I act.” He absently rubbed his neck again. “I need to get to the bottom of this. Quickly.”

She unlocked a door and snapped on the lights. Inside were several stacks of microfilm cases and a reader. “This is the morgue. We keep all the oldest archive information down here.” She handed him the key. “Lock-up when you’re done and return the key to me at the desk.” She turned to go but stopped. “I hope you find what you’re looking for Detective. I really hope that you do.”

“Thank you Ms. Higginbottom.” He waited until the door was closed and he was alone before going to the stacks and beginning his search. He’d seen the pain of loss in her eyes as she had mentioned the case from twenty years earlier. It made him angry. Finding the appropriate stack of films he went to the reader and sat down. Feeding the film into the machine, he searched the articles. There was a brief description of the man responsible for the killings but nothing clear and concise. A police sketch was shown next to one article. Pulling the artist’s sketch from his pocket, he held it up next to the reader and groaned inwardly.

“It can’t be! That was twenty years ago!” He stopped the reader and stared from his picture to the picture rendered twenty years before. The artist’s name was present in the caption below the sketch. He stared at it in disbelief. It was odd to mention the name of the artist. His eyes scanned the article. Halfway down the page he found what he was looking for. The sketch artist’s daughter had been victim number three. “More loose ends.” Inspiration struck him finally and he did a global search. Hit brows knitted in consternation, as he found nothing.

Pulling out the film, he placed another microfilm in the reader. He read through each article with growing trepidation. He found several more references to the killer but nothing solid. Doing a separate search he found sixteen instances of odd markings on the bodies. “Damn!” He searched for the killer’s calling card and felt his



The high nasal voice grated on his nerves as it had so often over the years. He turned with slow deliberation. "You ungrateful bitch! Four years I have endured this hateful marriage. Four years I have endured you cuckolding me with every man that catches your fancy. I have funded your extravagant lifestyle without question. I have endured the sniggers and snide comments. I will endure you no longer!"

"You can't divorce me. Caesar will never allow it. Father will stop you... force you to continue to endure me. Gods, I can't bear the sight of you! Leave me and take your trash with you."

The anger misted his vision. What he did next he only remembered in snippets. It wasn't until he was standing on the hill above the villa watching it and the olive grove burn in a funeral pyre. It was there that the soldiers found him. Loud maniacal laughter spilling from his lips. He didn't fight when they took him before Caesar.

"You are positively mad man! What happened to my daughter? Who has done this? Tell me!"

Adeo laughed for a minute more. Abruptly he sobered and bowed deeply to his ruler and father-in-law. "My lord Caesar. That bitch you saddled me with got precisely what she deserved. All of her fripperies and fancies followed her cold black heart straight into hell!"

Now if he hadn't said those things in front of the soldiers he might have gotten away with it. But he had shamed his Caesar in front of others. That could not be overlooked. "Blasphemy! How dare you speak of my poor dead daughter in such a manner! How dare you blacken the good name of your wife! You shall be punished for this! Take him away!"

*Rap. Rap. Rap.*

Adeo sat bolt upright. A sound had intruded into his dreams.

*Rap. Rap. Rap.*

Swinging his legs from the elegant bed, he made his way to the balcony surrounding the walkway outside his second story room. "Just a minute," he shouted down. Stepping back into his room he slipped into a deep gold robe. He relished the silk sliding along his bare flesh. Belting the material closed, he walked barefooted down the carpeted stairs. He opened the front door and stepped back out of the glare of the setting sun. On his doorstep stood a familiar man. "Good evening Detective Taggart. To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"Mr. Sidonius, I'd like to ask you a few questions. May I come in?"

Adeo hid a grin and stepped back with a sweeping gesture. "Please come in Detective." *People can be so predictable. A soft unpleasant voice in his head chided, "Yes but he found you didn't he Adeodatus. He knows your crimes. He's here to kill you. Best to kill him before he has a chance!"* His face contorted briefly as he recognized his dead wife's voice. *Be silent Faustina! You're dead! Leave me alone you bitch!* Blanking his look he moved his arm towards the kitchen. "If you'll come this way, Detective? I was just about to make some coffee."

"Thank you Mr. Sidonius. I won't take up much of your time. I just need to fill in some gaps in my information. You look like hell. Are you feeling all right?"

Adeo smiled thinly. "I haven't been sleeping well recently, no. Please sit." He gestured to a chair in the spacious kitchen before moving to the counter to begin making coffee. A few minutes later he set a steaming cup of the horrid brew in front of the detective. Settling down across the table with his own steaming cup he took a sip and looked expectantly at the officer.

"Mr. Sidonius can you tell me your whereabouts last night?"

Adeo let a frown cross his brow as he set the mug down. "I'm sorry? I was out last evening walking by the river at about sunset. Then I had a nice supper and came back here."

"Hmmm. Can you tell me what restaurant you visited last night?"

"I didn't go to a restaurant Detective. I was simply not at home when I ate."

"Mmm! Were you anywhere near the pool?"

Adeo sat back, his fingers drumming on the tabletop. He grew thoughtful. His mind drifted to the woman he'd let go. After several moments he realized that the detective was watching him intently. "I'm sorry Detective. I've been a bit under the weather all day. It's a bit chilly to be walking down by the water this time of year. I may have caught something. Anyway, to answer your question. No, I wasn't anywhere near the pool. Has something happened?"

"There was another killing. Four young women, this time the fifth survived. She's being detained for questioning."

"Detective, I do not mean to be rude here, but why are you questioning me? I'm not connected to your case," he paused, "am I?" He read the cop's expression and nearly laughed. *Preposterous! He wants to accuse me but can't!*



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