



*SWE's McLaughlin City's Stories*

# Shadow

Book 2

**Written by Bashan Savage**

**Shadow**

Bashan Savage

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Smashwords Edition

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## *Chapter One*

The lighting in the compartment car flashes each time it passes under one of the McLaughlin City's many tall buildings. Packed beyond full capacity, different sounds and smells bounce off the walls. It's late, so the majority of the people on this monorail ride are young, with a small mix of elderly and single parents with children. Using a handrail is a man who doesn't fit any of these categories, yet blends in quite inconspicuously. Wearing a trench coat on a typical summer night is not uncommon since the weather of this area usually permits it. On his head is a matching Stetson hat that barely exposes his face, except to the person sitting next to where he's standing.

He has already surveyed the train, no one interests him. He looks down and tries to zone out the various conversations he hears, including the people whispering at the front of the car.

He thinks, "Here I am in 'Mac L' City again. I haven't been here since the World's Fair, and it looks fairly different now."

He looks out the window to see a few skyscrapers, "Yup, a little different. Well, I guess it's good to get out every once and a while with the people, so at least I can keep up with the local trends. It's not like most snitches wear the latest clothes or gear. I believe that's what they call it now days."

The lady next to him looks up and blushes when she realizes a very handsome and well-groomed man in his early twenties has been standing right next to her the whole ride. He notices her looking. She realizes this and turns away.

The man thinks to himself, "Too bad lady, it could never be. There was a time when I was foolish enough to believe in love, but I've learned a long time ago, love and me don't mix."

He looks away in effort to not encourage any communication. "So those are the new Trezelle Thomas shoes. And to believe in this day and age, with mass production methods and thousands of shoe companies that anyone would pay several hundred dollars for tennis shoes. And it's even less conceivable that people still kill for them." A teenager seated a few feet in front of him provoked this thought. "I guess several all-star appearances and championship after championship really do mean

something, like big pay checks.”

The train screeches to a slow stop. The man waits patiently for nearly everyone to exit the train before he does. The place he's going means very little to him and time means even less. Once he's exited the train, he stands off to the side and unfolds a piece of paper. “Who needs a smartphone when you can use a good ol' napkin.” The unfolded napkin reads, “Go up three blocks, cross the park by the statue and the tallest building is it.” He then throws the napkin into a nearby trash bin.

He can see the park off in the near distance, he heads towards it. “If I wasn't so bored with life...again, I probably would not have taken the job offer from these criminals. It's not like I need the money. For most people ten million dollars is a lot of money, but money along with time has lost its importance to me hundreds of years ago. I just hope that they aren't typical mafia type who wants someone dead, and for ten million it's probably a lot of someones.”

He enters the park. It's late at night, so he's the only person in earshot besides a late night jogger and his dog.

“I don't kill for pleasure. Never have and never will. It's just not me. Now hurting someone is a different story. Usually these mafia guys have a tough time hearing that I don't kill for money, so I usually have to leave a room full of clear headed people.”

He comes up to the statue. “A statue of Donovan Wates? I thought that one day he would have a statue of himself...in his house but not in a so-called public park.” He stands in front of the statue looking it over, he says, “A nerd with muscles? Can someone say ‘Oxymoron’?”

“No! But I can say give us your wallet!” demands one of three armed assailants who had approached the man from behind. He heard them approach but figured they were just nightwalkers, joggers, or something, so he paid them no mind. He turns around to find three men, two armed with knives, one with a bat. The three men start trying to circle him. He notices that the assumed ringleader is wearing a pair of nice Italian shoes, easily worth a couple of grand. The man figures that these shoes must have been specially ordered because the man's feet must be at least size fourteen.

“So much for the wallet, huh?” asks the man, who is standing nonchalantly.

“What?” asks the ringleader.

“Well, you asked for my wallet, but before I could even hand it over, you three started circling me.”

“Um...yeah give us a wallet!” says the assailant in a demanding yet uncertain voice.

“Where do they get idiots like this from?” thinks the man silently.

The ringleader who has more balls than brains demands again, “Give me a wallet!”

The man tries not to laugh at what he just heard and thinks, “Give me a wallet? Did someone forget his criminal acts flash cards?” He decides to have a little fun with these guys before he heads off to his business appointment.

“Can I give you his?”

“What? His what?”

“His wallet, you did say a wallet right? Not anyone’s in particular?”

The leader of this goon squad looks baffled but one of the other goons grows tired of this game and charges the man. The man easily ducks his attacker's wild swing, elbow's him in the midsection, then raises his forearm sending him to the ground. Another one charges, the man dodges his feeble attempt and chops the attacker in his throat. The thug drops to the ground, choking gasping for air and rolling around.

The ring leader finally runs at the man, who easily sidesteps him. He trips him on the way past, sending the attacker head first into the metal statue. The collision sounds like a church bell chimed once.

“Ouch, that had to hurt,” said the unharmed man as he approaches the only one who's not unconscious, he's on his hands and knees. The approaching man says, “See, you aren't able to kick it with the big dogs, but I am,” then kicks the man in his face. Now all three would be attackers are out cold.

The man kneels down and digs into the downed man's pocket. He pulls out the man's wallet, then walks over toward the downed team captain and says, “Here you go champ, here's a wallet,” then tosses the wallet of his partner in crime on him. The man then continues his way through the park, with the Katsuya Corporation skyscraper in front of him.

## *Chapter Two*

The man approaches the steps of the building. He stops in front and looks up at the skyscraper. He blinks his eyes, and when they open a sheet of yellow has replaced his pupils and retina. The man continues to look up, his vision greatly improved. He looks at the second to the top floor of the building. That whole floor's windows are lit up, while most of the buildings other offices are dark. "So, that's where the meeting's gonna be." He blinks again and his eyes have returned to normal. He heads into the building. After clearing the revolving door, the security guard stationed at the desk asks, "Can I help you?"

"I'm here to see Mr. Katsuya."

"And you are?"

"Here to see Katsuya. Something wrong with your hearing?"

The minimal wage rent-a-cop decides against questioning this man again considering that most of Mr. Katsuya's guests don't like being ID'ed. He picks up the phone, "Somebody is here to see Mr. Katsuya...I don't know he hasn't said, but he should be on your monitor."

The man surveys the area, paying no attention to the guard's conversation. The guard hangs up the phone, "Okay, you've been cleared. Mr. Katsuya is expecting you. Please take the elevator to the right. We only leave one running after hours."

The man leaves the counter and heads toward the elevator. "Even though he didn't mention it, it's gonna be either one or two. I bet two," he thought to himself. The elevator chimes as it stops at the lobby.

The doors open and two Japanese men in black suits are standing inside. "I was right," thinks the man as he enters the elevator, turns around, and takes his place between them. The elevator starts its ascent. The man starts to think to himself, "I've heard some bad things about mafias, but none worse than what I've heard about this particular family of the Japanese mob. While these so called mafias don't hold a stick to the acts of Khan or even Zulu, as far as organized crime today, they are up there. I heard they even cut out the tongues of their spies and ninjas so they could never talk about the families activities, but that makes little sense because they could just write it down." The elevator stops on the ninety-ninth floor, which apparently is the top floor, as indicated by the button options. "I could swear I saw a floor above this one." He thinks as



he exits the elevator with one man in front and one in back of him.

They make their way down a long winding hallway, then the front man opens one of two conference room doors. The visitor steps in. A well-dressed Japanese man in his early forties is looking out of one of the office's wall-like windows overlooking the park. "Thank you gentlemen, you are excused."

"Yes, Mr. Katsuya," says the man who opened the door, who now pulls it shut behind him. The Japanese man sits down.

"Please have a seat."

"No, thank you."

"Are you sure? It's gonna take a while to explain exactly why I hired you."

"You mean 'might have hired me'. I haven't decided yet."

"Why do you sound so reluctant?"

"Because common street thugs don't wear thousand dollar shoes."

"Come again?"

The man throws the ID card he took from the wallet of one of his would-be muggers in the park, onto Katsuya's desk.

Katsuya inspects the card, "Oh...I see, but come on now, you understand I had to test you and see if you are as good as I've heard."

The man understands this perfectly, he's been tested many times before and even tested others, but he doesn't show it, instead he sits down as a gesture of acceptance.

"Well, as you probably already know, I'm Jin-Jun Katsuya, one of the chairmen of the Katsuya Corporation, but you can just call me Kats. And what shall I call you?"

"You can't, the number is unlisted."

Kats laughs, "Strong and funny. Must be a real lady killer."

"I'm a nobody killer."

"Oh, no, that's not why I want to hire you. I know you probably have heard some bad things about my company and my family, but let me assure you a lot of what you might have heard has been blown out of proportion."

"Like cutting out tongues?"

"Exactly. Our agents are not mistreated like that. And that subject brings us to why I, we need your help. One of our ex-operatives is killing off our board members. And we need your help to stop her."

"Ex-operatives? Sounds like a disgruntled ex-employee who wants

payback. I'm sure your company has its own internal ways of dealing with issues like this."

"Yes, actually we do, but this was no normal operative, this was Shadow." Kats expression shows the degree of seriousness involved but the man doesn't seem interested but does say, "Shadow? The deadly female assassin? I heard she was only a myth."

"That's what I heard about you," says Kats with a grin.

The man leans back in his chair, "So, why is she killing your people?"

"We have no clue. That's why we need your help. After fruitless attempts to capture her, we the remaining board members decided that to catch a myth, let's use a myth."

The man doesn't react to the comment; he continues to sit leaned back with his Stetson's brim blocking his eyes from view, "So you want her alive?"

"Yes, if possible. She had been missing for almost ten years; then, out of the blue, she reappeared killing off our board members."

"Missing?"

"Yes, we sent her away on a mission to retrieve for us a lost artifact from the Tomb of King Foymama."

"The King of Greed."

"Yes, you heard of him?"

The man thinks back to the time he had to battle the King's pet killing machine, Taxa, to retrieve an item to save a village that was cursed. This was back in the days when the monks used to take care of him.

"Continue."

"Okay, where was I? Oh yes, well, she never returned from the mission and considering her mission success rate was one hundred percent at the time, we assumed she must have been killed."

"So, you have no clue why she would be killing off her former employer?"

"Well, actually, we don't have anything solid, just theories and that is why I need to know if you are on board because if so, then the next board members life is in danger."

"How many has she killed?"

"Six, all in Japan. The other members are now here in the states as a way to better protect them. We assume she'll be stateside within the next

twenty-four hours.”

“How many are left and when did you move them here?”

“If she kills or attempts to kill Mr. Ioto, then our theory is correct and that will leave four. And we moved them here about twenty-four hours ago.”

“Let me get this straight. She's been killing your people in some kind of predictable order and you can't stop her? And you moved your people to the States and you believe that she'll be here for them that soon?”

She's that good. Now do you understand our need for concern?”

He feels like it could be the biggest challenge since he prevented Judaki from destroying the world. Even though he's starting to feel excited on the inside, outside shows nothing. He decides to cover his excitement, just in case it did show with a traditional gesture all mafia employers have come to expect, “So ten million, right?”

“Yes, ten million U.S. dollars.”

“Okay, I'll catch her and bring her back, but I need as much information on her as you got.”

Kats slides forward a folder that was on his desk on some papers. The label head says, “Codename: Shadow.” While the folder has the words “For Century” written in Japanese and black ink.

The man looks at the folder but doesn't pick it up, and then he looks at Kats who says, “I told you I had to test you. So now I know you understand Japanese, Mr. Century.”

The man starts to think of the emotional pain attached to that name. That was the last time he allowed his heart to love and he had to abandon it for the best of both them. The man grabs the folder and stands up and heads for the door.

“So we'll be in contact Mr. Century?”

The man says without turning around, “Yeah, real soon and if you're gonna call me by that, at least get it right. It's Century.”

Then he exits the room.

### *Chapter Three*

The little girl sits excitedly as her mother works on her angel costume for the annual school play. The young mother of this bundle of energy has the dress almost complete.

“You're gonna be the cutest angel in the whole play,” says the mom.

“Yup and with the prettiest dress. I'll be a princess angel.”

The mother laughs, “Sure dear, you can be anything you want.”

“Mommy.”

“Yes dear.”

“Thank you.”

The lady smiles, “You're welcome, sweetheart.”

She lifts the finished dress from the sewing machine, “Stand up Betty. I want to see how it's going to look.”

Little Betty leaps up with a grin that would lighten up a whole room. “Okay mommy. I'm going to be the bestest princess angel ever.”

“Yes you are, dear, yes you are.”

A pickup truck pulls into the driveway with the music almost blowing out the cheap quality speakers.

“Oh no! He's home and I didn't even start dinner! I completely lost track of time!” says the lady as she frantically makes her way into the kitchen, while Betty sits on her stool next to the sewing machine.

In the kitchen, the woman is scrambling around to make it appear as if she's been cooking. She puts the thawed hamburger in the frying pan and turns the burner on high. She starts a pot of water and tosses spaghetti noodles in.

The front door opens and her husband walks in. “Damn idiots at work, fucking write me up. They can kiss my fucking ass!”

He tossed his work jacket on the chair he passes on the way to the kitchen. His path takes him through the room where Betty is sitting quietly, he doesn't notice her. He opens the kitchen door and to his disbelief dinner is not ready. “What? Dinner is not ready? What the fuck have you been doing all day?”

She's pouring the sauce into a saucepan, her hand is shaking so much that she spills some of the sauce on the stove. Once the jar is empty, she reaches for a towel.

He grabs her by her arm as she reaches, "I asked you why didn't you fucking start dinner earlier? You know what fucking time I get home each damn day!"

With tears and fear forming in her eyes, "I'm sorry. I was working on Betty's costume for the play."

The man is so furious that he pushes her to the side and starts pacing around the kitchen. Little Betty sits quietly in her place as she watches shadows on the open door play out the actions of both parents.

"I fucking work all day and this is my fucking reward? You don't have to do shit. I provide for you and this is how you pay me back? No respect at work and no fucking respect at home. You could have worked on the fucking costume tonight after dinner!"

"But the play is tonight," she pleads.

"So fucking what! No one's fucking going anywhere!"

"Mark please! She's been waiting to go to this for weeks."

"So fucking what! I haven't eaten shit! No fucking one is going anywhere. I am going to lay down the fucking law in this house!"

Betty's tears go unnoticed in the other room. The mother is now crying also, "Mark, please."

Mark's patience has grown thin and he's getting tired of tears. "Shut the fuck up bitch!" he yells as he hits her with a closed fist.

"See what you made me do you stupid bitch!"

The lady is now cowering on the floor and choking on tears and spit. She pleads, "Please take it out on me, but not Betty. I'm the one who messed up. Please take her to the play."

"I'm not taking her anywhere! Shit, she's probably not even my fucking kid. You were out whoring around!"

"You know that's not true. You're the only man I've ever been with."

"Then why the fuck were you found naked at that mother fucking campground?!"

"Yeah right you fucking slut!"

Little Betty's blue eyes are wide-open and dripping tears. Her mother is sobbing on the floor balled up in the corner.

"Stop your fucking whining!"

Mark then climbs on top of her, huddled in the corner and starts punching her in the head. Her arms block some punches, but some of Mark's timed punches make their way through.

Little Betty grips the costume angel so tightly, that one of the wings breaks off and falls to the floor. The little girl's eyes are locked on the shadows on the door.

The mother's screams and flesh meeting flesh are finally drowned out by the smoke detector that goes off due to the burning hamburger on the stove. The noise does not distract the man from his attack.

A phone ringing draws Shadow's attention to the present and to the person sitting behind his desk in his office. On the dark rooftop, Shadow stares down into the office through the sky roof. It's nighttime and late, only an occasional car can be heard driving around on the streets below. The man motions for two other men to leave the room. They do, and then the man continues his phone conversation. Shadow looks around the office and notices that no one else is in the room. She draws her sword from its sleeve.

In the back seat of the taxi cab, Century thumbs through the files, “Nothing too exciting or shocking in here, which usually means one of two things, either she's really over hyped or this folder is missing some pages. I hate being left in the shadows no pun intended.”

He flips to the part about her past. “So the myth is true, she was a prostitute before becoming Shadow and she was also a junkie too. Not too surprising to use her, someone the world would hardly miss.”

He now reads over the training files. “They must have worked her ass off to learn that many things. Considering just the physical training part must have taken a long time considering she would be a recovering drug addict. And I haven't met many prostitutes who have the capability to learn six different forms of martial arts, along with various armed and unarmed combat techniques. And she can read and write fourteen different languages.” The list goes on.

He decides to double-check something in the file. “Just as I thought, something doesn't add up. She learned all this in five years, that's even more than I could handle.” Century looks out of the window of the taxi because he noticed it's been sitting for a while.

“Hey what happened? This heap of junk finally break down?” refers Century to the situation and the rustic vehicle.

“No, my friend, there appears to have been an accident or something. The street is blocked by police.”

Century does his vision-enhancing blink to get a better look. He

sees several cops, including the detectives casing the scene. Also, a few Japanese men in expensive suits standing behind the yellow tape. Century looks at the address of that building, which is four blocks away. "It looks like a party started without me."

He hands the cabbie a hundred dollar bill.

"Hey, I don't have change," says the cabbie.

"And I don't have time," says Century as he exits the cab, "so with the change, go out and buy yourself some breath mints and an air freshener for the car." He then shuts the door and heads for the building on foot.

## *Chapter Four*

Century blends in with the crowd of civilian on-lookers. He asks the man to his right, "So what happened?"

"I don't know, I think someone got killed."

"Why'd you say that?"

"Well, there was an ambulance here earlier, and look how many cops are here. It even looks like some detectives are here."

Century nods then starts toward the building. Once he reaches the yellow tape, he ducks under it. A police officer heads to intercept him. Century digs into his inside coat pocket as the cop turns and tries to stop him.

"Hey buddy, you can't go in there."

Century removes his hand from his coat flipping out a wallet with a badge and I.D. card, "I'm special agent Jones, FBI."

The cop doesn't seem too shocked to be out ranked and lets him pass. Century thinks, "Amazing how many times that has worked."

He heads up the stairs and into the building. There seems to be one officer directing the CSI team. Century approaches the man and flashes the fake identification and same spill. The man states his name and title in return.

"So when and where did all the action happen? And where is Mr. Ioto's body?"

"I believe upstairs, but we haven't been able to confirm anything."

Century ponders, "What's going on when a guy on the streets knows more than the lead CSI captain?" He asks, "So why so many people on the scene?"

"911 got called from a frantic housekeeper. That a man staggered out of a room with a ninja star lodged in his neck. The lady said she saw Mr. Ioto's body missing its head, lying on the carpet. When we arrived we found a dead man who was apparently tossed or fell off the roof.

"And why haven't you been able to confirm Mr. Ioto's death?"

"I don't like to play into rumors, but as you probably already heard this, but it's common knowledge that this so called camera company is a front for the mob."

"What do you think?"

"Well, it doesn't matter what I think, but chew on this. On the way



here we got a call from the chief saying that we can't go above the first floor. Then when we got here, they had more attorneys than they had security."

"Well I'm going to get to the bottom of this."

"Good luck, I don't even think you guys can get through there."

"I can."

"Like I said good luck."

Century heads toward the elevators. There are three people standing in front of the elevator; two are security guards and the third seems to be an attorney. When Century reaches the trio, the attorney says before Century even has a chance to speak, "Can't you guys get it through your thick skulls? The higher floors are off limits and we aren't talking about anything to anyone."

Century, who doesn't ever have much patience usually has even less now, "I work for Mr. Katsuya," he says.

"And so do we, and your point?"

Century squeezes his fist and raises it to the man's face, once his fist is clenched two-six inch spikes stick out of his knuckles," These are my points!"

Both of the men on the sides of the lawyer reached for their weapons hidden in their sports coats, but stopped once they seen the spikes are only an inch from their co-workers face.

The lawyer gives a nervous gulp, already sweating. The attorney tries to use the only weapon he has ever used, the law. "If you even touch me, I'll sue you for everything you own and have you spend the rest of your life behind bars." This speech was a little stronger than Century thought the attorney could muster, but it was still laughable.

In his ever so steady voice Century replies, "You can't sue..." Then similar style spikes extend from the side of his arm, through holes in his coat, from wrist to shoulder, "If they can't find any witnesses or the plaintiff."

The men move their arms away from their pistols.

"Enough of the bravado gentlemen. We have an ex-operative to catch," says Katsuya who has just walked up, wearing a very expensive white suit. "Norton, let us through."

"Yes, Mr. Katsuya," says Norton the lawyer, with a sense of relief in his voice. Century's weaponry withdraws. All three men step aside.

Once the elevator opens, Century and Katsuya enter and head to the 3rd floor.

“So I see you got to meet Norton. Very intelligent but lacking in the physical department.”

Ignoring the small talk attempt, “So why’d you hide Ioto here?”

“Mr. Ioto used this office whenever he was in the States as his home office.”

“Even more reason to not hide him here.”

“Exactly what I told him, but he prefers the quaintness of this office. And with him being a board member, he has the right to work wherever he chooses. We did add security measures but as you can see they failed.”

As they exit the elevator making their way down the hallway, they came across the body of a bodyguard, laid in a crimson pool of his own blood. He bled to death from a hole in his neck. As they enter the office, Mr. Ioto’s headless body is still in his chair, with his hand still gripping the phone that is making that annoying off the hook sound. His head is several feet in front of the desk, and the once readable papers on the desk are nothing more than a red blurry mess. Besides the few drops of blood representing the path the head most likely took, there’s no sign of any struggle or that anyone else was in the room.

Century looks at the head. The neckline was cut so smoothly that it looks almost like an artifact head.

Century asks, “So how did you beef up security measures?”

“Two armed guards in the room, two downstairs, one man on the roof and motion detectors on the roof also.”

“Well, I only see one guard. Where was the other one?”

“He was relieving himself.”

“And now?”

“We relieved him.”

Century knows enough about the mob to know that meant that he won’t get to question him, unless he wanted to do it at the bottom of the river. So he moves on. “The two downstairs?”

“Saw nothing, heard nothing. We believed she came in through the roof. She’s used that method before.”

That’s why we added motion sensors.”

“But that didn’t seem to work, evident the man who did a swan

dive off the roof.”

“Agreed.”

Century then looks up and notices hairline cuts in the glass.

“She definitely came in through the roof by that sky top. It has a square cut out but has been replaced.”

Katsuya doesn't notice but agrees.

“Well, at least we know the exact order that she will strike.”

“And this must be the theory you mentioned before.”

“Yes, she's killing in the order of how the board was over 15 years ago.”

“How are you so certain?”

“Because it was supposed to be Mr. Ioto or me who died next.”

Shocked to hear how calmly Katsuya talked about how close he was to being targeted is hard for Century to believe, “What?”

“You see in our company, the newest member gets to be number seven in our in-house company photo. Here let me show you.”

Jin Jun sits his briefcase on a chair, opens it and pulls out two photos, both marked with x's over the first six faces. “The year I was elected I became the seventh member. Before that Mr. Ioto was the newest member. Even now seven years later I'm still the newest member.”

“So you weren't a bit nervous knowing that you were possibly next on her hit list?”

“Yes and no. I don't fear death. It's inevitable, but the idea of having my head cut off wasn't how I ever imaged dying.”

“She's cut off everyone's head so far?”

“Only the board members. This is not our M.O. either. If we ever needed anyone removed from the picture, no pun intended, we made sure they were simply never seen again.”

Century looking over the older picture notices that the last member is blanked out. He thinks to himself, “Hmm, removed from the picture huh?” Century asks Katsuya about this.

“That is our silent partner. He needs to remain anonymous.”

“I don't like secrets.”

“Understandable, but if you capture her before she gets to him then there's no need to know that member's identity, correct?”

Century hates missing information but agrees with Katsuya. As good as he knows he is, Century is confident that he will catch her the next

time she shows up, especially since she's killing in a predictable order.

"That's fair, but if I want to find out who this person is, I will."

"I truly doubt that, Century." Katsuya said confidently.

Century thinks, "Damn arrogant prick. If I was at Fortitude with all my connections I would know who he was and what he had for breakfast the last two weeks." Century says, "Speaking of leaving things in the dark. Some of Shadow's information seems to be missing."

"Like what?"

"If I knew what, I wouldn't say 'seems like', I would know."

"So you are making accusations? That's a very bold assumption."

"Well, I'm a bold man."

Katsuya grins, "Well, Century, what is it you have questions about? But as you should know I can't divulge company secrets."

"And as you know I'm not trying to buy a camera."

Katsuya almost laughs but does grin, "Ok. No problem. Go ahead."

"So how is it that you managed to train a drugged out whore fourteen languages, martial art styles, espionage and other things in less than five years?"

"Would you believe through hard work and patience?"

Tired of the answer dodging, Century says, "I'm warning you now. It's taking hard work to keep from losing my patience with you."

"Ok, calm down. I'll explain. I was just trying to lighten up the mood. Considering that we have two dead bodies within fifteen feet of us, I assumed we might have needed it."

Century doesn't look amused.

Katsuya explains, "Yes, it would be next to impossible for even a naturally gifted person to take in as she did in such a short period of time, yet alone a drug abuser of so many years. So, when we met her we offered her a gift of a lifetime. You see, Mr. Century, she was leaving the hospital after overdosing and was on the way to face criminal charges that would have easily cost her 10-20 years of her life."

Katsuya starts to stroll across the room as he continues, "In exchange for freedom and complete immunity, she would have to work for us. We informed her of the risk and requirements involved before she agreed to anything. And of course our deal sounded better than prison, so she agreed. Over the first few years, we had to replace, due to neglect, a few of her damaged organs. Her lungs, liver and another few other minor

organs were replaced with artificial counterparts.”

Century thinks, “Can anyone say Heil Hitler?”

Katsuya is still talking, “The training was going extremely well until she went missing and we later found her at a crack house. This happened several more times before the board decided to exercise a clause in her contract. She had agreed to any necessary actions that we chose to take if she happened to relapse. So we opted to clean her memory.”

Century questions in his controlled way, “What?”

“Yes. It was unfortunate but we had already spent five million dollars on the project and she was already given several opportunities. It turned out to be a blessing.

This procedure help cut the original planned timeline roughly in half. We were able to bypass certain brain functions to improve her learning capacity greatly. It was almost as simple as drag and click on a computer screen. We could simply download skills and abilities.”

“And you wonder why she’s killing off your board members?”

“I assure you that could not be the reason. She can’t remember any of the operations done to her and she worked perfectly for us for years without any problems. Well, she didn’t have a problem with aggressive males, but we believe that was a result from the aggressive self-defensive programs installed in her. Also, she’s no longer capable of emotions.”

“OK, Dr. Frankenstein, maybe some wires got crossed.”

Katsuya tries to defend the corporation’s decision. “I agree with you that the project was not a socially sound plan, but remember I had just become a board member at this time and my voice carried no weight. Nevertheless I have to stand firm with their decision, and she did agree to the terms.”

Century has seen his type and knows there’s no way of getting through his thick skull. He decides to move on, “I need the addresses and locations of the remaining board members.”

Katsuya once again reaches into his briefcase. He hands another folder to Century. Katsuya tries to explain his personal standpoint, “My father, the corporation founder, built this company and our family name from the ground up. An assassin posed as a whore killed him. So, I don’t feel for her like I probably should, and while I don’t completely agree with the methods we used awhile back, this is family and this is about the present.”

Century heads toward the door with folder in hand, “Don’t tell me.

Tell it to your God when the time comes. I'm off to pick up a prostitute.”

## *Chapter Five*

Betty Jean is now nine years old. She sits bored in her room looking into her dresser mirror. It's been about a week since she's been at school. She checks to see how much it has faded. "It" is why she hasn't been to school, "it" is a black eye. It is the first time Mark has hit her. The bruise is barely visible now but the same can't be said about the fear. Betty hasn't eaten much lately and has had a tough time sleeping since that evening. She has been faking sleep when her mother checked in on her at night. Part out of not wanting to be a burden, part because she's scared that if her mother is with her too long Mark will get angry. She doesn't like it when Mark is angry.

It's almost time for Mark to get home from work, but today was and is going to be different. Today Mark came home for his lunch and assaulted Betty's mother because he blamed her for his horrible rest the night prior because she kept getting up.

Betty goes downstairs to find her mother sitting in a chair, sporting a fresh new shiner, along with a fading bruise on her forehead. Betty looks at her and barely recognizes her. Each day around this time, her hair is nicely done and she's dressed in something Mark picked out before he went to work that morning.

Today she is a total mess. Her hair is ratted and she's sitting in her green robe staring at a wall. She didn't even notice Betty Jean standing next to her until she called out to her.

In a monotone voice, "Yes, dear."

"You okay momma?"

"I will be and you will be too."

Betty doesn't understand what her mother means but before she can ask, both females tense up from fear when they hear the music blaring from the vehicle in the driveway.

"Betty, dear, I need you to go to your room."

Sensing something's not right and the mounting fear, Betty pleads to her mother, "But momma!"

"Betty. Go to your room dear. Everything will be okay."

Betty Jean heads up the stairs but stops at the top of the stairwell and out of sight. Mark comes in. He tosses his coat over the chair by the door and on his way to the kitchen he notices his battered wife sitting in

living room recliner. “Why aren’t you in the kitchen? Is dinner already done?”

In an emotionless voice, “No, Mark, it’s not.”

He can’t believe his ears, he thinks, “How could she be so stupid?” He yells, “You fucking didn’t cook? And you sit around all day and do nothing but look like shit?”

She says nothing. She starts trembling and her eyes fill with tears.

“You fucking lazy whore! I thought I beat some sense into you earlier. How many times do I have to beat your ignorant ass?”

As Mark approaches, he crossed an imaginary line that she had envisioned in her mind. She stands up and points a gun that she had hidden in her robe. “Today was the last time you put your damn hands on either of us!”

With that burst of emotion that Mark had never seen from her, shocked is not a strong enough word to describe how Mark felt as he stared at the gun aimed at his midsection. Realizing that the tables have turned on this one-sided, almost daily ass beating, Mark begs, “Please honey. Put that thing down before someone gets hurt.”

“Like you Mark? You mean finally you are the one hurt?”

Betty who’s still hiding on the stairs, grips the railing. She’s scared. She can’t see them directly but once again she watches the drama unfold as mere shadows on a wall.

Alternating between looking at the gun and the eyes of the women he’s pushed over the edge, Mark slowly edges toward her. He says calmly, “C’mon baby, give me the gun. I didn’t know things were this serious. We can sit down and discuss this like adults right? I can change.”

“Really?”

She doesn’t want to hurt anyone, it can be seen in her eyes. She believes him and starts to lower the gun slowly.

“Yes baby. We just need to talk about it, that’s all.”

He feels that this is his best chance to take the gun away since he’s edged within three feet of her. While it appears that she is thinking about his proposal, he lunges and tries to take the gun by force. This lunge has brought her back to reality. The reality that Mark is a lying asshole. They fight for control of the gun.

“Give me the gun you stupid bitch!”

“No!”

During the struggle the gun goes off.



“BANG!”

Betty Jean jumps and her eyes are wide open, yet the fear of the worse has her frozen. Mark and his wife stand in close embrace until she falls to the ground.

“Lynn!”

Betty’s tears flow like streams when the ice melts. She is shaking uncontrollably.

Mark is beside himself. He drops to the floor right next to his wounded wife as she gasps for life. He lifts her head. Her eyes are open and staring at him. She spits out blood. He pleads, “Lynn don’t die! Damn it! Look what you did! Why did you bring a fucking gun into the house? What were you thinking?”

Betty has not blinked or moved as she stares at the shadows of her parents.

“Silent but deadly. I heard those usually stink the most.”

On top of another Katsuya Corporation building which is housing the next target, Shadow awakens from her daydream to find a man in a trench coat and Stetson hat standing about fifteen feet away.

“Why do I even waste my time coming up with these great one liners if the common crook never seems to get it?” Century said.

Century now has Shadow’s undivided attention as she raises from a crouched position. He looks at her and thinks, “Pretty good body for being out of work for almost ten years.”

Shadow in her skin-tight black body suit starts to circle him, challenging him to hand to hand combat. He starts to inspect her from head to toe, checking for weapons. He notices that her outfit has been stitched up in numerous places as if she had been in some ferocious battles. Inch long gashes have been hand repaired and even her face veil has the part under her nose removed, revealing voluptuous lips.

“Wherever you’ve been for those years, I can tell it was none too pleasant.” He starts to circle too.

Shadow charges him sending several fast punches at Century, most of which he dodges. One gets through but doesn’t seem to bother him. He catches each of her wrists with his grasp as she punches at him again. As he holds both wrists, he thinks, “This was way too easy.”

Still in close quarters with him, Shadow steps on his knee forcing

him to bend. She uses this for leverage and does a flip kick out to his chin sending him flying several feet and landing on his rump. She lands on both feet.

“What in the world was that? A person would have to dislocate their shoulders to do that.”

Century stands up. Shadow had turned and started to walk off. He yells, “I don’t know who you are used to tangling with, but I’m not a one-pump chump.”

She turns around and starts walking toward him. He heads toward her. They start exchanging blows again with neither landing one. He grabs her wrist again but this time before she can react he does the same flip kick she just did to him. He sent her higher in the air and farther away than she sent him. She lands in a cat-like position on all fours.

“Like that didn’t you?” Century said with a smile.

She stands up and charges him. They start fighting again, neither still able to land a solid blow, but Century manages to bait her into letting him grab her by the wrist again. This time he pulls her close to him, eliminating room for a counterstrike.

“I prefer to dance close, it’s more intimate don’t you agree?”

She looks down at her feet then back up at him. They are face to face. She smiles. This catches Century completely off guard. “A smile? I thought she didn’t...” Century is unable to finish this thought.

Shadow had clicked her heels three times and a flash has emitted from her body. The clicking activated the suit’s electrical defense device, sending thousands of volts of electricity over the outside of the suit. This surge sends Century through the air and over the edge of the roof.

Century thinks as he free falls, “What just happened?”

His twenty-story descent finally stops when he landed on the top of a car parked outside. The impact shattered all the windows of the car and caved in the roof. Immediately Century jumps up and runs back inside the building. Once inside the night security guard, who hasn’t been able to grasp what he just saw, stands speechless.

Century decides to pass up the one-liner he was going to use on the slack-jawed guard. Century instead heads to the stairs and makes it up to the fifteenth floor without breaking stride. Once on the floor, he runs to room S-67, the door is opened. Century steps inside and finds two dead bodyguards, along with the decapitated body of Mr. Kamai Zukayo.

“Damn it.”

He heads back out into the hallway. “Looks like Kats and me are going to have a very informing talk.”

## *Chapter Six*

Katsuya, sitting behind the desk hears two loud thuds outside his office doors.

“What in the world was that?” He said as he looks up. The two doors swing open, Century enters, behind him two unconscious guards.

“I sent them out to an early lunch and I suggest that unless you want to hand out retirement benefits like candy on Halloween, you’d tell the three or four village idiots about to show up, to go back to their post!”

Right on cue, four of Katsuya’s men arrive at the door with guns drawn. Katsuya’s gut instinct says to listen to Century, even though the odds appear greatly in their favor.

“Gentlemen, thank you for your promptness, but you may return to your posts.”

They don’t appear to want to leave. Katsuya’s usually calm, controlled look changes to a stern one. One of the men notices and withdraws his weapon, the other three follow suit. They all head back to their posts.

Back to the situation at hand, Katsuya asks, “You seem bothered Century, how may I assist?”

Growing tired of Katsuya’s ever professional manner, which Century believes is a total crock, “I’m bothered by the fact that you failed to mention that Shadow is a walking electrical transformer with enough juice to deep fry a two ton elephant to the bone instantly.”

Amazed, Katsuya answers, “That wasn’t in there?”

Century doesn’t buy it, “You have no clue who you’re dealing with, Kats!”

“I assure you Century, that I was under the impression that the file was complete. I didn’t double-check it because it was sent directly here from research facility.”

Century grabs the office chair directly in front of him and flings it into the wall on his left, causing minor wall damage.

Century says, “I assure you that if something else was left out, the chairs in this room won’t be the only things flying into walls.”

Katsuya nods, “I will double check with downstairs.”

Century doesn’t trust Katsuya, not because of this situation but because he’s a mobster and since the first time they met, Century could not

judge this man's emotion and sincerity. The better the liar, the harder it is to separate the honest from the dishonest. Either Katsuya was honest or the best liar he's encountered in a long time. But, either way, he had questions that he needed answered and this man had the answers.

"So what all did you guys replace again?"

"Replace?"

"Inside Shadow. What did you guys replace her heart with, a tow truck battery?"

Katsuya smiles, "No, nothing like that. She does have an artificial heart. Why?"

Century doesn't believe him.

"She has a pacemaker and she's a lethal killing machine? How stupid do you think I am?"

"Not stupid at all, otherwise we would not have hired you. I assure you that the heart and other pieces of technological wonder that is in her are not like the crude stuff you read about in science weekly journal. We spent millions on her."

"So what else did you put in her or do to her besides replace organs?"

"If you're referring to the electrical charge you felt, that is the suit's defense device. In case she was ever outnumbered or couldn't escape a trap such as a net, all she needed to do was click the metal heels on her boots together twice and everything within two feet will no longer be within two feet of her. Which brings to me a question of my own, how did you survive? As you mentioned earlier, the power could kill an elephant, how is it that you are standing here in front of me?"

Century raises his tone, "I'm the one asking questions here!"

"Very well."

"Again, what all did you do to her?"

"I don't know what exactly you're talking about."

Century describes the flip kick, then states, "So how was it that she was still able to fight, yet alone move her arms after that move?"

"Mr. Century... sorry Century, I assure you that what you speak of I have no clue, but at the same time, there could have been an enhancement done over the original plans. Remember, I was not on the board at that time. I wasn't elected until the project was almost complete, and at the time of her disappearance I was only minimally involved."

“So you think that maybe they rewired her emotions, because she smiled right before she zapped me.”

Katsuya looks more shocked now than when Century kicked open the doors, “She what?”

Century notices this reaction but Katsuya immediately regains composure, “You must be mistaken. It was dark on the roof right?”

Century now has facts that the Katsuya Corporation doesn’t know about, that is, if he plays dumb, “Yeah, maybe you’re right, it was dark.”

Katsuya seems to be letting his mind wander off on something else. Century questions him, “So I know everything about her outfit and skills? And if not, will be informed right?”

“Um... oh yeah. I assure you.”

Century decides it’s best to leave now, because if he hears one more “I assure you” Kats will be joining the office chair next to the wall.

## *Chapter Seven*

It's a nice spring day. Betty sits on a stone bench in front of the school library. The remaining yellow busses are for after school activities, the usual clamor of high school has been replaced by a few handful of students roaming and killing time. Betty sets in her colorful dress with her hands in her lap. A tall athletic boy walks up and sits down next to her. He gives her a kiss and asks, "Hey Betty Jean, what was so important? I know how hard it is for you to stay after school, so I'm missing practice today." This is Jack, her boyfriend, the only person she allows to call her Betty Jean.

Nervous about revealing what she wants to, she tries to get out of it, "Never mind, you don't need to be missing practice for me, go ahead, it was nothing."

"BJ baby, I would quit football if you asked me to. Nothing is more important to me than you." He grabs her hand. "And I know you too well, this has got to be important, so go ahead."

What she wants to tell him is something she has never told anyone, not even the child she was forced to see or the police who investigated how her mother was shot. Betty tried to live as if it was just a horrible nightmare but it had pushed its way to the surface when she allowed herself to love someone, that someone was Jack.

"Well... remember how I've always told you that my mom left when I was young?"

"Yes."

"Well... Mark killed her when I was eight."

Jack almost falls off his seat, "What? You're joking right?"

Betty starts to cry, "I wish I were." Jack holds her close. He decides not to say anything until she gathers herself. When she has, he asks, "I know he's a major jerk and all, but he killed your mom? His wife? Why didn't he go to jail for life?"

"I don't know."

"Did he go to jail?"

"I can't remember."

"But you're certain he did kill her?"

"Yes, I was hiding on the stairs one day when he came and they started arguing and he shot her." She started crying again.

“So did you tell the cops?”

“No, I mean I don’t believe so. I can’t remember, I was so scared of Mark and I was so confused, that I even bottled up and refused to talk to anyone for a while. I hardly remember anything besides all the shrinks asking me questions every day.”

Jack snaps, “That damn Mark. I’m gonna kick his ass!”

Betty pleads, “No please! This is my last year of school and I’ll be eighteen, so I can move out and away. I don’t want any problems please.”

“But he killed your mom!”

“Jack please!”

Jack turns away for a minute, then turns back, “If that’s what you want.”

“I think I’m gonna have to buy you some toilet paper with all the squatting you do.”

Sunny spring day turns back into dark cold night, as Shadow turns to find herself facing the same man she thought she killed.

“Did you miss me, dear?” asks Century.

Shadow snarls, raises and pulls out her short sword.

“Yeah right, she’s not capable of emotions.” thinks Century as he squeezes his fist and lets out his full arsenal of arm and fist spikes. She charges him. He uses his arms as shields to block the sword swipes. The blade hits his arm in between the spikes doing no damage. The lack of expected injury stuns Shadow long enough to give Century a chance to land a spinning thrust kick to her midsection. Shadow hits the rooftop with a thud.

“Isn’t it ironic that you’re on your back again? I guess you just like that position.”

Shadow uses her hands to flip back up to her feet. She grabs four capsules from her waist, two in each hand and throws them to the ground by her feet. These little spheres explode on impact and cause the immediate area to fill with thick smoke, making both combatants unable to see each other.

“You’re gonna have to do better than that,” says Century.

He blinks his eyes, and when he opens them they are completely red. He thinks, “I’ll find you soon enough, your body heat won’t lie.” As he looks around for heat traces. Shadow walks up to within two feet of him. He doesn’t see her.



“Damn it, you could not have left this huge rooftop that fast.” Shadow takes a few steps back and runs at the unexpected Century.

“Where did you go? Man, this is making me look bad.” He then hears her approaching, but it’s too late, “I bet that...” she nails him in the chest with a jumping front kick, Century starts his descent off another building, this time the one hundred story Katsuya Corporation building.

“Or shall I say this is making me look Real bad.” This drop is long enough for him to think about what just happened. “How did my infrared not pick up her body heat? Must be something to do with that damn suit. This makes Kats look real bad too, but not as bad as I’m gonna make him look when I get my hands on him.”

Right before he lands, he ponders, “Why couldn’t I’ve been given some cool ability like flying? Oh right, I’m not a superhero.”

This time there was no car to cushion the fall, not like it mattered. Fortunately there was no one outside or under him. He climbs out of the crater his impact made, “I’m not paying to fix that either.” He walks into the building, “No need to run, he’s already dead and so are a handful of guards.” The front desk is unoccupied.

“I guess he went upstairs to help. Poor guy.” Century waits for the elevator to open, it does and he heads toward the 68th floor. As he steps out of the elevator, he notices the hall is in total shambles, blood, bullet shells, and bodies cover the floor while blood, bullet holes, and body chunks cover the walls.

“Well, at least they put up a fight.” He steps over the bodies of the Katsuya’s security team and into the office housing the board member. As expected, the executive's body lays on the floor minus its head.

Katsuya and three armed men enter the office. Katsuya bows his head as he looks at the new headless executive, “Poor Mr....” before he can finish his grieving, Century grabs him by the collar of his overcoat and flings him feet over head into the far wall. Katsuya hits the wall so hard that the plaster cracks. One of the men who came with Katsuya tries to grab Century from behind. Century takes him by the arm and flings him into the same wall that Katsuya hit, making a bigger crack and landing in front of Katsuya.

Century executes perfectly a spinning crescent kick to one of the remaining men who was reaching for his gun, sending him back into the hallway. The last man has his gun drawn and shoots Century in the chest at

point blank range. All the impact does is cause Century to take one step back, then Century replies, "I hate guns," then hits the man with an open palm thrust that sends the guard crashing into the wall behind him. Katsuya, who is on all fours trying to gather himself, is shocked when he sees Century walking toward him unharmed from the gunshot.

"What are you?" asks Katsuya.

"A person you don't want pissed at you!" He then lifts Katsuya off the ground with one hand, "Tell your goon to leave and that we don't want to be disturbed. We got to talk."

The three henchmen, who are all still shaking out cobwebs, are told to leave by Katsuya. Then Katsuya trying to show that he's still the BMOG yells, "Now!"

"Yes Mr. Katsuya," can be heard in almost unison by the fallen warriors. Once the men have left the room, Century who still has Katsuya in his grasp, feet dangling, demands, "This time you're gonna tell me everything."

"I assure you that..." again Katsuya is interrupted by crashing into a wall. Katsuya now has a slight gash on his forehead, which is dripping blood, "What was that for?"

"I'm tired of you saying, 'I assure you', your little third year's businessman tactics don't work on me. 'I assure you' translates into "I'm full of shit!"

Katsuya says, "But I... um have told you everything. What is the reason behind this assault?"

"Her damn suit, it covers her body heat. She's undetectable."

"Century, I assure... I'm telling you the truth, I didn't know. After our last meeting I called and confirmed her file, and was told that everything was in there. I have no need to lie. Why would I hire you if I didn't want her caught? Someone else might be behind this and I will get to the bottom of this."

"This better be the last secret, for your sake."

"Why would I want a man who can't be killed as an enemy?"

"What'd you say?"

"Well at least that's the myth about you, and the gun shot kinda makes that myth seem more plausible."

"Whatever, well, the time frame between the killings has shortened, so I'm gonna be with the next member until she shows up. You have until then to let forth any more information."

“Yes, I understand Century.”

“You better.”

## *Chapter Eight*

“Is all this really necessary?” asks the Japanese man sitting behind his desk.

“If you want to live,” answers Century who is standing with his back to Yoshi Baino, the next targeted member.

“But we have three guards in the hallway, two patrolling the stair well and two monitoring all elevator activities. Undercover patrolling the outer parameter, men on the roof and even a helicopter overlooking the building.”

“And your point?”

“This seems more like a prison than a place of business. And why in the world would she still come here with all of this?”

“Cause she wants your head on a platter.”

Baino’s mood changes, “Not funny Mr. Century.”

“Not at all.”

Century with his back still to Baino asks, “So what do you know about her assignment involving the tomb?”

“Not much. It was only supposed to be a retrieval mission.”

“Retrieving what?”

“Some mythical object. But I don't even think the mission was real.”

“Why not?”

“Come on. A place sealed in time? I don't even believe the place existed.”

“I know it existed.”

“How are you so sure?”

“That’s not important.”

“As a board member, aren't you supposed to know all about the important missions? You’re not supposed to be left in the dark.”

“Not in an ideal world, but the world we live in is far from ideal.”

“Agreed.”

It’s midsummer and Jack is waiting on a park bench for his girlfriend to show up. Jack thinks how ironic it is that the last time they had a meeting to reveal something big, she was the one nervous and

holding earth moving news, but now it's his turn. Betty has no clue why he asked her to meet him here. It's a hassle to get out of the house but since its summer time, she has a small window when Mark is at work between lunch and the time he gets home because school is out. Betty walks up and sits next to him on the bench.

"You look beautiful today," he said to her. She smiles. It seems that Jack is the only person who can get her to smile.

"Thank you. I wore this dress for you, but I got to change when I get home. Mark doesn't like it."

"You might not have to worry about that jerk much longer."

"What do you mean?"

"I got amazing news, that why I wanted to tell you in person."

"What is it, Jack?"

Jack says with a huge grim, "You're mother... she's not dead."

Overwhelmed with emotion Betty cannot believe her ears. Even though she has allowed herself to dream this, now that it's reality, all she can say is, "What?"

"What? That's all you can say?"

"I'm sorry... how? How is it possible? I saw her get shot and the ambulance took her away. She never came back."

"When you told me you couldn't remember much of what happened, I did some research. You used to live in a little town named Norris. After the shooting, Mark got a restraining order on your mother and later, because of her mental state, she was considered unfit. Mark won custody easily because of your mother's huge state of depression. Then he moved you two here. She had no clue where you two had moved. Mark never told her."

"How did you find out all this?"

"Well, your last name is not that common, and remember that I'm going to college to be a journalist. It took a while, but isn't it worth it?"

"Yes it is! Jack, yes it is!"

She gives him such a huge hug and kiss that they both fall off the bench onto to grass with her on top.

"I love you, Jack!"

"I love you too, Betty Jean!"

They kiss, then she asks, "So did you talk to her?"

"Yup."

"How is she?"

“She went back to school, remarried and has one young son and can’t wait for her only daughter to come home.”

Betty’s eyes opened wide, “What? You better not be kidding me. I have a little brother?”

“Yes you do, and no I am not kidding you. She wanted to make sure you wanted to meet her too. Before she came here.”

“Of course I want to, you silly head!”

“Silly head?”

“Yup, that’s what mom and I would call each other. So when is she gonna come here?”

“Next Friday.”

“For reals?”

“Confirmed. The hallway is clear, no sign of her. Over.”

The buzz of the walkie-talkie brings Shadow back to the current day. She is in a vent looking down into the hallways beneath. There is one man walking the hall and two in front of room G-50.

Besides these men in the hall, there has been no one else on this floor for hours. Shadow looks at the watch on her wrist. It clashes with her outfit. It’s a Barbie watch. The stop watch display is doing a two minute countdown. Meanwhile back in the office, Century is standing looking out the window.

“So do you have to stand in here the whole time?”

“I have to make some business calls.”

“So, make them.”

“Well, they are business calls, as in private business calls.”

“So, tell your mistress I said hi.”

Baino is angry and turns his back to Century. The monotonousness of Baino tapping a pencil finally makes Century turn around. Baino hears this motion and turns around also. The look on Century’s face lets Baino know it’s time to put the pencil down.

“So Mr. Century, why do you think she’s killing us off?”

“Revenge.”

“For what?”

“For using her as a lab rat.”

“No. I don’t believe that. I’ve seen her work, I was there the whole project and for her five years of service. She was very content.”

“You wiped out her memory, why would she be anything but

content? She was anything you programmed her to be.”

“Exactly my point, how often does a computer get angry at the manufacturer? There wasn’t enough of the old her left to even remember her real name.”

“Do you even remember her real name?”

“No, and why should I?”

Century hates people like Baino and has no problem expressing this fact, “And why am I protecting you?”

Before Baino could answer there is a small explosion in the vent behind Baino’s desk. Smoke starts to pour into the room. Century takes a whiff, “Nerve Gas! Quick, we got to get you out of here!”

The fumes have already started taking effect on the chairmen who was on the way to the floor. Century catches him before he collapses completely. Century throws him on his shoulder like a rug and heads through the door. He looks down the hall to his left and two bodies are laid out flat in the hall. The nearest exit in that direction is about two hundred feet. Century looks to his right, there’s only one body and the exit is fifty feet away. He heads that direction. As he is running, he passes underneath Shadow and she drops from the vent in which she was hidden. With one motion she removes the head of the board member Century was carrying. The motion was so quick and the blade so sharp that Century barely noticed it but he could feel that Baino suddenly lost several pounds, “Shit.”

He lifts the body and finds it missing a main part, “Damn it!” He tosses the lifeless body to the ground. Century looks back at Shadow, who had the board members head held by its hair at arm’s length

Century has seen a lot in his long life but what he sees in front of him makes him wonder even more what exactly is going on in her head. Shadow tips her head, as if she’s looking to notice something about the head. She frowns and growls, then tosses the head against the hallway wall. She runs toward the stairs.

As Century gives chase he thinks, “What was that all about? Did she expect candy to fall out or something?”

Shadow takes the stairwell and Century follows about two floors behind. He’s gaining ground. She drops a smoke bomb similar to the ones on the roof. Century has no way to improve his vision against this, so as blind as a bat he continues down the stairs, tripping every so many steps.

This slows his pace and he is no longer gaining ground. She continues one bomb every floor it seems. Century says, “Damn, how many of these does she have?”

When Shadow reaches the lobby she opens the door and finds several guns aimed at her. She runs for the main door. As she is running she tosses ninja stars with deadly accuracy as bullets fly past her. Four security guards have received stars to their head and/or neck. Two others caught them with their chest. Backup had arrived. This left six more guards shooting at her. Back on the stairwell, Century trips over the body of the guard who was patrolling the stairwell. This sends him crashing into the wall. Luckily this was the lobby floor. He opens the door to see Shadow executing several back flips with the grace and skill that an Olympic gold medalist would have been jealous of.

“Wow, pretty impressive. But you’re not getting away this time.”

She finishes this display by doing the splits in front of the entrance. She drops two high-powered grenades, one on each side of her. She stands and exits through the glass revolving doors.

Century yells, “Everyone get down!” He is running towards the door. The explosion sends glass shrapnel through the air. Plants, curtains, and rugs catch fire, while smoke flows from the front of the building through all the spots where glass used to be. Century runs full bore out of the front of the building where the revolving door used to be. He is unharmed and in hot pursuit of Shadow. Shadow crosses the street and Century is about twenty feet away and gaining. Shadow dives into a bush and two seconds later Century leaps at the same bush, “Gotcha!”

But he was one second to late, Shadow roars out of the bush on a motorcycle and Century catches nothing but dirt. He pounds his fist on the ground as he is forced to watch her speed away.



## *Chapter Nine*

Katsuya and his limo driver head toward Katsuya's private limousine. Glass and other debris from the explosion cover the top of the car.

“Quick, driver! We need to get to the estate ASAP!”

The driver opens the door for Katsuya and he gets in. The driver shuts the door behind him. Katsuya hears a too familiar thud. Seconds later, the glass separating the front and back of the limo rolls down. Century is behind the wheel, “How ya doing Kats? Going somewhere are we? I got the perfect place. How about the bottom of South Schaub Ocean?” All the doors lock and Century slams on the gas.

Katsuya is scared, “Why are you doing this? What have I done?”

“You're behind all this.”

With a look of total disbelief Katsuya asks, “What? What in the world are you talking about?”

“How else did she know the exact location of each board member, deactivate alarms that she's never seen before, manage to park a motorcycle in the bushes not even two hundred feet from the building and make it either on top or inside each building undetected.”

“I told you before. She was built to be the best.”

“And I might have believed that until the last one. You said that missions and other information was as easy as click and pull right?”

“Yes.”

“So in the simplest terms, she was programmed?”

“Yes, I guess so.”

Century whips the car around a curve going fifty plus. “So then explain how she planned this last one. She knew that the gas would affect everyone but me. Knowing that Baino would be unable to move himself and that I would have to carry him out, most likely on my shoulder with his face back. Also that once in the hallway I would choose the shortest and safest route to remove him before he suffered severe neurological damage, which is where she waited patiently for me to pass. Sounds like one hell of a program, huh?”

Katsuya sounds impressed, “Ingenious. She was programmed to improvise, but I'm impressed.”

Century rolls down the window and taunts, “Oh that salt-water

smell. Intoxicating isn't it?"

Panic returns back to Jin Jun's voice, "I assur... I mean I'm telling you the truth that I had no part of any plans to kill Bairo or any of our board members."

"And also it seems that every time that we met, Shadow had some neat cool device that you failed to mention."

"I told you I had nothing to do with that. I believe that someone in our corporation is a mole."

"How convenient, Kats. Well I hope you can hold your breath pretty long, as in years."

The limo smashes through a barrier and onto a long dock.

"You're insane! I'm telling you the truth!" Katsuya's eyes get bigger as he sees the ocean growing bigger. Shouting out in desperate plea, "Why would I have anything to do with my own father's death?"

"What are you gabbing about?"

In a solemn tone, Katsuya answers, "My father...my father is the fifth member."

Century slams on the brakes, "What? I thought your father was dead? It was all over the news and you said so yourself."

"My father is alive."

"But how? Explain or swim!"

"For one reason or another our particular family has never gotten along with the other families. We tolerated them and they tolerated us. A rumor got around that father was turning state's evidence against several of the other families but he wasn't. The Kairasha family sent an assassin to set a car bomb to kill my father before he was rumored to testify. Luckily for us the assassin that they sent was a friend from my childhood and he owned my family and me her life for helping her mother one time. She couldn't set the bomb. We staged my father's death so that he could run the company from secrecy. My father was so outraged that another family tried to kill him, that we started the Shadow project and used the turmoil followed by a boss's death to explain the monetary loss. Shadow was created with the sole purpose of eliminating the other family heads without being traced back to us. An assassin with no family ties, no emotions and no loyalties to anyone except us."

"Keep going."

"If it was ever found out that my father's death was a hoax, the

whole Shadow project could have blown up in our faces. So when she disappeared, we had to double our efforts to keep my father a secret.”

“Do you think that another family kidnapped her and reprogrammed her?”

“Yes. I believe it is the Kairasha family.”

Century thinks to himself, “That would explain her disappointment with Baino’s head. She was looking for Kats Sr.”

Katsuya continues, “I have several employees that I have had suspicions about, but they are not my concern at the moment. My concern is my father who I believed Shadow is after as we speak. I was headed to my estate where my father is at before you abducted me.”

“How does she know he’s alive and where he’s at?”

“Like I stated earlier. I believe there is a mole.”

Century backs the limo off the dock and they head to the Katsuya Estate.

## *Chapter Ten*

As Century and Katsuya speed to the Katsuya estate in the limo, Century can't help but think of the irony of the situation. Katsuya Sr's life is in danger by the same mad scientist invention he planned to use on the other mob families. "Sweet evil justice."

"Kats?"

"Yes?"

"I'm going to have to kill Shadow."

"I understand."

Century has held back because he gets no joy in taking a life and because corporations like these usually value their property more than human life. In his mind this mission was shaping into almost a total failure. All the board members were dead except Kats Sr. What had he accomplished? Did he mess up so bad that by holding back that things were now un-repairable? Wouldn't be the first time but it's been a very long time since the last. He ponders these thoughts as they pull into the opening gates of the estate. The gates close behind them.

Once they have stopped in the driveway, Katsuya jumps out and heads straight into the house while Century overlooks the grounds. Standing away from the car, Century blinks and as he uses his enhanced vision to overlook the estate something catches his eyes. It's the exhaust pipe from the motorcycle that Shadow was on earlier; it's hanging a little out of a bush.

"She's here."

He is dropkicked by Shadow who was on the roof of the house.

He lands on the concrete driveway, "What is it with you and roofs?"

She doesn't acknowledge his statement. He squeezes his fist, which extends his spikes, "I didn't want to hurt you...bad, but now I have no choice."

She motions for him to bring it on. This display of emotion doesn't shock him anymore. He charges her with kicks and punches, all which she dodges. She lands a thrust kick to Century's midsection sending him back a few feet but standing.

"Nice. But you aren't the only one who can switch up styles."

He charges again but throwing more punches and at varied paces

than before. He lands one of his spiked knuckles to her left breast inflicting a massive wound. She reels to the ground bleeding badly from the wound. Century is standing and hopeful that she's had enough considering that blow was delivered to a near fatal spot. He looks on from about twenty feet away. Century can't believe his eyes, even though he has seen something like this before, it's still a very rare sight. The wound on Shadow heals itself in less than five seconds. Shadow stared at the wound as it healed.

“Did I just see what I think I did?”

Shadow just smiles. She stands and draws two daggers, one from each side and throws them at Century who easily catches them both, one with each hand directly in front of his face. “Come on now. I didn't look that shocked did I?”

She smiles a very familiar smile.

Century thinks, “Why does that particular smile bring back bad memories?”

He notices that there is a thin line connected from Shadow's direction to that of the daggers. Before he can drop them, a surge of electricity sends him sailing through the air and all the way down by the entrance gates. The surge this time was much stronger and even caught his trench coat on fire. He removes it revealing his muscular, statuesque build. He's wearing a jet-black body suit with a belt carrying several gadgets, long black boots and the word “Century” across his chest.”

As he runs toward the house he says, “I knew I shouldn't have worn this today.”

Once inside the house, he has no clue where Kat's, his father or Shadow might be. He stops and focuses his hearing to find out where the action is. A window shatters upstairs. Century takes to the stairs. Once he's upstairs he can hear someone sobbing.

He enters the master bedroom to find Katsuya holding his father's headless body. Century moves to the broken window, no sign of her. He can see the bush where her motorcycle was stashed. It is gone. Century drops his head in personal disappointment.

Katsuya's father or the board members meant nothing special to him, but he feels because of his over-arrogance or mistake, five people are dead and a killer is still on the loose.

Human reactions and emotions are hard to predict at times like

this. One person may want to be alone and another might want to be consoled. Kats was the prior.

“You fucking bastard! You good for nothing bastard! You’re a joke! Everything is gone. Everything is ruined! Get out!” Kats screamed between sobs.

Century walks past as if Katsuya wasn’t there. If Jin-Jun only knew that those comments and the realization that he failed miserably hurt him more than anything that had happened to him the last few days, maybe he would be consoled. But Century will never reveal that kind of pain to another being again. He heads downstairs.

“Shadow, I will find you and I will bring you down.”

Century leaves the estate.

## *Chapter Eleven*

Betty is anxious but waiting patiently for Mark to leave. Usually by this time every Friday he's gone to Rick's Pub to shoot darts and drink beers, but this Friday he's still at home an hour longer than usual. This Friday is a very special Friday for Betty. She gets to see her mother for the first time in over ten years, the whole time she believed her mother to be dead. She has packed all her necessities into two sports bags and one purse. Betty has had to control her excitement for the last week since she found out because she's afraid Mark might do something stupid to ruin it. Paranoia has already kicked in that maybe Mark knows but she still waits patiently for the time to come.

Finally Mark comes into her room unannounced as usual, and delivers the same speech he usually does when he leaves.

“You ain't to go nowhere. When I call you better answer the phone and no fucking company, got it?”

She does her part in this routine. She nods. Mark goes downstairs, chugs the last of a beer and leaves. She waits until she can no longer hear the truck's loud music before she jumps with joy. “I'm free!” she yells. She looks over all her things one last time to make sure she has everything. Then with bags in hand, she heads to the bus stop only a few blocks away. She arrives at the bus stop only to see the back of the bus pull off.

With no way to contact Jack and her mother at the park, she decides to walk it. It's only two miles, She's full of energy and they already know Mark was leaving late, thanks to Jack's “Wrong number” phone call earlier. About a half a mile into her journey, she has to walk through a poor part of town, known for its late-night activities. Luckily for Betty it wasn't too late, so there was only a handful of pimps, whores, and dealers out. None paid her any mind; most were either too drugged out or busy setting up shop. As she strolls with a skip in her step, a black Mercedes Benz pulls alongside and decreases its speed to her walking pace. She notices and tries to pay it no mind, but then the black tinted window rolls down halfway.

“Hey girlie, wanna have some fun?”

She ignores him. He repeats himself. She once again ignores him and she picks up her pace. He asks, “Come on girlie, let's get toasted and

wasted.”

Without looking and still continuing her stride she says, “No, thank you. Please, leave me alone.”

The man won’t take no for an answer, “Come on girly, I got lots of money and drugs.”

Finally really frustrated, she stops. The car stops with her. She looks at the back window and leans forward to try to get a look at the jerk, “Look asshole! I don’t have time for this!”

The tip of what looks like a straw sticks out the back window and blows a dart that hits her in the neck. The drug starts to take effect immediately and she starts to fade in and out.

“Quick, grab her ass and put her in the trunk. Finally I will get the respect I deserve.”

She fades out, then back in to the trunk slamming down.

Katsuya sits in his secret 100th floor office behind his desk with his back to the door.

“Yes I assure you, now you have the family’s full support. Yes tomorrow at noon will be perfect, brunch it is, we’ll discuss all... hello? Hello?”

Katsuya pushes the buttons on the phone trying to figure out why the phone stopped working.

“What? Grieving so much that you forgot to pay the phone bill this morning?”

Katsuya turns around to find Century uninvited in his hidden office.

“What are you doing here? How dare you show your face after all you have cost me! I want you out of my office now!” He tries to buzz security.

“Surprised I found your little office huh? Wasn’t hard to find. And the phone? I cut it off so we could have an uninterrupted meeting, a meeting of my fists to your face.”

“How dare you come and threaten me after you let my father be murdered?”

“Oh, kill the act Kats! I figured it out, stop me when I’m wrong. You see I hate things left in the dark and this mission had too many things unexpected. Like how did she manage to get into the building so many times and even into the ventilation system undetected. So I came here



early in the morning to investigate because I had no intention of resting until I found Shadow. And guess who else had no intention on resting either?"

Katsuya still has an angry look on his face but is paying full attention.

"You! At 6am, only hours after you were embracing your dead father's headless body."

"Some people grieve in different ways."

"I agree but four hours of grief followed by fourteen hours workday. I don't think so."

Katsuya's look changes from anger to no expression at all.

"Then I started thinking about her disappearance ten years ago. What would make the mob risk losing a 100% effective, million dollar killing machine built for the sole purpose of eliminating the crime families, just to explore a tomb that wasn't supposed to exist? Something worth more than her, maybe something that would make someone invincible. This item, if retrieved would give the bearer endless power, but with eleven board members ahead of you and an average membership's being a lifetime, you would have never been chosen to use or even probably touch it."

Katsuya sits silently saying nothing.

"But if she was armed with this object and programmed by you to kill everyone else, everyone who was originally involved with the program, you would look innocent of all the wrongdoing. Then you would be left with the item and sole control of the company. Am I right so far?"

Katsuya says calmly, "Continue."

"I figured that the almost ten-year gap had something to do with the tomb being trapped in time. I figured that the first group failed but someone must have re-opened it and she escaped then, so it seemed like only one day to her. But the one thing I don't understand is why did you have your own father killed? No one even knew he was alive?"

Katsuya stands up with his usual confident demeanor, "Bravo, Mr. Century. You are good, better than I thought. You are correct in everything. I didn't plan the seven-year hiatus but everything else was calculated including my father's death."

"But why?"

"I didn't tell you all lies, my father did turn states evidence, and

because of that he ruined the family name. Yes, we kept our name and membership but we lost all our power because of my father's cowardly act. We were the joke of the families. I had always dreamed of running the family one day, but my dad's disgrace made us as powerful as a third rate street gang."

Century stands speechless.

"And being the family leader he decided to fake his death and all these drones followed along. So my father ruled from the background and was scared to make any real moves because of fear of exposure."

Century asks, "But your own father?"

"He was a cancer that infected the rest of the board, so I created the Shadow project and put together a plan to remove them all with their own help, to bring back pride to the Katsuya Family name!"

"You have truly lost it!"

"No, Century, that's where you are wrong! I have gained it all and soon I will have the item that will make me invincible. No one can oppose me!"

Century charges him, grabbing Kats by the shirt.

"Have you forgotten about me?"

Katsuya smiles a grin that is the equivalent of spitting in his face.

"What about you? I told you from the beginning I was testing you. You don't kill unless it's absolutely necessary because nothing is life threatening to you. A man who cannot die has no need to kill in defense. So what about you? You won't kill me!"

Century grins, "But I will hurt the hell out of you!"

The office doors fly open as a huge networking machine on wheels crashes through them. Before Century can react, the momentum drives Century and the machine through the window.

Shadow is now standing in front of the desk, Katsuya behind it demands, "About damn time! Give me the gauntlet!"

She removes one of her gloves. Century, who was dangling on the side of the building starts to climb back in.

Shadow rolls up her sleeve and reveals a golden gauntlet.

"Finally the gauntlet of Shoko is mine. Finally, I will get the respect I deserve!"

As she reaches to put the gauntlet on the table, she has another flashback. Betty Jean is leaning forward toward the black car to tell the

man to get lost, a tip of a blow dart sticks out of the partially rolled down window. Behind it is the face of Jun-Jin Katsuya, twenty years younger. The words, "Finally, I will get the respect I deserve" echoes in her head. Shadow snaps back to the present as she places it on the table. Katsuya reaches for the gauntlet. Shadow in one quick motion draws her sword from her back and cuts off Katsuya's out stretched hand.

"Ahh!" screams Katsuya as he jumps back and falls in his chair.

"Yooooooooouuu.... YOU!!! Screams Shadow, now breathing heavy.

Pain, shock, disbelief, confusion, and many other emotions cross Katsuya's face, "What? What?"

Shadow swings her sword cutting the desk into two, Century at the broken window watching.

"You... stole... mom... you stole my mom!"

Katsuya can't comprehend what she is trying to say. He wraps his nub in his jacket that was on the back of his chair.

"I... was... no prostitute!"

Katsuya's eyes open wide as he remembers that day over twenty years ago.

"You took everything! Everything!" She lunges at him as he screams. Century turns his back to the action. It only takes seconds before Katsuya cries no more.

Century looks out at the full moon, "What a beautiful night. I guess weird things do happen on the full moon."

Shadow walks up and stands beside Century. Without looking over she says, "Sorry... for... everything."

"No problem, it was the most fun I had in while, so it seems that the gauntlet restored your memory."

"Kinda."

Shadow just stands slightly looking at the moon with him, he asks her, "So, what are you gonna do now?"

Again without looking she says, "Rest." Then does a swan dive out of the broken window. Century turns his back; he can't stand to watch another person die so soon. He goes over to the remains of the desk and what remains of Katsuya, "Well, at least I got another artifact for all this mess."

He searches the debris, no sign of it. Century stands up, "Until we meet again Shadow, good luck." Then he walks off.



**Bashan Savage**

"This was one of my good days."

To learn more about the author and his other works, check out

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