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Cape Town, winter 1995

She watched him leave the way he always did. Proud and decisive and without looking back. No life in the past, she could hear the words still; the credo he lived by. Men stood aside as he wove his way through the throng at the long bar, they always seemed to, for despite his sixty plus years there was something about him that triggered their sensors, made their minds go wary and clear in an instant.

It was the eyes, she decided, the penetration of their gaze as he looked at you and through you leaving the lingering imprint of having seen all, known all, in an instant. That and the way he moved; like a tiger, newly freed from the cage and eyeing its surroundings, moving slowly yet purposefully and all the time tensing the organism, readying it for the snarling fury of the leap.

Men can sense that.

So can women. She saw the way they glanced at him as he brushed past, the furtive sideways glance from under lowered lashes as they toyed with drink and cigarette and laughed at whatever their man was mouthing. And she could understand all that for she felt it too, even if it was in a different way, had always been. Maybe that was why she had flown two thousand miles to be with him. To see him again and listen to his voice and feel his embrace. In their secret place a few stolen hours. The way it had been for so long now.

Five minutes later she was outside and gathering her thin cotton jacket as the icy northwester tried to snatch it away and shivering as she turned her face to the wind to search for a cab. It was past midnight and most of the waterfront's restaurants had closed and the few people about were huddled and hurrying for their parked cars as the rain started coming

down in icy sheets.

For a moment she was indecisive, wondering whether to go back inside and try phoning for a taxi, or make a dash for where she could see the lights of the Imax Theatre winking across kaleidoscopic reflections on rain washed tarmac. She could hear the traffic, crisp sounds on the thin night air, knew her friends would still be there, the late show only ended at half past twelve. There would be time for a nightcap at the theatre's cocktail bar and she could share a taxi back to the hotel.

Screwing up her eyes against the rain she started a shuffling run for the shelter of a shop's awning diagonally across, her high heels unsteady and clattering over the cobblestones. The figure in the shadows watched her progress with a gaze as fixed and penetrating as that of a feral cat, its prey sighted and naked to the kill. It watched her reach the cover and hold onto a post as she raised an ankle to massage a sprain, the features bright and shiny in the fleeting headlights of a turning car.

A cigarette burned brightly and died a sizzling death in the gutter as the lithe figure detached from the shadows to start for a Volkswagen parked nearby. Dressed all in black, including the thin leather driving gloves and the long hair tucked under a rolled up knitted cap, the figure was a sinister one with one redeeming quality that would instantly register with any casual observer. And evoke a moment's puzzled silence.

For, peering out from the matt black attire of the stalking predator, was the face of a stunningly beautiful woman. A face that had now lost all expression, the eyes large, the pupils dilated, as she started the car and crawled slowly for where she had gauged the next stop of her prey to be. She was oblivious to the rain or snatching wind as she slotted the small car into a parking spot around the corner of the long row of closed shops that lined the far end of the plain and seconds later she was part of the darkness once more.

Time was of no essence now, her heart rate was down four or five beats as it always was when the moment came, her breathing shallow and con-

trolled. She watched the distant figure depart the cover and cross in a quickstepping puddle skipping gait towards where she waited and felt nothing more than quiet satisfaction in having read correctly the progress of the quarry. The quiet pride of the stone cold professional; for this wasn't personal, just business.

There was a sudden clatter of footsteps, a rush of breathing and the woman was onto the porch and pressing her back against the wall to get maximum shelter from the increasingly heavy rain now coming down at forty five degrees before the driving northwester. The dark figure studied her from less than six feet away, standing absolutely still and undetected in the recess of a darkened doorway. Impassive eyes followed the outline of the profiled face, the cut of the hair — now blonde and much shorter than when last they met - and a slow smile parted the full lips and small white teeth glinted.

'Hello Lisa.'

Just that. There was nothing more to say. She studied the change in expression on the girl's face with detached interest; curious how in an instant flushed cheeks would go deathly pale, eyes would grow rings of white and the exhilaration of a run in the rain would make way for sheer blind terror. She saw the recognition flash, registered the sharp intake of breath and brought up the obscenely thin stiletto in a lazy arc that caught and reflected what little light there was in a series of jagged imprints on the retina. Soundless and swift and entirely without malice. Just old business.

The girl who was then calling herself Lisa Grant lived only because fate had decreed she should. Even as she felt the incredible sharpness of the cold steel penetrate the side of her neck, her flailing arms too late to block the wicked sweep of the murderous instrument of death, a foot slipped on the wet tiles and she went over backwards and away from the probing thrust of the knife. And the figure in black following her down and raising the knife and the sudden shout from close by jerking her head around for that vital second Lisa needed to roll clear and onto her

hands and knees. 'Hey! What're you doing?!' It was a man's voice, closing fast and then she saw his reflection in a display window of a curio shop, the features angry, the details of the security guard's uniform distinctive even in the poor light. She saw her assailant hesitate, expertly flick the knife across to the other hand, held low and with blade facing up, ready to face the new challenge. Saw the man hesitate as his gaze fell on the knife, saw him pause, a wary slow smile cross his lips as he brought the big gun up and aiming.

'Take it easy now, just...' There was an explosion of movement, a vague fluidity of shapeless form in motion and the guard was tumbling in the gutter and scrambling for his weapon and then she was gone, swallowed up by the very night she had emerged from. There was the roar of an over revved engine, the screech of spinning tires and the acrid smell of exhaust and rubber. Gone, a phantom that had been part of Lisa's life for going on eight terror filled months with no end in sight.

'You OK, Miss?' The guard had climbed to his feet and was ruefully staring after the fast receding shape of the speeding car, his gun hanging by his side. She nodded, her teeth gritted against the pain that was threatening to engulf her, swamp her mind. She had to keep control now; a doctor, she needed a doctor, but not an emergency room where they could track her down, complete the job.

'I'm fine...just a scratch. No!' She waved him away, her hand quickly returning to where she could feel warm sticky blood welling up from under the collar of her jacket,

'...No need. I'll be alright. Perhaps just get me a taxi...' She saw him hesitate then shrug and reach for his two way radio. Crime at the waterfront had become a way of life, nothing out of the ordinary about this evening. Yet he wondered about the figure in black, was his imagination playing tricks on him? Had it really been a woman? He shrugged the thought off with a grimace as he felt the pain from where the knife had grazed his chest wall. Naah... no woman he knew could pull that off, not against a pro with a gun. Goddamn punks were getting more cocky all the time.

Ten minutes later Lisa was in the back of a cab and on her way to an address she had given the driver, the name of a discreet doctor who could be relied on not to ask questions as long as the price was right. As she lay across the back seat, fighting consciousness and trying to smile reassuringly at the anxious gaze of the cabbie in the rearview mirror, she reflected that that was typical of her man; he never did know the real world from the make believe, but he had a tame doctor in every port. And probably a girl.

It went with the territory.

And yet she loved him without question, without terms. Always had; always would.

It was not a matter of choice.

Coming over the hump at Monwabisi I had the sea on my right and the twin horns of False Bay sat far out but not so far that I could not pick out the etched sharpness of Cape Point as the winter sun lifted it out from water and sky. Further back, behind me now, the buildings of Simons Town would be shimmering white and a beacon for the early yachtsmen setting out from Gordon's Bay for a leisurely four hour cruise across the twenty miles that separated the two. There was a sloop rigged thirty footer sitting close in, near my end, white sails flapping in search of the elusive breeze and tiny figures in gaily colored gear sipping coffee at back and the kids playing peek a boo around the forecastle. Family stuff.

Taking the dip to the Monwabisi pavilion another fog patch rose to meet me and I geared the Alfa Spider down and there was something solid and satisfying in the roar and rumble of the exhaust as she protested and hunched down on the wet tarmac as the growl of the engine brought her to heel. A grocery truck was struggling up the hill, its back doors open and tailgate down and jammed to capacity with about a million carrots with someone lying prone on top and peering out so the bunnies wouldn't sneak up and steal some. I finally got second to engage, playing her like a new woman, soothingly yet firm and when I swung out the black ribbon stretched out open and glistening and tapering away