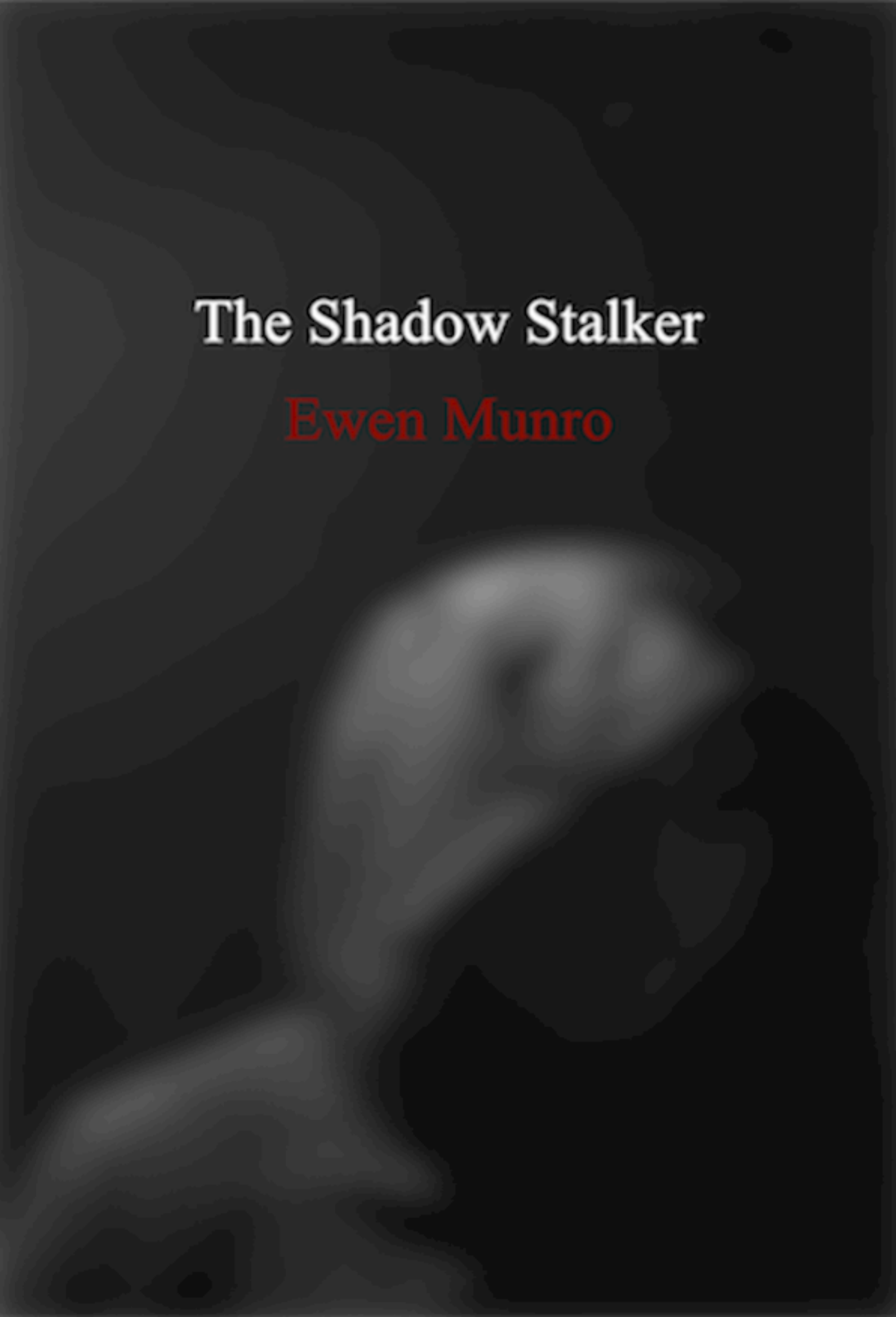


The Shadow Stalker

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The Shadow Stalker

The 1st Case

It was as if a pink filter had blanketed the evening sky. The clouds roared with tranquility. She couldn't decide whether it was sad or beautiful.

"Who's hungry?" a soft voice asked, behind her.

"Me", "I am", two children answered.

She snapped out of her trance and slowly turned around with the same look of euphoria on her face, seeing a young woman putting two children into the backseat of a car. Looking back at her life, she decided it was sad.

Driving down the quiet winding road, and with the children finally asleep, the young woman behind the wheel asked her "Are you okay?"

"Yeah", the woman answered.

"You've been really quiet all afternoon."

"I just don't need to talk."

The driver gently exhaled, wondering how to respond. But nothing came to mind. An air of silence morphed around them.

After a moment, the woman looked over to her driver and was caught by the blue in her eyes again, taking her back to when they first met in a night club and a strobe light lit up both her irises. Of course, she knew it wasn't real, but when one is transfixed, one cannot help but lose oneself in the illusion. It was in this moment that she understood everything. The memory gave her another smile.

Her partner looked over to her, taking her attention off the road for a split moment, seeing the smile on her face and asking "What is it?"

She looked away, still wearing her smile and answered

“Nothing.”

Her partner smiled, although, she couldn't tell whether her partner was genuinely reassured or was masking her true feelings. 'We all lie', she thought to herself. 'We all have our secrets.' But that wasn't enough to question her further. They drifted on.

The walls of the house were perspiring, with the windows fogging up from the steam coming from the kitchen. Both children liked playing with the light coming through the window when their parents were cooking.

After their feast, the family usually enjoyed watching TV, when there's a show on that's worth watching, or reading books. Whilst they were all together, they were also in their little worlds, fantasizing about their hero's journey from the story they were currently engulfed in. It was their way of slowing down from the events of the day.

As one of them started to yawn, the rest of them would follow suit, catching the bug like a contagion. It would mean time to go to sleep for everyone. They would stop what they were doing, change into their sleepwear, brush their teeth, say their "Goodnights", and go to bed.

It was like any other night, without concern, as they all closed their eyes and left the day behind them. But then she tossed from a dream she couldn't remember. This was usual for her. She always had a knack for remembering the worlds she built at night. However, this dream was different and now she was caught up trying to remember what she dreamt about. 'Where was I?', 'What was I doing?', were some of the questions she asked herself. But she had no answer and was stuck ruminating. She could only open her eyes, get up out of bed and wait for her thoughts to stop thinking.

She gently placed her hand on her right eye and softly rubbed it to allow herself to wake up. She was now able to widen both eyes just a little bit before she gently rubbed her other eye. As she stretched her neck and took a deep breath,

her vision gradually came to her, enabling her to see through the night light. She could feel the quietude. It wasn't cold but wasn't warm either. It was just plain. Nothing there, but at the same time, it was as if something had got a hold of her. Or someone? She quickly looked toward the door and saw a hooded figure in the shadows looking back at her. She gasped, jolting back in her bed and turning her bedside table light on. The figure was gone. Her partner woke up with a groan to all the commotion.

“What?”, her partner moaned. “What is it?”

“There was someone there”, she replied.

Her partner looked over at the doorway, but there wasn't anyone there. Hesitation seeped in. They both gradually got out of bed and slowly crept to the door. Still no one. The tension in her shoulder tightened, like a clenched fist, as both their heart rates accelerated, feeling as if they were about to beat out of their chests. But the children. They had no choice but to investigate. They both cautiously walked into the living room.

Everything looked as it should. Nothing appeared out of place. But there was still this air of anxiety looming over them, as if something was not quite right. It all seemed too appropriate. Or were they simply putting this anguish on themselves, she wondered. ‘No’, she thought. ‘There was clearly someone there.’ Doubting her beliefs, they both continued forward, looking around the place for anything peculiar. And still no alarms were raised. But then, she noticed the window to the backyard open.

“Look”, she said, pointing to the window.

Her partner saw the window open too and wandered towards it to inspect it further. It didn't seem as if the window was big enough for someone to squeeze through and her partner wondered that even if it was big enough, how come they didn't hear someone bolt down the corridor, open the tight window and crawl themselves through? Surely, they would have heard something. Questioning what she

saw, her partner closed the window, turned towards her and asked “Are you sure you saw someone?”

“Yes”, she insisted.

Her partner kept on looking back at her for a moment, wondering if there was a follow up comment. But no further response was given. Her partner eventually had to say, “I’ll check the rest of the house.”

“Ok”, she responded.

As she stood there, her partner hesitated for a moment before wandering off to check the rest of the house. There was nothing else that could have possibly been out of place. Or so it seemed.

A police car rolled up to their house and two police officers got out of the car, stretched and had a look around before sauntering up to the house. A curtain from the house next door could be seen moving. The younger officer noticed this. Quietly, they made their way to the front door and the older officer to knocked. In their moment of waiting, the older officer kept to himself, while the younger one looked around some more, and seeing more neighbors peering through their windows. She wondered if they were causing more disturbance by showing up. But her thoughts subsided when the door opened and they were let in.

Both officers were told the events of the previous night from the woman who witnessed the hooded assailant, while her partner sat back and listened. The officers took their own notes, jotting down the important points from the story. The worry on both the women’s faces was evident. But the officers couldn’t tell the source of their concerns. Was it from an assailant who wandered through their house, as was claimed? Or was it for the well-being of the witness? Neither officer knew, but they were both wondering.

“Where are your children now?”, asked the younger officer.

“At their father’s”, answered the partner.

The younger officer gently smiled before asking, “And what is he like?”

“He is good”, the witness answered. “He is a good man.”

“No quarrels?”

“No, he...”, she paused. “No.”

“Can you describe the assailant for us again?”

“Sure...”, she paused again, trying to gather her thoughts. “But I couldn’t really see him.”

“You said he was about five ten?”

“Yeah, about that.”

“You couldn’t see his face?”

“No, it was pitch black and he had a hood on.”

The younger police officer just looked back at them for a moment, thinking about whether or not to ask any follow up questions. But then the woman interjected: “It wasn’t him”, she said. “He wouldn’t do this.”

“Ok”, the younger police officer accepted, at least, for now.

The officers continued to search the house for any abnormalities, but nothing stood out. The most obvious answer was that the story was all made up. But they couldn’t assume that it was. Besides, they didn’t have a motive for why they would have made up this story.

They both left the house with all questions and no answers, as they told the women that if they needed any more help to then call them again. Both women thanked the officers and went back inside. The police officers looked to each other to gather each other’s perspectives.

“What do you think?”, the younger officer asked her senior.

“I don’t know”, the older officer answered. “There’s something not quite right about all this.”

The older officer paused, looking over all the drawn curtains from the windows of the neighboring houses, before facing his junior and asking: “What do you think?”

“I think we don’t have enough information to know what happened”, she answered. “And besides, it’s not our job. We’re not detectives.”

“Speaking of which”, the older officer said. “You shouldn’t have asked about the father.”

“Was that wrong, sir?”

“It’s not our job.”

“Sorry, sir.”

“But we will relay this information”, the older officer said. “It might be useful to somebody.”

The young officer nodded her head and allowed a bit of space to breathe before asking, “Since that’s the case, sir, wouldn’t it be worth asking the neighbors if they saw anything last night? Seeing as we’re going to relay the information anyway?”

The older officer hesitated, looking back at his junior, before accepting “We might as well.”

The reluctance could be felt from the older officer, but the younger officer, without saying a word, turned around and headed next door, while the older officer followed at his own speed.

On her way, walking along the footpath, a noisy miner flew down, almost grabbing her hair before flying up to a nearby tree. Luckily, the young officer ducked in time. But she put her hand over the top of her head and looked out for the bird that attacked her. It wasn’t in sight. She looked to the nearby tree, assuming that it had flown up and perched itself on one of the branches, but she couldn’t see it and didn’t hear any calls. She hesitated, wondering if she was really attacked or not, if even for a second. But there was no time to ponder this and so, she looked over to the neighbor’s front door and headed towards it. Her senior watched all this unfold.

The young officer walked up to the door and knocked on it as her partner followed and stood right beside her. The trees around them were alive, drowning out any possible

silence they might have heard. Time slowed down, adding more weight to their shoulders. But then, slowly, the front door creaked open, revealing an elderly lady, wearing glasses too big for her eyes, in a purple cardigan that was too small for her.

“Yes”, the old lady answered.

“Hi, ma’am”, the young officer said. “We’re the police. We’d like to ask you a few questions if you don’t mind.”

“May I see your badges?”

The younger officer looked to her senior, only for him to shrug his shoulders. The younger officer then looked back at the old lady, pulled out her badge and revealed it to her, with a bit of a rolled eyes feel about her. The old lady had a long glance at the badge before the officer took it away from her sight.

“Do you have a moment?”, the young officer asked again.

“Ok”, the old lady answered. “What is this about?”

“Did you see or hear anything unusual last night?”

“Yes.”

“Oh”, the young officer responded with a look of surprise. “What did you see?”

“There was a young man sneaking away from the house next door.”

The older officer turned his head, questioning for a moment what he had just heard, before interjecting, “Can you describe this young man?”

“I don’t know”, the old lady continued. “It was hard to see him.”

“Because it was dark?”, the younger officer asked.

“No”, the old lady answered. “Because he was wearing a hooded jumper.”

The younger officer looked to her senior, as he stood there with doubt across his face. But he had to ask the old lady, “Did you talk with next door at all about this?”

“No”, the old lady answered. “I do speak with them.”

They are a nice family. Wonderful kids. But I haven't talked to them in a few days. They were away for the weekend, you see."

The older officer smiled, but only slightly, still filled with confusion over what was going on and at the same time attempting to be polite.

"Thank you for your time, ma'am", said the younger officer.

The old lady slightly nodded before turning back around and closing the door on them. Both officers turned to each other, unsure of what this meant. An assailant who wanders into a house and does nothing, leaving no trace, no evidence that they were even there. Surely, this was made up. Possibly a joke. But how could the two witnesses of the incident come up with similar descriptions of the assailant without corresponding with each other? He must be real, even if it did appear that he could walk through walls.

The 2nd Case

There were some dead flies in the small dish of cashew nuts. Even the sunlight coming in through the venetian blinds couldn't light up the dimly lit atmosphere. Nor could all the air freshener mask the stench of vomit. But none of this bothered the barfly, sitting at the bench, with his head in his arms and his hand firmly clasped around his fifth drink. He had the stink of a regular, as the TV right above the drinks was showing a news report of the incident at the two women's place, describing the assailant as six foot with a medium build. The barfly didn't care though, remaining where he was, as if he were molded into his position.

The night was very young, with the neon lights turned on inside and more and more partygoers entering, ready to begin their night. The barfly, however, was stumbling out, already worse for wear, fumbling his way through the swarm of younger selves and heading as far away from them.

The barfly found his way down a quiet street, surrounded by two story buildings with cracked windows, dry walls and graffiti. But he ignored it all, as if he had made this unconscious walk many a times before.

Finally, the barfly made his way to an apartment complex, with a few people standing outside smoking and some loud techno music playing from the top floor of one of the buildings. With his head down and his shoulders hunched over, like a gargoyle, the barfly casually walked past everyone and made his way to the front door. He tried to open the door, pulling at it, but the door resisted. After pulling it a few times, the door managed to barge open, if only slightly, to allow the barfly to step in, one leg at a time. The smokers outside didn't pay attention to him.

He made his way up some steps, passing more revelers who were going up and down the steps to different parties on the various floors, only to make his way to a shut door. Number 08 was the door number, but the 8 had fallen over, as if it were lying down on its side. The barfly got out his key and entered.

The music could still be heard, pounding through the walls and reverberating through the tiny apartment. But the barfly just locked the door behind him, walked down the hall and opened the door at the end, only to reveal a single shut window looking out towards the rest of the city with a stained mattress on the floor. He slowly made his way to the mattress and simply collapsed onto it, shut his eyes and relaxed into the void.

The air was still even though the walls continued to thump. The barfly was still where he was, in limbo, as the dark engulfed him. A door from outside could be heard opening, letting some of the partygoers out and taking their ruckus to the streets. The barfly coughed, hearing the commotion outside. He slowly reached for his head, feeling the split, gasping and coughing some more. Gradually, he sat up, his vision slowly coming into focus. That was when he saw a shadow standing near the window. He shook his head, ignoring the pain, to double check what he was seeing. The shadowy figure was still there, wearing a hoodie, his face concealed in the darkness. Sweat began to drip from the barfly's forehead, as he could feel the nerves fire through his body, his heart jumping. He crawled towards the door as the figure continued to stand there, watching, not making a move. The barfly could feel the throbbing in his neck. Then suddenly, the figure made a slow step towards him. The barfly screamed, leaping to both his feet and running towards the front door.

The barfly ran out of his apartment, down the steps and barged out the entrance to the building, all the while

screaming louder than the music. All the attention was on him, as he made it to the street and looked back, exclaiming over and over again how there was someone in his flat. They all just watched. The barfly continued to tell the people around him that there was someone in his flat, looking at them with wide eyes, as if asking for help. But the exhaustion began to take a hold of him and he reached for his knees, looking back at the front door, gasping for air. Still, everyone around him didn't move, watching his turmoil unfold.

A suit was looking through a glass window as he picked at the callus on the edge of his right middle finger with his right thumb, watching closely. On the other side of the glass window was the barfly, sitting at a table, alone, looking down at the empty chairs in front of him. An older man in a suit walked in with a cup of water and handed it to the other suit. The younger suit stopped picking at his finger and took the cup from his senior.

“Are you ready?”, the older gentleman asked.

“Yes, sir”, his junior answered.

The older gentleman nodded and led them both into the room next door with the barfly. The barfly snapped out of his trance, watching the two gentlemen enter and sit at the table opposite him. The older gentleman pressed record on the sound recorder on the table and introduced everyone in the room to it as the younger gentleman handed the barfly the cup of water. They then went over the events of the night together.

“Can you explain to me why this man is targeting me?”, the barfly asked again. “Who is he?”

“What we're struggling to understand here is how he could have gotten in”, the younger gentleman mentioned, ignoring the question asked to him. “Your windows are frozen shut. The only way he could have gotten in was through the front door, which you said you locked behind

you when you got home. On top of that, when you ran out of your apartment, no one saw anyone else leave your flat, let alone the man in question.”

“What are you saying?”

“Your blood alcohol levels were quite high when we got to you. Could you have just imagined him?”

“He was standing right there. You have to believe me.”

“Then how could he have gotten into your flat?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know!”

A pause grew between them. Was he telling the truth? Neither of the two gentlemen could tell, looking back at the barfly, waiting for him to reveal something new to them, something that could shed some light onto what had happened.

But the barfly just clasped his hands together, intertwining his fingers, looked back at the gentlemen and begged, “Please, you have to believe me.”

Both gentlemen continued to look at the barfly for a brief moment before the older gentleman said, “Okay, we’ll stay in touch.”

The gentlemen stood up from their chairs. Before leaving, the older gentleman told the barfly, “You can go now.”

“Go?”, the barfly queried. “Go where?”

“Go home.”

“Go home. Are you shitting me?”

Both gentlemen didn’t answer, looking back at the barfly.

Then the barfly whimpered, “I can’t go home. What-What if he comes back? You have to protect me. It’s your duty to protect me. Please.”

The gentlemen still didn’t know how to respond, but they had to move forward, so the younger gentleman just said, “We’ll see what we can do.”

‘Would they?’, the barfly thought to himself. But what else could he do? The gentlemen left the room, leaving the

barfly by himself, and entering a much busier and noisier workspace, before the younger gentleman asked his senior, “What do you think?”

“I think we don’t have enough info to know what happened”, the older gentleman answered. “But there’s one thing for certain. He’s definitely shaken up.”

“That’s for sure. But his description of the assailant matches the descriptions from the first two witnesses.”

“It also matches the description released by the press. This doesn’t tell us anything. I still don’t know how they got a hold of the description.”

“Do you think we have someone inside leaking info to the press?”

“Could be. Could be.”

The 17th Case

The chaos of the office was growing. Movements forward and back were becoming increasingly frantic, phones going off with more frequency, conversations rising in volume. It would make anyone panic, just seeing everything that was going on, even a little depressed. The older detective was quietly sitting in his chair, watching all this unfold, contemplating the case. ‘What is it that we truly know?’, he asked himself. The question ran around in his mind, again and again, going over the facts, hoping for a realization that could break this case wide open, instead of running around like headless chickens. But nothing new was coming to him. He concluded that the only thing he could do for now was to go over the details of the entire case and see if there was anything they’d missed. He stood up, called over the younger detective and off they went.

Outside was even worse as leeches swarmed around the station, waiting for their scoop. The detectives made their way through the carpark, away from everyone else, got in their car and headed out. As soon as they were visible, the leeches with their mikes ran for their car and barraged them with questions about the infamous ‘Shadow Stalker.’ But the detectives turned their eyes away from them and drove off.

“Can’t believe this perp already has a name”, the older detective commented.

“What are we going to do with the media on this one?”, the younger detective asked.

“There’s nothing much we can do. They’re after what they want, like everyone else. We can’t stop them.”

“Like everyone else?”

The older detective paused, as he was taken aback by

the question, but then moved on, stating, “We just have to get on with our job. It’s all we can do.”

The younger detective went quiet, leading to a silence in the air before a question came to mind, as he asked his senior, “Do you think going over everything is a good use of our time?”

“Everything before the media’s involvement is”, the older detective answered. “It’s the only info on this case that we can take at face value.”

“Can we take it at face value, though? Even the two major witnesses we have told us that there was no way ‘The Shadow Stalker’ could have exited their places as fast as he did without being heard or spotted.”

“Don’t you start.”

“Start what?”

“Using that name.”

“What else am I supposed to call him?”

“Assailant. Perp. Just don’t call him that.”

“Why not?”

“Because it mythologizes him. It makes him grander than he is. It makes him something for people to believe in.”

“That won’t happen.”

“You wait and see. People love something to believe in.”

“Not when it’s not true.”

“Oh, on the contrary. That’s all people believe in: The things that aren’t true.”

“Sir, I don’t mean to offend you, but you have a fairly bleak view of people, if you think that.”

“I don’t need to think it. It’s how people are, how we are, regardless of whether we believe it or not. You’ll see.”

The detectives made the rounds, trudging through the rain, going back to the original witnesses, to see if they’d missed anything, or if they might have remembered anything new. But nothing, at least at this point. What was there left to do?

The older detective decided to get lunch, spotting a café, and leading them to a table outside, as the smell of salt overpowered their coffees. The younger detective finished his meal and pulled out a cigarette.

“Don’t do that here”, the older detective interjected.

“What’s wrong?”, his junior asked.

“I hate cigarettes.”

“You afraid of me getting cancer?”

“No, I hate the stench of them. It makes me sick.”

The younger detective put his cigarettes away, as the sound of the pouring rain was all that could be heard, at least for the moment. Then the younger detective said, as if to ask a question, “Sir?”

“Yeah.”

“Why did you pick this line of work?”

“I didn’t. It picked me.”

“How was that, sir?”

The older detective went silent, ignoring the question and waiting for his junior to move on.

Eventually, his junior commented, “You must have decided to do this. People decide to do what they do, even if they don’t want to admit it.”

“If you say so”, the older detective responded, looking away from his junior.

“If you don’t think that then you must not think that you’re responsible for your actions. And that’s not good.”

“Don’t lecture me on what is good and what is not. You don’t know. You have no idea. You’re naïve.”

“You can assume that because I am younger than you, but if people don’t take responsibility for themselves, then they’re liable for all kinds of things. They’re willing to justify all sorts of atrocities just because they believe that it wasn’t their fault. That can’t be good for the world.”

“It might not be good for the world, but it’s who we are. I’m just being real.”

“You can be real without being pessimistic. You can

change people. Do good.”

“Is that why you became a detective?”

“Yes.”

The older detective scoffed before saying, “You’re wasting your time. Besides, people don’t change. They either become who they are or they don’t.”

“I’m sorry, sir, but I just don’t believe that.”

“As I said before, ‘People love to believe in things that aren’t true.’”

“So, people can change then?”

The older detective just looked away, not saying a word. The younger detective went silent, feeling a cold breeze flowing through him, questioning if he was right or not, before looking away, in the same direction as his senior was looking.

The sky began to darken, the rain was feeling heavier, they heard a few claps of thunder, but both detectives remained still, where they were, waiting. Then the older detective posed to his junior, “Let’s suppose that all of this was made up.”

“Could it have been? How could the neighbors have had the exact same description without them corresponding with one another?”

“But let’s just say that this was made up. Why would they? Why would they make it up?”

“Don’t know. They seem like a nice family.”

“They do, but people do have their secrets. Some of them very dark.”

“Some of them.”

“What do we really know about this family? Two loving mothers. Two children.”

“Financials are clean.”

“The mother split up from the father because she fell in love with another woman?”

“We assume so.”

“What if there was more to it?”

“What are you thinking?”

“I’m not sure, but let’s go speak to the father again.”

They headed to their car, got in and drove off. The windshield wipers were working over and over, making it difficult to see, despite the heater being used in the car. Both detectives remained silent, whilst still pondering what other reason there could have been for the father to have split up with his wife. Then they heard the radio report that another crime had been committed by The Shadow Stalker. The news was describing how the assailant was again caught watching a witness while they slept. Of course, the detectives knew of this case, but it did make them wonder if these witnesses were the ones who were telling the media about their incidents and might they be doing it for their own twisted personal agendas. One of the new cases was with an influencer who appeared to do anything for attention. Another was a recently retired politician. But then another case that they had was with a foreign stay-at-home mother. Who knows whether these witnesses were using this assailant for their own gain or not. All they could do was investigate further, each incident at a time.

The rain had calmed down considerably by the time they arrived at the father’s place, but was still a nuisance, as dark clouds continued to loom over everyone. The children could be seen through the window, playing with their toys, leading the older detective to think how nice it would be to be a child again, oblivious to the horrors of the world, while the younger detective waited for his senior to make a move. Once the older detective was done reminiscing, they got out of the car, headed towards the house and rang the doorbell. The father arrived at the door, in a white T-shirt and a light blue cardigan, with a child’s kind, innocent face.

“Hi detectives”, the father said.

“Hi”, the older detective responded. “May we come in?”

“Sure.”

The father nonchalantly stepped out of the way to let the

detectives in and walked them to the kitchen where they could speak in private.

“Can I get you anything?”, the father asked them.

“I’m good, thanks”, the older detective answered.

“I’m ok”, the younger detective then answered.

“So”, the father said. “What can I do for you?”

“We’d just like to ask you a few more questions, if you don’t mind”, the older detective said.

“Sure, hit me.”

“Do you mind telling us a bit about your relationship with your ex?”

“No, I don’t mind. What do you want to know exactly?”

“Well, how is it?”

“It’s good. Yeah, it’s good.”

“There’s no animosity between you two after your divorce?”

“No. None whatsoever.”

The detectives just looked back at the father, waiting for him to elaborate.

Eventually, the father had to give in, stating, “Look, I love her. And I was heartbroken when we separated. But we’ve both moved on. And we’re happy now.”

There was a pause before the older detective said, “Ok.”

Tension could be seen leaving the father, shoulders dropping, as if letting his guard down. But it wasn’t over. The older detective then said, “Can we ask you something else?”

While the father didn’t tense up again, he wasn’t drawing a smile. It was apparent that thoughts were running through his mind, but what thoughts and why, the detectives could not be sure of.

“Sure”, the father had to answer. “What is it?”

“What was the reason for why you and your ex-wife split up?”, the older detective asked.

“Because she fell in love with someone else.”

“There wasn’t any other reason?”

“No. She met someone else. And fell in love with her. If there was some other reason, you’d have to ask her.”

“Did you know she was interested in women?”

“No. I had no idea. But then again, I don’t think she knew either.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Because there were no signs. People don’t know these things. They don’t know what they like until they try it.”

“People don’t know what they’re even capable of until they try as well?”

“Yeah, exactly.”

“Would you say you’re like that?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I guess, I am. Much like anyone else.”

“Right.”

A cold silence drifted between the two parties, leaving all three of them to wonder, before the detectives excused themselves and the father, politely, escorted them towards the front door.

“Bye detectives”, the father said.

“Goodbye”, the older detective replied, with a smile.

The detectives exited the premises, leaving the father behind with his children, as some sunlight finally shone through the ominous clouds.

“What do you think?”, the younger detective asked his senior.

“I think he’s hiding something”, the older detective answered. “Did you see the look he gave when we pressed him about his ex-wife liking women? And the response he gave about people not knowing what they’re capable of. He’s hiding something. He’s hiding something for sure.”

The 35th Case

A full moon was shining through the handful of clouds that were drifting across the night sky. The streets were relatively quiet throughout the suburbs, except for a few hot spots, especially in the city, where friends were gathering for a drink or two. However, most people were home, together, reluctant to go out, in case they crossed paths with The Shadow Stalker. Paranoia was clearly seeping in and fear could be smelt on the mind.

But in the shadows of a dilapidated alleyway, a hooded figure was hiding, watching the activity across the street. There was a club with music pumping out of it, people coming and going, some drunk, others just looking to dance, but with a mix of different people. The hooded figure remained where he was, head down, biding his time, as if waiting for the perfect prey. And as he waited, whilst everyone else was distracted by fun, he whispered to himself, "I am The Shadow Stalker."

Colors were blending into each other. Dust particles were vivid. Kaleidoscopes were slurring. The rush was soaring through the veins.

"Where are we off to now", a woman said.

"Back to my place", a man replied.

"On we go."

"On we go!"

The man escorted the woman away down the street, away from the music. They wobbled and laughed their way down the quiet street, filled with apartment buildings. A few of the lights were on, but no figure was visible at the windows. The man and the woman found themselves alone.

The woman slowed down, influencing the man to do the same.

“Why you slowing down?”, the man asked.

“I had fun tonight”, the woman responded, ignoring the question.

They both slowed to a stop.

“Me too”, the man responded. “But the night is still young.”

“I know”, the woman said.

“Has the magic worn off?”

“No.”

“I have some more at my place.”

“I don’t know if I should.”

“Oh, c’mon. Lighten up.”

“No.”

“C’mon.”

“I said ‘No!’”

As the man grabbed the woman’s arm and the woman resisted, smacking him, trying desperately to get him off, screaming for help, the hooded figure appeared from nowhere, holding a blade in his right hand, drawing blood from his own palm, approached the man and stabbed him repeatedly in the neck, over and over, dragging him to the ground and repeating, “I am The Shadow Stalker”, again and again.

The woman, standing back, watched all this unfold, her heart pumping faster, sweat drawing, tension riddled throughout her body. The hooded figure’s face was disclosed to the woman, despite some of the blood running down the man’s neck and along the concrete. She could finally see through the haze, as the incident was becoming ever so clear to her. And then the hooded figure looked up at the woman, revealing himself, scars across his face and a glass right eye, as he said to her, “I am The Shadow Stalker.”

She screamed at the top of her lungs before quickly turning around and running off, while the murderer

continued to stab the corpse again and again, depriving it of any identity.

Lights from the building blocks around them were turned on, as tenants peered through their windows to see the hooded figure hunched over the body. They could all see that blood was being spilt but couldn't make out the hooded figures face.

Realizing that he had drawn too much attention to himself, the hooded figure stood up, covered in blood all down the front of his jumper, turned in the opposite direction to where the woman ran and quietly walked off into the darkness.

Many of the witnesses got on their phones to report the incident, while one of the witnesses stepped away from their window with their phone in hand.

The cold air was drawing steam, despite the sun being unobstructed. Police tape was surrounding the scene, as the entire street was blocked off from any bystanders and from sight of the windows of the surrounding buildings.

The two detectives arrived at the crime scene, passed the tape and were informed of the latest from the incident, being told how the man was murdered, that there was another woman who had run off, that the culprit was someone in a hooded jumper and that none of the witnesses could make out his face.

"This doesn't seem like our perp", the younger detective said to his senior.

"No, it doesn't", the older detective affirmed. "This is the work of someone else."

"The witnesses seem convinced that it's him though."

"They're wrong."

Exhausted from analyzing the crime, the detectives left the scene and made their way back to the station where they found their colleagues huddled around one of the desks. They had to see what was going on. They walked over to join

the group and saw that they were watching a video recording of the incident online. It revealed the hooded figure murdering the man, whilst a woman watched on in horror, confirming the statements from the witnesses. But the video didn't reveal the hooded figures face.

"You two with me", a voice said to both detectives.
"Now."

The detectives followed the suit into an office room.

"Give me an update", he said. "Where are we at?"

"We just came back from the crime scene, sir", the older detective answered.

"And do you think The Shadow Stalker did this?"

"No, sir. This isn't his M.O."

"Great, now I have two psychos running around."

"This could be a fan, but as far as we're concerned, this was done by someone else."

"I thought as much. It all doesn't make any sense."

"We still suspect that the husband is the one who we're after, but we still haven't found a motive, nor how he could have done it."

"Ok. Keep digging."

The woman was shivering as her loud heels and running makeup drew a lot of attention to her. Or was it because bystanders could recognize her from the video? She made her way towards an open entry way, past the square in the middle of the complex, rushed up a flight of stairs and towards a door, numbered 888, got out her keys and entered.

"Hey", a female voice said, with a slight tremor.

But the woman just shut the door behind her, leaned back on the door and began to cry and cry. Her friend arrived at the front door, and seeing the stress all over her, gave her a hug, helping her to remain on her feet.

"It's okay", her friend reassured her. "It's okay."

"Yep", she nodded, desperately trying to keep her spirits up.

Her friend made her a hot chocolate, while she sat on the couch, motionless, processing everything that had happened to her. It felt as if the color within her was gradually dissipating.

“Here you go”, her friend said, as she brought the hot chocolate over to her.

“Thanks”, she responded.

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“I don’t know where to start.”

“You don’t have to. You can just relax if you want.”

“I’d like that.”

“Just remember, you did nothing wrong. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Good.”

Her roommate smiled before standing up, taking out her phone and began typing.

“Who are you calling?”, she asked.

“The police”, her friend answered.

“Wait.”

She leaped up off of the couch, quickly grabbed her roommate’s phone and ended the call.

“What are you doing?”, her friend asked.

“What am I doing?”, she answered. “What are you doing? Calling the cops?”

“You need to tell them what happened.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I was tripping out of my mind last night. I can’t. I’ll get fired.”

“I think we’re past that. I mean, you’re a witness to a murder. You have to tell the police.”

“Wait. How do you know what happened?”

“Haven’t you seen it yet? The whole thing is online.”

She quickly took out her phone and started scrolling through it, only to find the video recording of the incident. She played the video and her body began to tremble, as the

anxiety passed from her hand to the rest of her body, causing her to drop her phone.

“No, no, no, no”, she said to herself. “I can’t. I can’t have this.”

She turned around, her heart pounding, body shaking and desperately tried to rush to her bedroom.

“Wait”, her friend abruptly said, causing her to stop. “You have to tell the police what happened.”

“I can’t”, she replied. “I can’t.”

She just turned back around, headed to her room, entered and slammed the door behind her. Her roommate could hear the heavy breathing from behind the door, as she tried to calm herself down. Her friend was in two minds. Should she call the police? Or should she respect her friend’s wishes? She wasn’t sure what to do.

But it didn’t matter. Moments later, two detectives arrived at their doorstep, asking for their witness. They dragged her from her room and to the station, where they interrogated her, were given a description of the perpetrator and told that The Shadow Stalker had done this.

Only the wind could be heard. Even the waves were quiet. The traffic lights changed for no one.

But the hooded butcher was out on the prowl, like a hungry fox, desperate for its next meal. He roamed through the darkness, head down, repeating to himself, “I am The Shadow Stalker”, as if to affirm his own view of himself. He wandered for miles, without a single sweat.

Tents were set up along the walk path. They smelled of trash, as if all the mold in the world had accumulated in a single spot. And some of the inhabitants were standing outside, smoking cigarettes and keeping their hands around their lit matches, as they complained to one another.

The scarred face was eagerly watching with his left eye from around the corner of a building, waiting. The inhabitants continued to keep to themselves, but eventually,

one of the inhabitants wandered off, leaving the others behind. The hunter followed the stray through the shadows.

The stench could be smelt twenty or so meters away, making it easier for the hunter to follow along the main street, past bus stops, empty stores and even past large garbage bins down dark alleyways. But eventually the prey found his way under a tunnel, with a single bright light hovering over the entrance. He entered the tunnel, but stopped as the other end was pitch black. 'Should I?', he asked himself. He then looked back behind him before facing forward again and shouting, "Hey!", to see if there was any reaction.

But nothing. Just a deadened silence. 'Don't go', he thought again to himself, the buzzing from the light permeating his ears. He had to decide.

But then, suddenly, still in his hesitation, as the fear could be smelt past his stench and in his sweat, the hunter jumped up from behind him and stabbed him in the neck with a blade and wrenching it around to open up his throat.

"I am The Shadow Stalker", the hunter said to himself.

The hunter pulled his prey to the ground as he bled out and went cold. The corpse was dangling in the hunter's arms. The hunter looked around, seeing if there was anyone about. It was lifeless. No humanity in sight. The hunter then picked up the body and dragged him into the black at the other end of the tunnel. Only the void was left.

The ptosis in both eyes was evident as the older detective began to sip on his second coffee for the morning. Piles of cases were in front of him. So many people affected by this assailant. 'How does this end?', he wondered to himself. The question was chewing away at him like a power drill to the side of his skull.

Then the younger detective rushed over to his senior partner and told him that a man fitting the description was seen wandering around an upper class area.

“Really?”, the older detective asked, double-checking.

“The officer that called it in recalled how this woman kept phoning them to get rid of this individual in their neighborhood, but that they couldn’t just arrest someone for looking odd, so nothing happened”, the younger detective explained. “According to what this officer was telling me however, this woman’s description does match ours.”

“Let’s talk to this woman then.”

Both detectives grabbed their coats, exited the station, got in their car and drove over to the address they were given. The air felt cleaner, the sun was beaming, and the grass was greener, as the car comfortably glided through the neighborhood until they found themselves at the front of the woman’s house. They parked the car, got out, casually walked over to the door, whilst looking for anything suspicious, and knocked on the door. A moment later, a woman with highlights and an orange tan in a stripped summer outfit appeared.

“Hello”, the woman said.

“Hi”, the older detective responded, whilst showing his badge to her. “You mind if we ask you a few questions?”

“Sure, what’s this about?”

“You reported a man wandering around your area.”

“Yeah, many times. Filthy thing. And you lot have done nothing to get rid of him.”

“We’re sorry about that ma’am”, the younger detective interjected.

“What did he look like?”, the older detective asked, bringing the conversation back on track.

“He’s almost always in the same disgusting dark hood, dark track pants, dark everything”, the woman answered.

“Any other features that stood out?”

“He has scars all over his face. A glass eye, I think.”

“Do you know where he is staying by any chance?”

“No. I don’t ask him. Whenever he’s around, I always go back inside. He gives me the creeps.”

“Wait”, the younger detective intruded again. “When he’s around, you always go back inside?”

“Yeah”, the woman answered.

“You telling us he still wanders around here?”

“Yeah, and I keep calling you guys to get rid of him. We all do.”

“You all do?”, the old detective asked.

“The whole neighborhood”, the woman answered.

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“Oh, it hasn’t been for a few weeks. Thank God.”

“Thank you for your time.”

“You finally going to get rid of him for us?”

“We’ll make sure he doesn’t disturb you anymore?”

“About time.”

“Take care.”

The detectives turned around and walked back towards the car, as the woman shut the door behind them.

“What are you thinking?”, the younger detective asked his senior.

“We’ll get some vehicles”, the older detective answered. “See if we can find him.”

A number of cars were carefully driving around the neighborhood during golden hour. Some of those cars were arriving home, with their occupants eager to kick their feet. But some of the cars had officers, in casual wear, driving modern cars. Some of their cars were parked, while others were casually driving through the streets, pretending to look for parking, but looking, searching, for their suspect. The detectives were in one of the parked cars, watching the neighborhood relax, whilst not talking to one another. Their attention was on the prize.

Time was weighing on everyone as the sun gradually set and the light was fading. Yawns were spreading. And the uncertainty was growing.

But then, suddenly, one of the parked cars reported

movement to the detectives, saying they saw a suspicious looking figure in a black hood.

“Tail him”, the older detective told them over the phone. “But don’t make a move.”

The officers got out of the car and followed the figure, while the detectives drove to the car’s position. Both officers kept their distance, making sure that they weren’t spotted, but the hooded figure wasn’t looking over his shoulder and it didn’t appear that he was suspicious of anything, just powering forward. The officers continued, wondering where he was going and what he was doing. Is he going to run? What is this figure doing around here? And then, surprisingly, the hooded figure made his way to the front gate of a mansion. The officers stood back and watched what he was doing. However, he pulled out a key and entered the premises. The officers stayed back and called it in.

The detectives arrived at the location and asked the other cars to station out front and around the back of the mansion before they called the station to see who owned the property. They waited. There was no movement coming from the property. No lights were on. No loud noises. Nothing. Just a quiet weight looming over them. They continued to wait.

Eventually, the call came in, telling the detectives that the property was owned by an elderly rich tycoon.

“He could be a relative”, the younger detective suspected.

“He could be”, the older detective acknowledged. “It’s not going to be enough to justify a warrant.”

“So, what do we do?”

“Let’s have a word.”

The older detective got out of the car, while his junior followed, and walked over to the gate. The older detective looked through the gate to see if there was anything out of the ordinary before pressing the buzzer. But there was nothing. Nothing wrong. Nothing to suspect. But there was

also no response. They waited, and still no response.

“Something’s wrong”, the older detective commented.

The older detective then started to climb the gate.

“What are you doing?”, the younger detective asked.

But the older detective didn’t answer, going over the gate and entering it from the inside.

“This isn’t right”, the younger detective said.

“There is something wrong going on here”, the older detective stated. “I know there is.”

The younger detective hesitated, looking back at his senior for a moment. But he then decided to step through the gate. They then headed towards the entrance of the mansion.

It all looked intact, except the front door was open slightly. They could both easily see the darkness, as if it was somewhat welcoming them in. What other choice did they have at this stage? They moved forward, into the unknown.

The darkness pierced through the entire front entrance, across the hall to both rooms on either side and even up the staircase. There was an odd smell about the place, leading them both to cover their noses, whilst they could barely make out the space of the place. That was when the younger detective noticed some odd things lying around. Neither of them could make out what they were, so the younger detective decided to turn on the light, only to reveal human limbs lying all over the place, all cut up and left to rot. The younger detective jolted back, holding his hand to his mouth, trying to prevent himself from throwing up at the sight of all this, while the older detective put his hand back to aid his junior, even though he was at the same time looking over all this with eyes widened, bewildered by what he was seeing. But what also stood out to the older detective was the message ‘I am The Shadow Stalker’ written repeatedly in blood all over the walls. He knew he was right: There was something wrong. Once the younger detective got it back together again, they both drew their guns and carefully made their way forward.

There were more limbs, more bodies, heads, skeletons lying around the place, more blood on the walls. The stench of these dead carcasses was overwhelming. Even breathing was difficult, as they felt the thick air flowing through their lungs. But they had to go forward, searching each room, looking for this murderer. They continued on and on and on, but they couldn't find anything. He wasn't there. At least, it seemed to them that he wasn't. So the older detective called it in.

However, that was when the younger detective noticed something. He saw one of the bodies, lying in a pile of other bodies wearing a black hood with scars on its face. He pulled out his torch light and pointed it at the body, whilst going in for a closer look. Nothing happened. No movement. Not even a twitch. But as the younger detective looked closer, the body's eyes opened.

“Bah!”, the body shouted.

The younger detective jolted back holding his gun up to the hooded figure, while the older detective also quickly drew his gun, pointing it at the hooded figure.

“Hold your hands up!”, the older detective shouted.

But the hooded figure just continued to laugh and laugh. The younger detective began to tremble. His gun shaking.

“Show us your hands!”, the older detective shouted again.

But again, the hooded figure didn't move his hands, looking to both of them, with glee, and said to them, “I am The Shadow Stalker.”

The younger detective's nerves were firing faster. He was losing a hold of his gun as the sweat made his hands clamp up.

“Show us your hands!”, the older detective shouted yet again.

Finally, the hooded figure lifted both hands. The older detective approached him, putting away his phone and taking out his handcuffs. The younger detective continued to

shake. Heart beating faster and faster. Sweat drawing from his forehead. But the older detective whilst still pointing his gun at the hooded figure, turned him around.

“Put your hands behind your back!”, the older detective shouted.

The hooded figure complied, whilst looking at the younger detective with a wry smile, his eyes locked on to the junior detective. The older detective proceeded to turn the hooded figure around, shove him to the ground and cuff him, all while still wearing that same smile. The younger detective couldn't look away. His heart beginning to slow, breathing deeply, as he was now getting used to the anxiety. Then, suddenly, whilst pinned to the ground, the hooded figure released a huge laugh that could be heard throughout the mansion. But the younger detective wasn't fazed. Not this time. They knew that they had him.

A sense of déjà vu passed through the young detective's mind, watching the hooded figure cuffed to the table, picking at his skin with his fingernails, through the glass window, while he was reverting back to his old habit of picking at the calluses around the nail on his right index finger with his right thumb. For a moment, it made him wonder if he was like him in any way, but he quickly dismissed the thought and stopped his nervous tick.

The older detective came into the room with their boss and approached the younger detective.

“I'm going to take this one alone”, the older detective told his junior.

“Alright”, the younger detective acknowledged.

The older detective nodded his head and walked back out the door, while the younger detective and their boss watched behind the glass.

“Still think he's not The Shadow Stalker?”, their boss asked the younger detective.

“Let's see”, the younger detective answered.

The older detective entered the interrogation room with the hooded man, sat opposite him, pressed record on the audio recorder and introduced himself to the tape. But before he began to ask questions, a silence grew between them, as he watched the hooded man's eyes lock onto him with the same wide grin.

Eventually, the older detective asked the hooded man, "Can you tell us your name?"

No comment.

"Who are you?", the older detective started again.

No comment.

"How did you get the keys to the house?"

No comment.

"How many bodies are there?"

No comment.

"How long have you been doing this?"

No comment. Those eyes were still locked on the older detective. His smile hadn't shifted. He knew he wasn't getting anywhere. He knew at this point that he wasn't going to talk. They're just going to have to investigate further.

But then, before the older detective decided to leave, he had a thought and said, "We know you're not The Shadow Stalker."

The hooded man's smile dropped, but he still had his eyes locked on the detective.

"Got your attention now", the older detective said. "Haven't I?"

The hooded man smiled again before he said, "I am The Shadow Stalker."

"No, you're not."

Then the hooded man tried to lunge at the older detective, as if to go for his jugular, but was stopped by the handcuffs. The younger detective and their boss reacted, moving to go to the interrogation room and defend their colleague, but the older detective didn't move.

He had the last laugh, standing up and saying, "No,

you're not.”

The older detective stopped recording and walked out of the room, while the hooded man's entire face went red, tensing up, filled with rage. He slammed both fists on the desk in front of him repeatedly before coming to an abrupt stop. There was another pause. Silence filled the air. Then he laughed. His laughter grew in volume.

“I am The Shadow Stalker!”, he screamed. “I am The Shadow Stalker!”

The hooded man was thrown into a holding cell, still seeing red, breathing heavily, like a gorilla confined in its cage.

With the assailant locked away, the detectives were in their boss's office. They were all sitting around, but the younger detective had his head down, keeping to himself.

“What do we think?”, their boss asked.

“Well”, the older detective said. “He's clearly insane.”

“And you”, their boss said to the younger detective. “What do you think?”

The younger detective snapped out of it and faced his boss before saying, “Yeah. Yeah, he's not well.”

While the detectives continued to discuss the case with their boss, the hooded man started to settle down, sucking in the air through his nose, sitting down in lotus position and closing his eyes, as if to attempt to transcend his dilemma.

The detective's boss then stated, “Neither of you think he's The Shadow Stalker, do you?”

“No”, the older detective answered.

“I don't think so”, the younger detective answered.

“This is someone else”, the older detective continued. “Something else.”

“Are you still convinced it's the father?”, their boss asked.

“Yeah”, the older detective said. “I am.”

The hooded man's breathing was slowing down, along with his heart rate, until he eventually exhaled, allowing it

all to come to a stop, where an emptiness could be felt, a void of sorts. Only the bristling trees could be heard outside. But then, suddenly, there was the sound of a heavy door opening.

The boss asked the detectives, "Have you been able to reach the witness?"

"Yes", the older detective answered. "She's on her way here right now."

"Good. That's a start."

As the hooded man's eyes remained closed, another figure wearing a dark hood stepped into the cell. But his face was darkened out by the shadow, unable to be seen by anyone. The hooded man, still in a meditative state, opened his eyes, peering at the figure in front of him. Who was he? An angel? A demon? Was it a premonition? Or reality? The hooded man simply smiled, with that wry smile of his.

The woman had arrived at the station, where she was escorted to a separate room and made to sit and wait at the desk for the two detectives. She could see all the officers working hard through the glass wall. For a moment, she felt grateful that there were people helping her and people like her, ordinary citizens, going to great lengths to make their community safe. But the thought faded quickly as she could see the detectives making their way to the room. She took a deep breath, allowing the nerves to subside, right before they entered.

"Hi", the older detective said, whilst walking into the room. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah", the woman replied. "I'm okay."

The younger detective handed her a cup of water.

"Thanks", the woman said, and sipped on the water.

"We're preparing the lineup now", the older detective mentioned.

An officer was walking down the hallway with all the cells and was heading to the end. When he got there, he opened up the slat and peered inside, only for his eyes to light up. He quickly stepped back, causing the slat to shut,

looking back at the locked door. Then, gradually, his last meal began to come back up. He ran back down the hall, all while covering his mouth.

The detectives were still with the woman, as the older detective asked her, “Are you sure you are up for this?”

“What other choice do I have?”, the woman asked back.

The older detective nodded his head, acknowledging her predicament.

But then the officer ran into the main room, still covering his mouth, searching for a bin. He quickly found one near the water cooler and vomited straight into it. The other officers around him reacted with concern.

Both detectives and the woman turned sensing the officer. The older detective stepped out of the room for a closer look, while the younger detective looked to the woman.

“Please, wait here”, the younger detective said to her.

The woman sat back down, but still had her eyes looking around to see what was going on. The younger detective followed his senior to the officer.

“Are you okay?”, the older detective asked the officer.

“The Shadow Stalker”, the officer answered. “He’s...”

Before he could complete the sentence, the officer vomited again into the bin. The older detective looked down the hall towards the cells. It was as if a darkness was growing from there. The older detective looked back to one of the other officers.

“Get him some help”, the older detective said to the other officer.

The detectives then faced the hall and made their way into the darkness, while some other officers helped the sick officer up and took him away.

There was this ominous sense that could be felt by both detectives as they made their way down the hall and towards the hooded man’s cell, but they had no time to reflect on it and quickly rushed to the cell door, where the older detective

opened the slat and had a look inside. His eyes lit up as well. He quickly opened the door, almost frantically, only to reveal:

The hooded man on the floor with blood pouring from his mouth, lying on his stomach, not revealing his face. The older detective rushed to the hooded man to turn him over and check the state of him, while the younger detective was distracted by what was on the wall. The wall had written on it 'I am The Shadow Stalker', in blood, similar to the way it was written in the mansion. But how did he do it? How could he write his message on the wall in that much blood? And when the older detective turned the hooded man over, it was obvious. Whilst there was blood all over his hands and the main source of the blood was pouring from his mouth, both detectives could see his tongue flapped about near his bloody right hand. Both detectives covered their mouths, as if by reflex, thinking about their own tongues. But this time, the younger detective couldn't feel sick.

There were a number of smokers outside a large office building, keeping to themselves. The smoke was wafting up and away, not leaving much of a smell for any passersby, as the sun was shining brightly on them.

The younger detective was among the smokers, but was keeping quiet, sitting by himself and reflecting on all that had unfolded. After a while, he grabbed his packet of cigarettes, held it in his hand and spun it around, playing with it like a child would spin a card in their hand. Whilst continuing to fidget with his packet of cigarettes, he looked over to an older gentleman in a wheelchair, with an IV drip, looking back at him as he smoked a cigarette without a care in the world. The younger detective realized then and there that he didn't want to be like this old man and had to change. He stopped playing with his cigarette packet, stood up, walked over to the bin and threw the packet into the bin before walking back inside.

The younger detective wandered down the hall where he saw the older detective and a woman in a medical outfit talking with one another. When he reached them, both detectives were escorted to a private room by the woman where the hooded man's body was lying on a table, already stitched back up together, along with some of the other limbs from the mansion lying on separate tables.

"It's what you presumed happened", the coroner said. "There's no need to get into the details. You were there."

"Can you tell us anything else about him?", the older detective asked. "About his mental state perhaps?"

"I didn't see any abnormalities in his brain. I can't explain to you why he was the way he was."

"And what about his scars?"

"They all seem to be self-inflicted. Used with various blades. Potentially with some of the blades found at the house where you found him. It's going to take me forever to match them."

"What about his eye?"

"Also seems to be self-inflicted."

"What?", the younger detective interjected. "You mean he cut out his own eye?"

"It seems like it", the coroner answered. "Popped it out with a spoon of some kind."

"How are you doing going through all the other bodies?", the older detective asked the coroner.

"It's an absolute nightmare, I have to say", the coroner answered.

"Any luck identifying them?"

"No, but I did find something else that you might be interested in. Have a look."

The coroner walked them over to one of the other tables with some of the limbs, leaving the hooded man's body to rest behind them.

As the coroner held up the bones of a small appendage to show the detectives, she said, "This finger here, I can tell

you, based on the state of it, it is at least a couple of years old.”

“He’s been at this for years?” the younger detective asked, with a look of surprise.

“It appears so. But that’s not all.”

The detectives watched with intrigue as the coroner put the finger down and showed them a piece of paper with data on it.

“I had some of the blood on the walls of the house analyzed”, the coroner said. “And it also appears to be a couple of years old.”

“But that’s not possible”, the older detective said.

“I’m afraid it is. The data doesn’t lie.”

As the thought that this new information was real crept into his mind, the older detective’s face dropped. He was then forced to swallow his pride as he thanked the coroner for her help and left her to continue her work. The younger detective followed.

“Sir”, the younger detective said to his senior. “How is this possible? This nickname has only been in the news for a couple of weeks. How could he have given himself that nickname?”

“I don’t know!”, the older detective responded, snapping at his junior.

Quickly realizing what he was doing was wrong, the older detective let go of his junior and stepped back.

“Sorry”, the older detective said. “I’m sorry.”

The awkwardness caused them both to hesitate for a moment before they then exited the building, got in their car and made their way back to the station.

When the detectives arrived, they were instructed to go to their boss’s office, so they did and were met with a disheveled boss with tired eyes and shoulders tighter than a drum.

“Have a seat”, their boss told them.

The detectives sat down opposite their boss, looking

slightly concerned for his wellbeing.

But their boss was too focused on the job at hand and simply asked them, “What did the coroner say?”

“She couldn’t find any abnormalities with his brain to explain his mental state”, the older detective answered.

“And what about the other bodies? Anything new on them?”

“She seems to think that some of them have been there for years?”

“Years?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“And what do you think?”

“I think that gathering that many limbs couldn’t have possibly been done in such a short period of time. And this sort of crime is not something that one starts with. He must have been building up to it for some time.”

“Anything else?”

The older detective hesitated before saying, “She took a sample of the blood on the wall.”

“The blood where he wrote that he was The Shadow Stalker on it”, their boss commented. “Yes?”

“She thinks that the blood is a couple of years old as well.”

“A couple of years old?”

“She has data that proves it”, the younger detective interjected.

The older detective looked to his junior for a brief moment, as if he felt a stab in his back.

“But that’s not possible”, their boss said. “The Shadow Stalker has only been in the press for a few weeks. Three at most.”

“I know”, the older detective acknowledged.

“Does this mean that he has been our guy?”

“Or there’s something else that we’re missing.”

“Are you still convinced that the father is The Shadow Stalker?”

“He’s hiding something. That’s all I know. And the MO’s are still different.”

“So there’s still someone out there?”

“We think so.”

Their boss gasped, rubbing his hand across his face before saying, “This is such a mess. I have conflicting info, the press breathing down my neck, higher ups, internal investigations on my backside, desperate for me to get this all sorted. What a complete disaster.”

The detectives sat back in their chairs as their boss continued to contemplate what to do. The silence engulfed them all, as they wondered what to do. But then, in the midst of it, an idea came to the older detective.

The older detective said to his boss, “Sir, would you hear me out?”

“Sure”, their boss answered.

“What if we said that this nut-job was The Shadow Stalker?”

“Why would we do that?”

“If the press think that we’ve caught the guy then they’ll stop harassing us. People will think it’s over.”

“But we don’t know that he is”, the younger detective interjected.

“Yes”, the older detective acknowledged. “But while that’s going on, we can investigate further, just us two. And if there is a tattle tale here, they will stop leaking info to the press.”

“Or if they do continue to leak info on this case we’ll know that we do in fact have a snitch at the station”, their boss commented.

“You’re not seriously thinking about going forward with this idea?”, the younger detective asked. “Are you, sir?”

“We have to get ahead of this”, their boss said. “We have no other option.”

A public announcement was made by their boss stating that

The Shadow Stalker had been caught. A few questions were answered, but their boss didn't say anything to suggest that they were hiding the facts. The media shared the info and the suburbs felt rested. Finally, they had nothing to worry about. Or so it seemed.

The 42nd Case

On a bright summer day, a group of people from different races, age groups and genders were following a small flag with the image of an animated man wearing a hoodie through the streets. They then reached the front gate of the building where the detectives found the hooded man and came to a halt. A voice from a megaphone recited for them the publicly reported details of the case, which included: The Shadow Stalker being found at the location, where he kept his victims and that the police were still trying to identify who the victims were and how many victims they actually found. The voice then went on to share some of the rumors surrounding the case, such as: The Shadow Stalker being a cannibal, that he killed himself in police custody, that he wore these red goggles, giving him the appearance that he had red glowing eyes, and more, stirring the fear in the group, before they all moved on to the next location.

The sun was almost set when the tour guide was walking down a suburban street with properties that had collapsing pillars, wrecked walls, unkempt lawns and wire fences to prevent bulldogs from attacking people walking past. After passing a number of houses, the tour guide turned to one of them, got out his key and entered.

“Hey!”, the tour guide said.

“Hey!”, a female voice replied.

The tour guide walked into the living room where a young woman was sitting in a chair watching TV.

“How did it go?”, the woman asked.

Instead of simply answering her, he smiled, pulling out a wad of cash and tossing it to her.

“Oh, yeah babes”, the woman responded.

She began to count the money while the tour guide stood back and watched the smile on her face. Once she was done counting, while still sitting in her chair, she turned to him.

“There’s over a grand here”, she said to him.

“Yeah”, he responded. “I know.”

“Oh, babes. We’re going to be rich.”

She stretched for a hug, again while still sitting in her chair, and he gave in, embracing her.

“You’re the best, babes”, she said. “The best.”

She gave him a peck on the cheek before she let go and he stepped back.

“Have you eaten?”, he asked her.

“No”, she answered.

“I was thinking we order a pizza tonight.”

“Oh, yes babes. I would love a pizza.”

“Right, pizza tonight it is.”

“Oh, love you, babes.”

“Love you too.”

The tour guide got on his phone and made an order for three large pizzas. An hour later, when the pizza delivery man arrived, the tour guide tipped him in exchange for the pizzas. They thanked each other before he shut the door behind the delivery driver and carried the pizzas over to the coffee table where he and his woman started digging in. They both devoured the three pizzas, not even leaving any of the crust for leftovers. Bloated, they sank back into their seats, despite the smell from the boxes attracting roaches. But they didn’t care. They were royalty in that moment.

The pizza boxes were finally left on top of the overflowing trash bin outside, near the side fence. The tour guide was gurgling a cup of water, as a way to substitute for brushing his teeth, while the woman was taking up more than half their single-sized bed. Once he was finished, he used a dirty tea towel to wipe his mouth before making his way to the

bedroom.

The tour guide walked over to the other side of the bed and tucked himself in, next to his woman, as she turned to him and they looked into each other's eyes.

"We're going to be alright", he reassured her.

"Thanks to you, babes", she said. "Thanks to you."

He kissed her before they both turned away from each other and soon fell asleep, relaxing into the night.

Despite a few cicadas singing, the night was quiet. The air was nice and warm, not too hot and not too cold. It all seemed just right. Nothing to worry about.

But the tour guide's eyes, whilst they were closed, they were darting around. It appeared that his dream was rather frantic, images rushing around in his mind. He had to wake up. His eyes opened. He was still quite sleepy, feeling a heavy head. He ran his hand across his face to see clearer. But once his vision came to him, he turned and noticed a hooded figure standing at the other end of the room, looking back at him with red glowing eyes.

The tour guide jolted up out of bed, sweating all over his body. There was a wet patch on his side of the bed. Despite all this, his woman was still fast asleep, facing away from him, snoring through her narrow nostrils. The tour guide decided to get out of bed, put on his shirt and leave the room.

He wandered to the kitchen where he opened the fridge and saw how little food they had left for tomorrow's meals. This made him feel a little dejected, but he then took the bottle of milk, got a glass and poured himself a glass of milk to drink. As the milk cooled him down, his eyes looked around the room until they landed on the stack of cash he had collected from the day's work. 'We're going to be alright', he repeated to himself in his mind. But were they? While he was telling himself that it was all going to work out, he could feel some doubt in his heart. However, he decided to keep telling himself that it was all going to work

out.

The sun was shining on everyone, as the tour guide was making another round with his new flock. There were more sheep this time around, hanging on to his every word, whilst he paid attention to their reactions. It felt that there was this real back and forth of energy between him and his group, like a conductor conducting his orchestra.

They reached the house where the hooded man was found and he brought them all to a stop. He started to tell them about what was reported at the crime scene, not even contemplating what words to say as he was so used to giving this speech now. It had all become a giant habit for him. But then, suddenly, in the midst of his speech, he spotted a hooded man in his crowd, looking back at him with big red glowing eyes. He shook his head, shell-shocked by what he had just seen. However, as he looked back again for a closer look, he noticed that he just saw one of his sheep with some new red glasses on.

“Sorry”, the tour guide said to his crew. “Where was I?”

There was a number of stars lighting up the night sky as the tour guide made his way home. He opened the door to his property only to find a pile of envelopes on the floor as he entered.

“Hey!”, his woman shouted.

“Hey”, the tour guide replied without the same level of enthusiasm.

He then proceeded to pick up the envelopes and go through them, seeing bill after bill after bill. Once he had seen them all, he sighed before wandering into the living room where he found his woman sitting on the same chair she usually sat on, watching TV.

“How did you go today?”, she asked him.

Again, instead of answering her directly, he pulled out another wad of cash and handed it to her. Her eyes lit up,

elated by the sight of money in her hands, while he wasn't wearing the same positivity she had on. She again counted the cash while he sat at the table, opening each envelop, one at a time, taking out the bill and reading it.

Once she was done counting, she hugged the cash and said, "Oh, I can finally get that dress I was always after. Thank you. Thank you."

But he didn't respond, engrossed in the bills they were sent.

"You're the best, babes", she said to him.

He finally realized that she had said something to him, being snapped out of his trance and looking to her, saying, "Huh?"

She then turned around, whilst still sunk in her chair and faced him, "I was saying 'You're the best.'"

"Thanks."

He looked back to the bills that were in front of him.

"What have you got there?", she asked him.

"Bills", he answered her.

"Oh, big deal", she said whilst turning back around and facing the TV again. "Thanks to you, we'll be rich in no time. And we won't have to deal with any of that crap. There's nothing to worry about."

But he just looked at the bills and continued to read over them.

There was a lot of activity around the beach, people surfing, sunbathing, getting ice cream, and so on. And on the corner was a local café with wooden pillars, some green plants and even photos of famous musicians who had dined there. The tour guide wandered in, looking around, as if entering the place for the first time, got in line and when it was his turn, he was greeted by the young waitress with a smile.

"Hi", the waitress said to him. "What can I get for you today?"

But he was taken aback by the light shining from her

demeanor, causing his feet to weigh him down.

“What can I get for you today?”, she repeated.

Finally, he snapped out of it, smiling back and saying, “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“Um, can I get a long black, please?”

“Have here or takeaway?”

“Takeaway.”

“Large or a small?”

“Large, thanks.”

She told him how much it cost, but he was oblivious to the price and could have paid her anything, as he handed her a note.

“Thanks”, she said.

She then took the note and handed him some change. And with a smile still on his face, he rejected the offer. Her smile beamed some more.

“Thanks”, she said again.

She then wrote the letters ‘LB’ on a large lid and slid it over to the barista while the tour guide wandered over to the other side of the counter where the takeaway coffees were received. While waiting for his drink, he looked back over to the waitress and saw her looking back at him, still with that smile. She then smiled to herself. It appeared that her cheeks reddened, but he couldn’t tell from his distance.

“One large long black!”, the barista shouted.

“Thanks”, the tour guide responded.

He then collected his coffee, looked to the waitress who was looking back at him again and he raised his drink as if to say, ‘Thank you.’ She gave him a thumbs up as he turned around and left for the day’s work ahead.

The brown leaves were lying still on the green grass as the naked trees stood tall in the back garden. The moon was full as a few light clouds drifted across it. All of the animals in the area were sound asleep.

The tour guide was asleep as well, in bed, next to his woman who was also fast asleep. But he could feel a gentle breeze brushing against his cheek. With his eyes still closed, he rubbed his fingers across his face, gently and reflexively. The breeze wouldn't stop though. So he opened his eyes, looked up and quickly noticed a hooded figure with red glowing eyes standing over him, a foot away from his own face, causing him to shout in response.

But then, suddenly, as if he were waking up, the tour guide found himself in line again in the café during the early morning. He took a deep, centering himself.

"Next please", the waitress said.

The tour guide ran his hand across his face before fixing his hair, making sure there were no strands sticking out.

"Next please", the waitress said.

It was now the tour guide's turn and he approached the waitress with a smile on his face. The waitress returned his smile with her own, elevating both their spirits.

"Hey", the waitress said. "How are you?"

"Okay", he responded. "A little tired. Yourself?"

"Yeah, same here. Large long black, right?"

"Yes."

She wrote down 'LB' on a large lid again before looking up and facing him.

"Is there anything else I can get for you?", the waitress asked.

"Um", the tour guide said. "Your number?"

Immediately, he regretted what he had just asked for, hiding his face so she couldn't see his embarrassment, while her eyes widened, taken aback by what he had just asked of her.

"Sorry", he said. "That was silly of me to ask. Forget about it."

The tour guide paid for his drink while still feeling guilty for what he had done before walking away to the other side of the counter. He just stood there, not looking at her,

having thoughts run through his head over what he had just done, how terrible it was, and how terrible he was for putting her in that predicament.

“One large long black!”, the barista shouted.

“Thanks”, the tour guide responded.

The tour guide then got his coffee and looked down at the lid. There was a phone number. He looked up at the waitress and saw her smiling back at him. He then smiled back again and again, raised his drink as if to say, ‘Thank you’, before turning around and leaving for the day’s work ahead.

The rain was gushing down, causing large puddles in the street, the overflowing of drains and the slowing down of the few cars on the road. The tour guide was telling a story about The Shadow Stalker as his umbrella was being hit relentlessly. There were only two customers in his group for that day.

Later that day, the tour guide arrived home with wet patches over his clothes, despite having an umbrella throughout the day. He hung up his umbrella on the porch to allow it to dry under the entrance shelter, got out his keys and entered his place. Shivering, he quickly warmed himself up, rubbing his hands across his arms.

“Hey!”, his woman shouted.

“Hey”, he responded.

The tour guide walked into the living room and found his woman sitting at her chair watching TV.

“How did you go today?”, she asked him.

He blew on his hands before pulling out the few wet notes he was able to make that day and handed them to her. She quickly counted them, realizing that he didn’t do as well that day as he had done previously.

“Oh, well”, she said. “Better luck next time.”

She handed the money back to him and turned back to watching TV, while he held the money in his hand and

looked at it, reflecting on his hard day's work and her.

The tour guide eventually turned around, went to his room, took off his wet clothes and had a shower. Feeling warmer, he dried himself off, went to his room and looked at his phone. He scrolled through to the waitress's number and paused, wondering if he should text her, what to text her and where and when they could meet. Many thoughts were passing through his mind, leading him to stagnate. But finally, he decided to text her to see how she was. 'What's the worst that could happen?', he asked himself.

It was another bright afternoon. But the tour guide wasn't showing fans around the scenes. He was buying two ice creams in cash. One for him and the other for the waitress. They then went for a wander around as he told her what he did, sharing his enthusiasm for The Shadow Stalker story, while she shared her ambition to become a designer. He decided to view her as a designer from now on, instead of a waitress.

Eventually, they walked to a bus stop. There was no one else around to watch them.

"I had a good time", the designer said to the tour guide.

"I did too", he replied. "Are you sure you don't want me to escort you home?"

"Yeah, I'll be alright. But thanks for the offer."

"Of course."

They both smiled, whilst shyly looking away before she looked up at him.

"You know", she said. "When you first came in the café and I gave you my thumbs up, I thought I had ruined everything."

"Yeah?", he responded.

"Yeah, I thought it was stupid."

"But then I asked for your number in the dumbest way possible."

"Yeah, that took me by surprise."

“It was so embarrassing.”

“I guess, we’re both pretty silly.”

“I guess we are.”

They both smiled again, but looking at each other this time. Then a bus turned the corner and she put out her arm.

“This is me”, she said.

“Alright”, he replied.

“Do you want to do this again?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“Okay then.”

“Alright.”

Just as the bus approached the bus stop, she quickly kissed him on the cheek. He froze, looking back at her, while she stepped back with red cheeks and a smile.

“Oh God”, she said. “I’m sorry.”

“No”, he said. “Don’t be.”

“I can’t help embarrassing myself.”

“Neither can I.”

The bus arrived and she smiled again, looking back at him, before she stepped on the bus. The tour guide watched the bus take off, giving the designer a wave. She sat down and waved back before the bus drove away. He continued to feel the adrenaline rush through him as he felt the need to raise his fist in the air in celebration, but didn’t, keeping his congratulations to himself.

Later that evening, when the sun had already set, the tour guide arrived home. But before he entered his place, he pulled out the wad of cash he earned that morning. It was less than he had been earning on sunny days previously and thoughts were rushing through his head on how he was going to have to explain this. But then, in that moment, a new thought came to him.

He entered his place and shouted, “Hey!”

“Hey!”, she replied.

He walked into the living room and found her again sitting in her favorite chair, watching TV.

“How did you go today?”, she asked him.

But instead of simply handing the entire wad of cash he had earned for that day, he handed her some of it and kept the rest in his pocket. She took the cash that was handed to her and counted it.

“Was this all you were able to get?”, she asked him.

“Yeah”, he answered. “It was a slow day today.”

“Oh.”

There was a slight pause from him to see if there was anything else she was going to add.

Finally, handing him the money and returning to watching TV, she simply said, “Oh, well. Better luck next time.”

She had bought it, and a plan came to him. The tour guide put the money he was handed back from his woman on the table with the rest of the cash, went into the kitchen, looked around, found an empty tin on the top shelf of the cabinet and put the rest of the cash inside.

The relationship between the tour guide and the designer was growing, as they were spending more and more time together, and he was saving up more and more money, stowing it away in the tin on the top shelf of the kitchen cabinet, unknown to his woman. But this couldn't last. And one night, when the tour guide and the designer were together, on the beach something deeper was revealed.

She said to him, “I think I'm in love with you.”

He didn't know how to respond at first, thinking about the repercussions of their relationship, but after a moment, he said back to her, “I think I am in love with you also.”

That was it. Something had to change. And at the bottom of his heart, knew he had to change things. ‘Why else would he have kept some of the money away from his partner if he didn't think he was going to leave her someday?’, he asked himself. It occurred to him that if he was going to leave his partner it would have to be with

someone else. And this made him realize further that he would like to marry this designer so they could be together and that the money he was saving up was for a ring to buy her. He knew what he had to do.

The tour guide arrived home later that night and wandered into the living room of his place, only to find his partner not sitting in her chair, watching the TV. He felt a presence coming from the kitchen, so he wandered there.

He noticed his partner standing by the kitchen bench with the tin with the cash he had saved up inside.

“What is this?”, she asked him.

“What is what?”, he replied.

“This tin of money? Why are you hiding money from me?”

“I’m not hiding money from you.”

“Then how can you explain this?”

The tour guide froze, looking back at her.

“Huh?”, she inquired again. “Why are you stashing money away from me?”

The hesitation was still apparent in his face, but then it was as if something had switched inside him, like he was seeing red.

“Because it’s mine”, he answered.

“Yours?”, she responded.

“Yes, I earned it. I deserve it.”

“But babes, what about us?”

“Us? Us? How can you talk about us when you don’t do anything for us?”

“I do plenty for you.”

“What? What do you do? All I see you doing is sitting in that chair, watching TV all day. What do you do?”

“I love you. I cherish you.”

“Love doesn’t cut it.”

“What? Love doesn’t cut it? How can you say that?”

“Love doesn’t put food on the table. I do. I do.”

His partner fell silent, looking back at him like a puppy

who was asking for kindness. But he was done.

“I want my money”, he said.

The tour guide then approached her, but she grabbed a hold of the tin and wrapped her arms around it.

“What are you doing?”, she asked.

“I want my money”, he answered.

He moved forward, trying to pry her arms open to release the tin.

“What are you doing?”, she asked again. “Stop.”

But he was too focused on the money, eventually, pulling her arms apart and taking the tin from her.

“It’s mine”, he looked at her with this stern look.

She was taken aback by the whole ordeal, standing there, alone, a somber feeling draping over her, while he turned around with the tin in hand, looked inside and saw that the money he had stowed away was still in there before he made his way to the table where the rest of the cash was, took it all for himself and left his place behind him. His partner was left all by herself, sobbing.

The tour guide left with very little possessions, but with a new lease on life, feeling as if the chain that had been weighing him down had finally been unshackled. He pulled out his phone and texted the designer to see if he could stay at her place for the evening.

After a long sobering journey, the tour guide made his way across to a small apartment and knocked on the door. The designer opened it, wondering why he was there, but pleased to see him none the less, welcoming him into her humble abode. He then brought the few things he had into her place and sat down on the couch, while she made a warm drink for him. He thought, in that moment, that she was really the one, and not the previous partner he was with. And when she came back with the hot chocolate, he then proceeded to tell her everything, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He knew this was a risk, that he could have hurt her feelings, revealing to her that he was already engaged,

but he couldn't withhold any of this from her anymore, so he was as open and vulnerable with her as he possibly could be. And gratefully, she accepted him still. At least, in that moment.

The light was hitting the tour guide's face as he woke up on the couch. He looked around and only then noticed how few possessions she had in her place. It made him recall his life when he was younger, struggling to make ends meet. He got up, walked around the place in search for her, to see if she was up. But she wasn't around. 'She's probably off at work', he thought to himself. And that led him to think that he'd better get ready. He then had a shower, simply rinsing his body with water, before he changed back into his old clothes and walked out of her place.

The tour guide made his way to the café, excited to see her again, wearing the same smile he had when they first met. However, when he arrived, he noticed that the line was much longer than usual. It struck him as odd, but he only ever thought that it was simply because there was a long line, that there wasn't anything more to it. But when he looked around at the other end of the line, he noticed that there was another waiter working the till. He looked around and couldn't see the designer anywhere. His forehead began to tense up, wondering where she was. And instead of making an order, he left the line and walked outside.

As soon as he stepped out, he pulled out his phone and sent her a text, asking where she was and if she was okay. It would be too much of a stretch to think that something bad had happened to her, but he also thought he had to ask, just in case something bad had happen to her. But what could he do now? He didn't know where she was nor whether or not she was actually in trouble. At this point, he realized that all he could do was wait until she replied. So he went about going to work.

But as he was going through his usual routine, doing

tours with various sized groups, he kept on stumbling on his words and wasn't performing at his peak. His mind was split between telling the story of The Shadow Stalker to fans and wondering where the designer was and if she was okay. However, he powered through it, despite his mind being divided. But by the end of the day, he still hadn't received a reply from her. Where could she be?

The tour guide made his way back to her place and through the window couldn't see any movement. She wasn't home. 'What do I do know?', he thought to himself. He was left staring at the door, without a key. Hopefully, one of the neighbors had a spare key. But he then quickly realized that it would have been odd for what would have been to them a complete stranger asking for a key to their neighbor's place. He had no choice but to kick down the door, so he did. And with three kicks the door busted open.

He stepped inside and looked around for her. But she wasn't there. And nothing had changed. It was all how he left it. 'Where could she be?', he wondered to himself again. But that was when it occurred to him, 'Where is my tin?' He looked around the place, searching desperately for his tin of money. He searched the living room, the kitchen, the bathroom, her bedroom, the entire place. But he couldn't find it. He even noticed in her bedroom that she didn't have any of the clothes that she had been wearing on their dates. The only conclusion there could be was that she had ghosted him. She took his money and disappeared into thin air. 'What other explanation could there be?', he asked himself. He then wandered to the couch, which felt like the only thing left in her place and just sat there, alone, perplexed.

Time felt like it was dragging as day steadily became night and the dark clouds were covering the moon. The tour guide was still sitting on the couch, where he was left, not having moved a muscle. He was wondering what he could do. She had taken everything away from him. The money he had

earned was gone. He couldn't go back to his ex-partner. He couldn't go on living that nightmare. 'What do I do?', he asked himself.

Not too long after, his stomach began to growl. He just realized that he had forgotten to eat and thought it be a good idea to get some food, even with the very little money he had made from that day. So he stood up, wandered out the front door and went hunting for some food.

During his search, he found a fast food joint where he ordered himself a burger and ate it alone while one of the staff was mopping up. He reflected on what his life had come to, how he had gotten to this point and had enough of it, so he asked the staff member to turn up the music to drown out his thoughts. The staff member complied, but it didn't do much. The thoughts were like daggers to his head, piercing his mind one at a time. Once he was done eating, he left right away without even acknowledging the staff member.

'Where do I go now?', he asked himself. But felt that all he could do was go somewhere familiar. He decided to go through his tour routine, despite the night still being heavily dark. He arrived at the starting point and walked through the tour, but didn't tell tales of The Shadow Stalker, instead, he just walked the path.

In what felt like a long time, but was actually much faster than usual, the tour guide arrived at the mansion where the police arrested the hooded man. He stopped and looked up at the gate, wondering whether or not his tales were even true. 'Surely, something must be true', he said to himself, as if trying to convince himself that it was true and deny his own doubts. He then decided to climb the gate, picking himself up and jumping on over the other side.

The tour guide made his way to the mansion and saw the empty darkness that was coming from inside the house, but this didn't bother him. He had to know for himself whether or not the tales were true. So he made his way towards the mansion and wandered inside.

The place still had police tapes all across the inside, despite all the bodies and limbs being removed. The tour guide wandered in, imagining what remained there. It was as if he was seeing the bodies lying there for himself, as he was soaking it all in: the atmosphere, the aura, all of it.

He quietly made his way to the main room where he stood in the middle and looked out the window. He noticed a few raindrops hitting the glass window, as he stood there. And not long after, it began to rain, pouring down. Thunder quickly followed, along with lightning. A storm was brewing and he wasn't even phased. He was feeling the pain of all that had happened to him, hitting him all at once. But he couldn't cry. There wasn't even a tear. All he could do was laugh. Laugh at the ones who hurt him. Laugh at the world. And in the midst of his laughter, with each flash, the shadow on the carpet made out The Shadow Stalker with red glowing eyes.

The 53rd Case

Empty packet of crisps, soft drinks and coffee mugs were laid around the desk, as the wires were sending signals to and fro, in a dimly lit room. At his computer was the developer, searching for bugs in his sea of code, with red eyes, a rough beard and greasy hair. In the midst of his focus, his phone went off. Initially, his attention wasn't distracted by it, but after the fifth or so ring he realized someone was calling him. He then answered the phone.

"Hello", the developer said.

"Hey", the caller replied. "How are you doing? Did you get enough sleep?"

The developer got up from his desk and walked over to what appeared to be a garage door.

"No", he answered.

He opened the door, only to reveal the sun blasting brightly down on him.

"You have to", the caller said. "It's not good for your health."

"Yeah", the developer responded. "I know."

As his eyes adjusted, he was able to view the world around him and was able to take it all in.

"How did it go last night anyway?", the caller asked.

"Yeah", the developer replied. "I managed to clean up a lot of the bugs."

"That's fantastic news. Congratulations are in order."

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Oh, c'mon. Be proud of yourself for once."

"I am. I am."

There was a break in the conversation, as the developer waited for his caller to ask the inevitable question, which he

ultimately did:

“So”, the caller said. “When will we be able to roll out the new version to our clients?”

“Tomorrow”, the developer answered.

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s fantastic news.”

“Yeah, it is.”

“You should really be proud of yourself.”

“Yeah, I am. I said ‘I am.’”

“It doesn’t sound like you are.”

“No, it’s just. I’m just tired. That’s all.”

“It’s because you work so hard.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I guess.”

“Do be proud of yourself, alright. Get some rest and give yourself a pat on the back. I’ll talk with you again tomorrow.”

“Alright.”

“Okay, bye.”

“Bye.”

The caller hung up, leaving the developer standing outside alone, with the sun still warming up his face. In the distance, in the park across the street, he noticed a child playing basketball with his father, only barely able to chuck the ball to the hoop. It gave the developer a smile, but after his moment, he turned around, headed back inside and shut the garage door behind him to continue his work.

There were some energy drinks around the computer this time as the red in the developer’s eyes had intensified, staring back at his computer, specifically at the red error message in his console. After he took a deep breath, he began to search for answers on his computer, parsing through articles, videos, blog posts, everything he could until he found a forum where there was a post from an anonymous individual who provided what appeared to the developer to

be the most obvious answer. So the developer tried it, making his adjustments to his code and running it, and for the code to finally work. He had a sigh of relief before finishing his energy drink, pulling out another from the mini fridge right below his desk on his right-hand side, opening the drink, taking another sip and then moving on to the next error message. This cycle went on and on.

A dapper man was sitting on a soft chair in a lounge, looking out a large window. He looked fresh, as if he had just woken up from the best night's sleep he had ever had, like he didn't have anything to worry about.

A moment later, a secretary entered, asking for the man. He then stood up with a hop in his step and followed the secretary to another office where he was met by another man in a suit. They both shook hands and got straight to business.

Thirty minutes later, the dapper man left the building, pulled out his phone and made a phone call, despite the hustle of the city life around him.

“Hey”, the dapper man said.

“Hi”, the caller answered.

“How are you doing?”

“Alright.”

“Are you? You sound tired.”

“I spent all last night fixing the remaining bugs.”

“Did you get any sleep?”

“No.”

“None?”

“No. I had to get it done.”

“But you can't compromise your health.”

“I know. I know.”

“I would be happier if you were well. I don't want you to get sick over a few bugs.”

“I know.”

“On another note, I have some fantastic news.”

“Okay.”

“My friend, the one I told you about.”

“What about him?”

“He’s willing to get in on our business. He wants to sign us a check. And he wants to encourage some of his colleagues to cut checks for us as well. We’ll finally be able to hire more people on our team. You won’t have to take on all the workload. Isn’t that exciting?”

“Wow, yeah, that sounds great.”

“It doesn’t sound like you’re all that enthusiastic.”

“I am. I am. I’m just tired.”

“Please. Please, get some rest.”

“I will.”

“Good. I’ll organize everything at my end so we can start building this team.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“Talk to you soon.”

“Okay, bye.”

“Bye.”

The dapper man hung up.

A moment later, the developer put his phone down.

A handful of developers were working at their own computers, in their own rooms, but were collaborating with each other on the same project.

The main developer was looking over the work of his new colleagues, parsing through their code and seeing whether or not their updates were meeting their clients demands. However, his mini fridge was still full of energy drinks.

Days and nights passed as the main developer was working on the project nonstop, trying to roll out the next version of their project to their clients. His body was asking him to stop, but his mind was fighting against it.

Through this mental haze, he was finally able to look over all of the changes to the code his team had sent him. And while he could understand why the team made the

suggestions that they did, he wasn't smiling. And he finally stepped out of his chair and left his garage.

But instead of going to his bedroom, he wandered to the living room of his virtually empty place, with only a couch and a TV, pulled out his phone and made a call to his business partner.

"Hello", the dapper man answered.

"Hey", the main developer responded.

"Hey there, how's it going? Has it been easier with our new team?"

"Yeah."

"That's good. And how are the updates going?"

"Yeah, that's what I want to talk to you about."

"Alright, sure. What about it?"

"The requests by the other developers are different?"

"How so?"

"They seem to be changing the whole thing."

"We have asked them to make a few changes."

"But it's not just a few minor changes. They really do appear to be changing the entire thing."

"They're not changing the whole thing. Look, we did ask them to make a few changes."

"Wait, we?"

"Yeah, the board."

"The board? What board?"

"Our board of investors."

"What? When did this happen?"

"I told you we were bringing on other investors to our business."

"Yeah, but I didn't expect there to be an entire board. At least not right away."

"It has been fast, I admit, but this is how these things are. Without them we wouldn't be able to bring on the team that we have now. Is something wrong?"

"It's just that this is not the business that we set out to build."

“Yeah, well, about that. We were looking over the numbers and they’re going down. We were losing user retention and decided to take the business in a bit of a new direction.”

“The board did?”

“Yes. Look, without user retention, no business can survive. It’s just how it is, so we took it in our hands to make some changes. That’s all.”

“But how come I wasn’t informed on this?”

“Weren’t you told?”

“No.”

“Really?”

“No, I wasn’t told about any of this.”

“Then that’s an oversight on my part. I’ve been busy trying to make this all work.”

The developer didn’t know how to reply, going silent, and waiting for his business partner to fill the void.

“I’m sorry”, his business partner said. “This was my mistake. Okay?”

“Yeah.”

“We’re good?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s good. Say, are you now getting enough sleep? With the team and all?”

“Yeah, I am.”

“That’s good. Look, I better head off now. People to talk to, you know how it is.”

“Yeah, yeah. Go ahead.”

“Okay, bye.”

“Bye.”

His business partner hung up, while the developer was left in his room alone. He looked to the black screen on his phone before slouching down on the couch and running his hands over his face. He took a deep breath and paused for a moment before he laid down on the couch in the fetal position to keep himself warm and closed his eyes.

But while his eyes were closed for the last few hours, his mind wouldn't allow him to sleep. Eventually, he had to sit up and do something, so he did. But he didn't know what to do. The void in his stomach was still there, so he decided to turn on the TV. However, he simply flipped through the channels, one at a time, over and over again, as nothing interested him. His mind was numbing seeing the screen flash from channel to channel, but he still wasn't feeling tired.

But then he noticed something that spiked his interest. Through the flashing lights, he landed on the news. His eyes opened up slightly and he leaned forward to listen carefully. It was a story about new witnesses seeing The Shadow Stalker. He just watched, taking it all in until the story was finished. But the story had gripped him. He couldn't get enough, so he pulled out his phone and read more and more on this assailant, learning about his MO, the descriptions people had given of him, finding forums where witnesses had shared stories about this criminal. And through it all, an idea came to him. He knew how to get his way.

The following day, instead of working on his business venture, the main developer was researching more and more about The Shadow Stalker on his computer to see if he was known to carry any weapon. But he couldn't find anything. There was no info on whether or not he had a weapon of choice and if he did, what kind of weapon it was. However, it sunk more and more into his mind that this assailant must have a weapon until he had completely convinced himself that it was the case.

The developer then got up out of his chair, wandered to the other end of his garage and looked through a shed of handyman tools to see if he had anything menacing. It wasn't long until he found a hammer. He thought that it could be useful and put it aside before continuing to search for any other alternative weapons. However, he couldn't find

anything that would have been more threatening, so he just stuck with his hammer.

Next, the developer went to his bedroom and looked through his closet. Searching through his clothes, he could only find a few shirts and a jacket. But then, tucked away in the back, he found a black hooded jumper. He took it out and put it on. It still fitted him well. He then looked at himself in the mirror and the thought occurred to him that he wouldn't want to mess with this guy. His body was rushing with adrenaline at the thought of doing some damage, even though his muscles were aching, asking him to get some rest. But he left his bedroom.

As the night fell, the developer found himself hiding in some shrubs, watching the movement inside a nice suburban house across the street. He remained hunched on his knees, paying close attention to the family moving about the house, having their dinner, watching TV and finally, getting ready for bed. The developer hadn't moved, just kneeling there, watching. When the family went to bed, he still stayed there, perched in his position. He was allowing the time to drag on, waiting for them all to be fast asleep. Then after a long while, when everything was quiet, he stood up and made his move.

The developer put his hood over his head and stealthily ran around back, looking for a way to get inside. But the back door was locked and the windows were locked. He paused, wondering what he could do. 'Maybe there was a spare key', he thought to himself. However, even after looking around for a while, he still couldn't find anything. And the anxiety was building up more and more inside him, as the risk of him being caught was increasing exponentially. He then just decided to smash the door open with his hammer, which he did, but doing it as quietly as possible, so not to wake anyone up. He hesitated before softly hitting the doorknob and looking around to see if anyone had heard him. But nothing. He then hit the doorknob again and looked around. Still nothing. And the doorknob was actually giving way, almost

dangling there. He hit the doorknob one last time, causing the doorknob to fall. And one last time, before fully committing himself, he looked around. Still, there was no ruckus. No sign of anyone hearing him. He was ready to fulfill his plan. The developer entered the house, holding his hammer up.

There was a silence reverberating throughout the home as the developer nervously made his way towards the living room. It was pitch black, as he was hoping it would be. No one could see his face, so he continued forward, passing through the entire ground floor, the living room, dining room, bathroom, kitchen and laundry room to see if there were any surprises. But there was nothing. The coast was clear. So he made his way up the stairs.

He quietly made his way to the top without anyone noticing and opened the first door, revealing another bathroom. He thought about staying in the bathroom for a moment, as his heart was beating out of his chest and give himself a moment to calm down, but his mind was too determined to change tactics. So he proceeded, opening the second door.

Inside, were two children fast asleep in their beds. He watched them, as they reminded him of the child who was playing basketball with his father from across the street, and causing him to wonder if he was doing the right thing here. But the moment subsided. It was already too late he had convinced himself. The developer then shut the door as quietly as he could, despite the creaking noise the door was causing. However, no one had woken up yet. And so, he continued to the last room and opened the door.

And there he was: His business partner, in bed, asleep, alone. The developer opened the door as wide as possible and quietly entered, one step at a time, making sure he didn't wake him up. Then, as he made his way to the bed, he started to raise his hammer with both hands, preparing himself to strike. But then his business partner flinched. The developer

froze, simply standing there with his raised hammer. ‘Is he going to wake up?’, the developer asked himself. ‘Can I actually go through with this?’, he asked himself as well. All these thoughts raced past him in his mind, paralyzing him in that brief moment. And then, suddenly, the business partner opened his eyes, seeing through his blurry vision, a hooded figure standing before him with a raised hammer. He shouted, jolting up and back in his bed, causing the developer to shout back in shock, all in a split second before the business partner turned on the bedside lamp, revealing the developer’s face. They both saw each other in that moment, face to face, both seeing the fear in each other’s eyes. Then the developer screamed, causing the business partner to scream again. But the developer couldn’t go ahead with it. Instead, the developer just turned around, ran back down the hall, past the other bedroom, ran down the stairs, out the back door, across the street and all the way back to his place. The children woke up, curious as to what all the commotion was about.

The sun was struggling to shine through the windows as the blinds were blocking its rays. In bed was the developer, curled up, with a thick blanket over him, fast asleep like a baby. Finally, the developer flexed his back, whilst still keeping his eyes closed. He had woken up, but he was reluctant to open his eyes and begin his day, as the warm embrace of his blanket was too good to leave. However, he opened his eyes, seeing and feeling as clear as he had been in a long time. He couldn’t even recall the last time he felt this refreshed. It made him wonder how good of a sleep he had, with even the thought of him having slept for a full day passing through his mind. He looked to his watch to see the date, and while he had slept for quite some time, he was somewhat relieved that he hadn’t slept for an entire day. Although, all of this thinking led his mind to wonder about his business partner and whether or not he actually attacked

him. ‘Was it all a dream?’, he asked himself. ‘Or was it real?’ He then looked to his phone and saw that there was a message from his business partner, asking if they could meet up in person. Immediately, he thought that something must have happened because he wouldn’t want to meet up face to face unless it was absolutely necessary. It’s not that his business partner wasn’t interested in working closely with him, but he realized that he had to optimize his time to get the most that they could for the business and felt that meeting up face to face wouldn’t be the best use of either of their time and might even distract the developer from doing his job. He respected this about his business partner, so he concluded that whatever his business partner wanted to talk to him about must have been serious. So he replied to the message and got out of bed.

Later, the developer walked around the corner and saw his business partner sitting in the lounge of a café, with his arm casually draped over the chair next to him, whilst also in his usual dapper look. He politely smiled to the waitress, as she brought him some water, and thanked her. He then thought that his business partner must be in a good mood, so there was nothing to worry about. The developer headed inside the café.

His business partner immediately spotted him, standing up and giving him a wave. The developer approached him and just before he reached him, his business partner held out his hand, as if to give a handshake.

“Hey there”, the business partner said. “How are you buddy?”

The use of ‘buddy’ made the developer curious as to what he was up to. Maybe, this was something to worry about.

“Good”, the developer replied.

“Good, good”, his business partner responded, shaking his hand. “Please have a seat.”

They both took a seat. Before either of them said

anything, his business partner simply smiled at him. ‘There must be something serious’, the developer wondered to himself. ‘Maybe, I did actually try to attack him’, the thought ran through the developer’s mind.

“Can I get you anything?”, the business partner asked.

“I’m good”, the developer answered.

“Okay.”

The waitress returned and the business partner ordered himself a club sandwich and a coffee before facing the developer.

“You sure you don’t want anything?”, his business partner asked him again. “My treat.”

“No”, the developer answered. “I’m good.”

The waitress smiled to the business partner before turning back around and adding the order to the system, while the business partner faced the developer.

“How are things?”, the business partner asked.

“They’re alright”, the developer answered.

“That’s good. That’s good.”

The developer kept wondering why he had asked him there and was beginning to feel inclined to ask. But before he could, his business partner started to reveal the reason for asking him to meet up.

“I wanted to bring you here because I felt bad for how I handled informing you about the changes to the business”, his business partner stated. “I was out of line and I want to make it up to you. I want you to be at the forefront of these decisions. You know the software, the product, how happy or unhappy the customers are, what’s working, what isn’t. It only makes sense that you’re the one who should lead this business.”

The developer was lost for words. He was even lost for thoughts, as he just sat there looking back at his business partner. The silence was becoming insufferable, and the business partner felt inclined to break it.

“Are you sure you don’t want anything?”, the business

partner asked him.

The question snapped the developer out of his trance, causing him to raise his lower lip.

“You know what”, the developer said. “I could go for a club sandwich as well.”

“Alright”, his business partner said with a smile. “Alright.”

The business partner then called the waitress over and added another club sandwich to the order. They then continued their catch up, as their meals came and went, and by the end of it all they were both happy with where things were at. Or at least, they both appeared to be happy.

When they were leaving the café, the business partner encouraged him to join the next board members meeting, which the developer agreed to. They both waved ‘Goodbye’ before heading off in separate directions. However, whilst the developer was left wondering still whether he had snuck into his business partner’s home and tried to attack him or it was all just a dream, he also realized that it didn’t matter. He had gotten what he wanted. And he couldn’t feel any prouder.

The 62nd Case

The breeze was drifting through the night, as the stars twinkled up above. But the street lamps were drowning out the night sky, whilst also causing a slight buzzing sound.

In one of the houses along the street, was a woman in her white night gown, going from room to room and habitually turning off the lights. With each flick of the switch, her house quietened, making it easier to hear any abnormalities.

And as she flicked off the last switch, before heading to her bedroom, she heard a creak. She couldn't tell if it was her stepping on the wooden floorboard, so she turned on the light and looked around the hallway. There was nothing there. She then turned the light off again before heading to her bedroom. But she was again stopped by a creak and flicked the light on. She looked around, keeping her feet planted on the floor, to check that she wasn't the one making the noise and detect whether or not there was something else disturbing her. She hesitantly proceeded to turn on the light again. And when she did this time, there was another creak. But there was also something at the other end of the hall. She couldn't tell what it was. Was she seeing someone there? She simply couldn't tell. So she turned the light on again. But there was no one there. Was she seeing things? She could only question herself at this point and concluded that she was just tired and needed to get some sleep. However, when she turned off the light again, she could make out through the darkness the same figure she saw previously. 'Is there someone there?', she asked herself. Not sure what to do, she stepped forward for a closer look. The wooden floor creaked with each step she took. 'Who is it?', she asked herself again.

But as she made her next step, she saw the shadow moving and realized that a silhouette was formed from a combination of the side light next door and the large tree in her back garden, shining through the window to make it look like a person was standing at the end of the hall in the darkness. To her relief, there was no one there. She sighed at the thought, and turned around to go to bed. But then, suddenly, as she spun around, a man in a hood, with his face covered by the darkness grabbed her mouth and threw her against the wall, causing her to fall to the ground. Then the unthinkable happened.

A sea of videos with various encounters with The Shadow Stalker were appearing online, with conspiracy theorists explaining their theory for why The Shadow Stalker was still around, citing blurry video and audio footage, testimonials from anonymous individuals on online forums, all while commentating on how the person the authorities convicted wasn't the true Shadow Stalker, with some of them even going as far to say that the police planted this person and named him as The Shadow Stalker in an attempt to hide the truth.

While many officers were sifting and sorting through all these claims, the detectives were in their boss's office, with the blinds closed.

"Where are you at with the father?", their boss asked them.

"We still haven't found a motive", the older detective answered.

Their boss ran his hands across his face, looking on the brink of exploding at them, but doing his best to resist.

"Do you know how bad this is getting?", their boss asked. "We created this lie to buy you time to find something against him. But now, people are believing that he's still out there, and they all think we lied to them. This is a nightmare. An absolute nightmare."

“We’re sorry boss”, the older detective responded.

“What really makes you think that this father is the one who is doing all this?”

“It’s not that we think he is doing all this.”

“But you think he started it?”

“Yes.”

“And all these other cases?”

“Are either copycats or lies.”

Their boss looked down and away for a moment before taking a seat at his desk. He took a deep breath, almost sighing, while the detectives just stood there, waiting for his next statement.

“I cannot have you tailing this father anymore”, their boss commented.

“But, sir”, the older detective attempted to interject.

“No, I can’t. You’ve had enough time to find a motive, and you couldn’t.”

“There is something here, sir.”

“There might be something there, but we’re getting swamped with all these other cases that we’re going to need you two on them.”

“Understood”, the younger detective butted in.

This caused the older detective to look at his junior for a moment before facing his boss again.

“But, sir”, the older detective said. “We can solve this case. We just have to figure out why he did it.”

“No”, their boss stated, standing his ground. “You two are to work on these incoming cases. Sort them out. Don’t waste any more time on this father.”

The older detective fell silent, looking back at his boss, while the younger detective watched them both, seeing who would make the next move.

“Now”, their boss said. “Get to work.”

After a moment of hesitation, both detectives turned around and left the office.

“Sir”, the younger detective said to his senior.

“Piss off”, the older detective responded.

The younger detective was left standing by their boss’s door for a moment, shocked by his senior’s response as the older detective returned to his desk.

A mob of reporters were huddled together outside as the boss of the detectives was making a public statement about the recent incidents involving The Shadow Stalker. At the end of his speech, the vultures sprayed him with questions, and while the boss did answer a question or two, providing the sort of answers that a politician would provide, the boss got out of there as soon as he could, trying not to cause any more unwanted controversy.

One of the reporters looked especially despondent, as she continued to shout her questions while the boss was leaving the area and heading back inside the station. She chastised herself before fleeing, similar to the rest of her cohort.

Later, when at her office, she was surrounded by other reporters, listening to the chief editor who was grilling them for a new angle on The Shadow Stalker, exclaiming how just reciting stories from witnesses that might or might not be telling the truth wasn’t enough and that they had to figure out who he is, whilst also berating the police for seeming to not be doing anything about all this. The lecture gave the reporter a headache.

As the day was drawing to a close, the reporter was the only one left in the office, yawning, whilst looking through more and more of these conspiracy theory online videos to find any hidden clues as to who The Shadow Stalker might be. But there was nothing more to be found, so she left her desk, calling it a day.

Arriving home, the reporter noticed her elderly neighbor through his window watching TV in his living room. Her neighbor didn’t spot her, but seeing him content brought a smile to her face as she entered her house. Her place was

slightly messy, but to her it was a sort of organized mess. She went to her kitchen, contemplated cooking a nice meal, but then settled on just eating some crisps, whilst also binging on some reality TV. The move made her feel lazy and ultimately, led her to falling asleep.

The sound of sirens woke up the reporter from her slumber. As the crisps fell from her chest, she sat up, seeing the rotating red and blue lights in the morning light. She got up and quickly walked outside only to see tape surrounding her neighbor's house. She went over to the house, crossing the tape, but was quickly held back by an officer.

"Sorry, ma'am", the officer said. "But you cannot cross the tape."

But the reporter just turned back around and continued towards the house.

"Ma'am", the officer said, trying to hold her back.

The reporter resisted though, wrestling away from the officer and running towards the house to see what was going on. However, two other officers stepped in her way, preventing her from any further progress.

"Hey", the reporter said. "Get out of my way."

"Miss", one of the other officers said. "You cannot be here. Go back behind the tape."

"What's going on here?"

"This is not the time and place, miss."

"Tell me what happened."

But then a body bag was wheeled out of the house and taken towards the back of an ambulance. The reporter's tears flowed, seeing the black bag.

"Miss", the officer said. "Please return to the other side of the tape."

"Is that my father?", the reporter asked, shocking both officers. "My father lives here. Is that him?"

The tension on the officer's faces dropped, realizing who they were talking to. However, the reporter just kept on

crying. The officer then decided to walk the reporter to his cop car, away from the house.

“I’m sorry, miss”, the officer said.

“What happened to my father?”, the reporter insisted.

“The gentleman in the house was found deceased.”

“What? How?”

“It’s not my place to say, miss.”

“Was he murdered?”

The officer didn’t say anything, falling silent and looking away. But this was enough for the reporter.

“He was murdered”, the reporter stated. “But why? And by whom?”

“You didn’t hear it from me”, the officer said. “But I think that The Shadow Stalker did it.”

“The Shadow Stalker?”

“I’m sorry to say, miss.”

The officer was then interrupted by another officer, asking him to help them to pack things up, and had to leave. But it didn’t matter to the reporter. She had gotten all that she needed, using the lie, that her neighbor was her father, like a gem.

When the sun was down, and the crowd had dispersed, the reporter exited the backdoor of her place, hopped over the fence, crossing the police line, and used her neighbor’s spare key to get in.

Looking around the nicely kept house, she noticed all the tapes, markers and the pool of blood on the floor, in the living room and approached with caution. She looked around, searching for anything out of place, but there wasn’t anything immediately noticeable. She paused, looking down at the stained blood on the carpet and reflected on her neighbor, mapping together in her mind what might have happened. However, what she was piecing together came across as very vivid to her, as if it were real. She could see how the blood trickled across her neighbor’s back on both

sides as he laid there with his belly on the floor and a knife in his back. The images that were coming to mind were too much for her, so she left from where she had entered.

The reporter was sitting in the front seat of her car, outside the police station. But despite the sunlight blazing on the car window, she widened her eyes and rubbed across them as if to tell herself to wake up. She couldn't get the images that she had given herself of her neighbor's body lying in his own blood out of her mind. They would flash, as if attacking her from nowhere. Even when she would try to distract herself by listening to the car radio, the images would still come back to haunt her. 'Maybe, I shouldn't have gone inside his house', she thought to herself.

Then the younger detective exited the back of the police station. The reporter lit up to this and watched with a keen eye, as the detective got in his car and drove off. The reporter followed him, staying at a bit of a distance, to avoid being noticed, as the younger detective made his way to a café where he ordered some food and sat outside at one of the benches alone, waiting for his takeaway. The reporter parked her car, got out and approached the detective. And as he made her way towards him, he sighed at the sight of her.

"What do you want?", the younger detective asked.

"I only want a moment of your time", the reporter said.

"I don't have anything to say."

"Just help me, please."

"No."

The reporter paused for a moment, hoping the younger detective would change his mind. But he wouldn't, so she just asked.

"The old man that was killed the other night", the reporter started. "Can you tell me what happened to him?"

"I don't know what you're talking about", the younger detective responded.

"Please, he was my father."

“No, he wasn’t.”

“He was.”

“We spoke to the family and you aren’t related to them.”

“So you are investigating the case?”

“Just go away.”

The detective stood up, facing away from her, but she grabbed his arm, encouraging him to stop.

“Please”, she said. “He was my neighbor.”

“Really?”, the young detective inquired. “I know you. I know you’ll make anything up to get what you want.”

“He was my neighbor. That much is true.”

The detective paused, looking back at her, unsure if she was telling the truth this time.

“I can’t tell you anything”, the detective stated.

“Just tell me if The Shadow Stalker did it”, the reporter insisted.

“No, I can’t.”

“Please. I beg you. Just this one time. For a friend.”

The detective hesitated again, looking back at her. But then his order was called and he felt compelled to answer it.

“I’ve got to go”, the younger detective said.

“Please”, the reporter said, stepping in his way again.

But the younger detective stepped around her, got his takeaway and walked off without acknowledging her again. She was left alone, knowing that the detective was too good of a man to compromise his position and fork over any information she requested. She had to find another path to the truth.

The reporter was at her computer in her office, searching through media reports on The Shadow Stalker. After a while, all the information seemed to blur and it was giving her a headache. She had to map out a timeline of all the reports she had gathered and cross-reference it with the timeline that their reporters had already fabricated. So she did, seeing if there were any missing pieces. But there weren’t. Nothing

stood out other than a few reports of incidents where The Shadow Stalker had been spotted in multiple places at once at the same time. However, she ignored these, putting it down to there being copycats and the general public just calling each copycat the real Shadow Stalker. But it did make her think about the first case. All they had gathered from the first case was that The Shadow Stalker was seen in the witness's house. It didn't mean that he was there to attack anyone. 'But what could he have been doing?', she wondered to herself. 'Was he simply watching them within their own home?', she asked herself. It made her realize that if that was all he was doing then all these other attacks by other assailants couldn't have been from the real Shadow Stalker as they didn't fit his MO. She had to dig deeper into the original case.

But as she was contemplating all this, an image flashed of a bloody knife on a kitchen counter. It appeared so clearly to her that something seemed off. 'Should I look into my neighbor's case or the original case?', she asked herself. She didn't know how to answer the question at first. However, the realization that her neighbor's case was bothering her influenced her to want to double-check what it was that was gnawing away at her. So, she left her office and went back home.

When she got home, she had to let time slip, as it was still daytime and wasn't dark enough for her to sneak back into her neighbor's house. So, she decided to make herself something to eat. When she entered the kitchen, she recalled the image that had flashed through her mind of the bloody knife on the kitchen counter and immediately realized that her kitchen counter was different to the one in the image. It gave her a sense of closure, if even for a brief moment. She then thought that she'd actually make herself a meal for once. She decided on pasta, which she then made for herself before taking her meal to the living room and watching TV.

Fairly quickly, day became night and as she looked out

her window, she could see the quietude coming from her neighbor's place. It was time to move. She went out the backyard with her neighbor's spare key, snuck over to her neighbor's place and entered.

Looking around, it was as it was before. However, she could feel this added weight to the place. Initially, she felt that it was simply her missing her neighbor, but then she began to question it, thinking that there might be more to the atmosphere. Although, as she looked around the place, she still couldn't see anything abnormal. She decided to leave. But on her way out, she peered into the kitchen and noticed the counter. It was the same design as the one in the image that had flashed through her mind. She stepped into the kitchen for a closer look and inspected the area. The kitchen looked clean, however, what drew her attention was the small tea towel hanging over the oven handle. It was too small for it to hang over the entire handle and made her speculate that there must have been a companion. That was when it clicked. The other towel must have been used to wipe up the blood on the knife. She quickly left.

Making it back to her place through her backdoor without being seen, she went to her own kitchen, thinking that she might have had something out of place like her neighbor. And immediately, she noticed a missing knife in the cutlery drawer. 'How could she have missed this before?', she asked herself. But there was no use in answering the question now as all these images came flooding her way: the image of her knife being drawn, the neighbor being stabbed in the back, the tea towel being used to wipe up the blood. 'Who was setting me up?', the reporter asked herself. This was the immediate question that came to her. But then another question dawned on her. She didn't want to contemplate it, but it wouldn't leave her mind. 'Or are these images memories?', the question was. Then a new image came to mind. One she hadn't experienced before. The image was of the tea towel and the knife being stowed

away in a black paper bag in the closet in her bedroom. She had to see for herself.

The reporter slowly made her way up the stairs, feeling the creaking with each step she made. While it didn't sound like this, it felt like scratching at a whiteboard. She made her way to her bedroom door. Her heart had sunk. All the feeling in her body had disappeared, leaving a numbness that was difficult to describe. But she had to enter. She opened the door and nothing seemed out of the ordinary, although, it did feel that something was off. She looked at her closet. This moment was her last chance to ignore what might have happened. But she couldn't go on living with herself not knowing. Although, she might not have been able to go on living with herself knowing. Her mind was in shambles, standing there, staring at her closet. But then she made a move, opening the closet door and revealing the black paper bag. It was true. She couldn't block it out of her mind now, so she crouched down and opened it. And inside the bag was the knife and the bloody tea towel. It was all coming back to her now, clear as day, the whole event. She had murdered her neighbor. She was a murderer. 'But why?', she asked herself. The only reason she could have thought of was that it would have been another story for her to report on, but she couldn't know that was why she did it. 'How can you explain fits of madness?', she posed to herself. These were the types of questions she was asking herself, as her heart and mind were being filled with guilt. What was she to do? She didn't know.

But she took the evidence, got in her car, drove off and headed to a lake where she filled the bag with rocks and chucked it in the water. 'Was that the right thing?', she asked herself. But it was too late now. What's done was done. She could only move forward from here. Although, her mind might not have let her. And since that was the case, then the only way for her to escape her turmoil was through death. This was all she had to look forward to.

The 80th Case

The clock was ticking slower than usual, as most of the morning had already passed. The younger detective was at his office desk, seeing the hands tick and tick, while the rest of the office appeared to be working on fumes. More and more cases were coming in, causing the energy in the place to flatten. As the detective was witnessing all this unfold, his partner's desk was empty. The younger detective couldn't help but wonder where he was, and where he had been. He decided to get up from his desk and go find him.

Leaving the police station, the younger detective got in his car and drove over to his senior's apartment. When he arrived there and parked on the street, he could see the blinds to his apartment window were shut. He couldn't tell if his partner was there, but his gut was telling him that he was. So he got out of his car, approached the front door and knocked. There was a moment of silence before the older detective opened the door and stepped outside.

"What are you doing here?", the older detective asked his junior.

"I came to get you", the younger detective answered.

"I don't want you here."

"Okay, sir, but we should get back to work."

"No. You do what you got to do. And I'll do what I have to do."

The younger detective didn't know how to convince his partner to come along with him. Eventually, he had to confront him.

"Did I do something to upset you?", the younger detective asked.

"No", the older detective answered.

“Then what is this about?”

“Get out of here.”

“No. Tell me what’s going on.”

The older detective paused, hoping that his junior would just leave.

“Was it because I didn’t back you?”, the younger detective asked. “We have no evidence to suggest that the father did anything. We’re just going off of your hunch. And what has it done for us? Nothing. Not a thing. And all the while, there’s some guy out there sneaking into people’s places and doing all sorts of things.”

“Are you done?”, the older detective asked, ignoring his junior’s inquiry.

“Why are you making this so difficult?”

“Me? Why am I making this so difficult?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Why are you making this so difficult?”

“I’m not. I followed you. I helped you in looking for dirt on the father and we couldn’t find anything.”

“That’s not what I’m talking about.”

“What?”

“I’m not talking about that.”

“Then what are you talking about?”

The older detective hesitated for a moment, sizing up his junior. But the younger detective didn’t flinch, as they looked back at each other, seeing who would make the next move.

“I know it was you who had been leaking info to the press”, the older detective said.

“What?”, the younger detective responded, genuinely shocked by the accusation.

“I saw you with that reporter friend of yours.”

“What reporter friend of mine?”

“You know the one I’m talking about?”

“No, I don’t. I don’t have any reporter friends. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t lie to me. I know it was you. And I’m going to tell the internal investigators.”

The younger detective just looked back at his senior, unsure how to defend himself.

“Now piss off”, the older detective said. “Rat.”

The older detective turned around and slammed the door behind his former partner, leaving the younger detective all alone, uncertain of what to do now.

The day was drawing to a close as the younger detective came back to the police station and walked through to his desk, seeing all the faces looking back at him, wondering if any of them also suspected him of being the rat. But no one stopped him, and he had no reason to feel guilty, especially for something he didn’t do. He made his way to his desk to see if there was any new info that could shine a light on who The Shadow Stalker was, but all he received was more reported cases. He sighed at the sight of the burden in front of him.

However, as the younger detective began to get stuck into sorting through the new cases that were reported, one of the other detectives approached him.

“Hey”, the detective said. “Do you have a minute?”

“Sure”, the younger detective responded. “What is it?”

“Check this out.”

The other detective walked the younger detective to his desk, where he sat down, while the younger detective remained standing, watching the computer screen behind the other detective.

“Do you remember that crazy barfly who said he saw The Shadow Stalker in his bedroom?”, the other detective asked.

“Yeah”, the younger detective answered. “The one who’s windows were bolted and the none of the other witnesses saw anyone else enter or leave his place.”

“Yeah, that one.”

“What about him?”

“I was looking through some of the footage collected around the area at the time of the claimed break in, to see if there was anything we might have missed, and I noticed this a few nights before the incident.”

The other detective played some video footage on his computer screen.

“Let me know if this seems suspicious to you”, the other detective said.

The video played revealing a somewhat empty street late at night. But as the footage ran, a car drove slowly past. The younger detective’s eyes lit up, looking closer at the screen. He recognized the car.

“Does this look suspicious to you?”, the other detective asked him. “I mean, why would someone be slowly driving around this area late at night?”

But the younger detective ignored the question by simply asking, “Which street was this footage taken from?”

The other detective gave him the details of where the footage was taken from and handed it over to the younger detective. The younger detective thanked his colleague and left the police station to investigate, getting in his car and driving to the location.

When the younger detective arrived, the sun had set, causing the streets to become much darker. He slowly drove around, and parked when he saw the camera from which the footage was taken. He had a look around, but he couldn’t see anything that looked suspicious. So he drove around some more to inspect the area. Nothing really unusual stood out to him still. But then he saw a woman in a tight dress, walking up and down the sidewalk. And even though he knew deep down that these were assumptions, he immediately pieced together the picture of what might have happened. He had to go question the owner of that car.

The younger detective drove off, making his way to the destination at hand. In his mind, it was all starting to make

sense to him. But when he arrived at the destination he needed to be at, it was too late.

The older detective was sitting in his car with a lit cigarette in his hand, dangling out the window. There were a number of used cigarette buds in the tray of his car. He stretched his neck on both sides in an attempt to loosen the knots, but he could still feel the tension through the back of his neck and down to his shoulders.

Across the road, the father exited his place along with his children, got in their car and drove off. Then the older detective put out his cigarette, started his car and followed them. The father took his children to a soccer field, where his children played in their league game, followed by going to a burger joint for a quick bite to eat, before going to the movies. The older detective followed them the entire time, without being spotted by the father. Finally, the father took his children home. It all appeared to just be a nice family outing. But to the trained eye, there was something else, something more. At least, this was how the older detective felt.

The older detective parked his car and watched as the father took his children into the house. He could watch them through the window, seeing the children run up the stairs while the father headed to the kitchen. He couldn't make out exactly what the father was doing, so he just sat there with himself, pondering what to do next. He knew he wasn't going to get anywhere just tailing this father, so what else could he do but confront him? The detective decided to get out of his car, walked over to the house and knocked on the door. Through the window, the detective could see the father walking to the front door and gently opening it before stepping out.

“Hi, detective”, the father said.

“Hi there”, the older detective responded.

“What can I do for you?”

The older detective hesitated, looking back at his kind eyes. But he wasn't falling for it. He had to face him.

"Why did you do it?", the older detective asked.

"Why did I do what?", the father replied.

"Sneak into your ex-wife's place in the middle of the night?"

"What?"

"You heard me."

"I didn't."

"We know you did."

"What are you talking about?"

"Did you have a vendetta against her? Leaving you for another woman couldn't have been good for your ego."

"No. No."

"Why did you do it?"

"I didn't do it."

The father reached out to the older detective, trying to touch his arms, as if to try to calm down a child. But the older detective flinched, grabbing a hold of his gun.

"I didn't do it", the father pleaded again. "I swear. Really."

"Yes, you did", the older detective said. "You had the motive. The reason to scare her."

"But I didn't do it."

The father was getting too close to the detective, leading the detective to draw his gun and point it at the father.

"Get back", the older detective demanded.

"Please, please, please", the father said. "Please, I didn't do it. I swear."

"Tell me why."

"I didn't."

"Why?"

"I didn't do anything wrong. I mean it. I mean it."

Tears were drawing from the father's eyes. But the older detective still wasn't buying it.

"Please", the father said. "Please believe me. My kids

are inside. I am a good man. Please.”

“No, you’re not”, the older detective said.

“Please.”

“Tell me why you did it.”

“Please.”

The father stepped forward, leading the older detective to raise his gun.

“Think of my kids”, the father said.

“Back off”, the detective said.

“I am a good man.”

“Get back.”

“An honest man.”

“Get back.”

“Please.”

“Get back.”

“Please!”

“Get back!”

Suddenly, an image flashed through the mind of the older detective, viewing The Shadow Stalker standing in front of him. At least, how the older detective saw The Shadow Stalker, as the father wearing a black hood. But before he could look back to see what he saw, blood was drawing from the father’s chest, under his cupped hands. The bullet had already lodged in the father’s heart. The older detective just looked back at the victim, seeing what he had done before facing the gun in his hand. He was now a criminal. The very person he despised. The shock and guilt towered over his mind. His heart had left him. And his body numbed. He ran over to the father, as the victim dropped to the ground, trying to help him up, pleading for him to get back up. But he couldn’t. The damage was too great. What was done could not be undone. And the older detective was left with this for the rest of his life.

The younger detective arrived at the scene.

There was a court case for the older detective, where he

pleaded 'guilty' for killing the father. It was an arduous process for everyone involved, but eventually, the older detective was found guilty and sent to prison.

The older detective was separated from all the other inmates, out of fear that he might be attacked and was given a cell all to himself. While the guards appeared stern, they acted quite nicely, at least towards the older detective.

However, the first night the older detective was there, when the guards turned off all the lights, he could hear the whispers of all the other inmates. It put him on edge, hearing all the pleas and cries. But then, all of a sudden, all the noises gradually came to a close, as all he could hear was a silence. A dead silence. As he was lying in bed, he looked up to the bars of his prison cell and saw a hooded figure with his face covered by the shadows standing on the other side, watching him. The older detective sat up and put his back against the concrete wall. The hooded figure stood there, continuing to watch him. And then, out of nowhere, a light shone across the hooded figures face. Finally, the older detective could see who it was, as his eyes widened with shock as to who he was staring back at. But as the light faded away, without making any noise, the hooded figure turned around and walked off. The older detective gasped for breath, as if he was held underwater for a long time, and had just come up for air, at seeing who he had just seen.

At least, this was how the story was relayed to the younger detective and his boss. The next morning, one of the guards found the older detective with blood streaming from an open gash on his forehead, along with a blood mark on the concrete wall, that had a few streams trickling down. The guard thought he might have been crying, but he couldn't tell from all the blood down his face. This was who he was now.

The 107th Case

The younger detective was telling his boss how he suspected that the father had been paying for sex from a prostitute in the same area that the barfly happened to be in, although, he couldn't find out whether or not that was the case, seeing as the father had died and the prostitute who was there wouldn't speak to any cop. However, it did explain why the older detective had this hunch that the father might have been hiding something. It was just that what he was hiding wasn't what the older detective expected. But this was all speculation and there wasn't any tangible proof to back this claim. Both the detective and his boss could only let this all slide and deal with each new case that came in. Or at least, that was how their boss saw it.

"Sir", the younger detective said. "I've handed in my resignation."

"When?", his boss asked.

"Earlier this morning. I'm sorry, sir."

"No, you don't have to explain yourself. I understand."

The younger detective didn't know what to say, as he continued to stand in his place.

"If you do wish to come back", his boss started. "You'll always have a place here."

"Thank you, sir", the younger detective said.

The younger detective then waved his hand before turning around, heading to his desk and packing his things, all while the other detectives and officers worked around the clock on The Shadow Stalker case. He did feel a bit guilty for just leaving them, but regardless of this feeling, he continued to pack his things. Ultimately, he left the station for the last time, only quietly saying "Goodbye", to a few

colleagues along the way.

When the detective arrived home, he was greeted by his wife, giving him a hug and a kiss on the cheek, before he took his things in and stowed them away in different spots around his house. There was a certain peaceful aura in the way he went about doing this, neatly putting away his mementos, as the sun shone through his home. But once he was done, he had no idea what to do with himself.

Time felt tired. Life outside seemed distant and quiet. The younger detective was just left alone watching TV, flicking through the channels. Nothing was catching his attention though, and he didn't want to continue, in case he landed on the news, so he simply turned the TV off after a moment. But what was he to do with himself now? He had things that he always wanted to do but couldn't previously find the time to get around to. Maybe, now was the time to do what interested him.

He tried completing changes that he wanted to make around the house, but it didn't take him all that long to do so. Then he tried to take up various hobbies, different sports, writing, photography, but none of them really fulfilled him. There was always something gnawing away at him, even though he could never put his finger on what it was. Ultimately, he found himself alone with an emptiness inside him. He had no idea what to do with himself.

It was a bright sunny day, so the younger detective's wife took him to a secluded beach, where they could spend some quality time together. She felt elated, as they lay on their towels, on the sand, feeling the warm sun hit their skin. And while he did want to feel the same way as she was feeling, he couldn't. He couldn't help but still feel upset. And a part of him even wanted to look away from her as to not burden her with his problems.

"Are you okay?", she asked him.

“Yeah”, the younger detective answered. “I’m fine.”

She wasn’t sure how to confront him about his issues, nor how sensitive he was feeling in that moment, but she knew that if she prolonged this any longer it would only get worse, so she had to say something.

“I think you should see someone”, his wife said.

“See someone?”, the younger detective asked.

“Like a counselor, or someone like that.”

“I’m okay.”

“But you’re not.”

The younger detective fell silent, finally facing his wife.

“We both know you’re not well”, his wife said.

“You’re right”, the younger detective confessed. “I’m not.”

“I don’t want to force you to do anything you don’t want to. But I would like you to talk to someone. I just want you to be happy again. Like you once were.”

“Okay, I’ll see someone.”

“Thank you.”

Later that week, the younger detective did indeed see a psychiatrist. But the younger detective was put through the usual procedure, being asked general questions that didn’t reveal to him anything he wasn’t already aware of and by the end of the session, all the psychiatrist could recommend was to book another session. He left feeling despondent and vowed to not to go see this psychiatrist anymore.

After the session, he drove home with the radio off, allowing the silence to fill the car. However, his mind was clear. It was possible that he was done thinking, finally. And when he arrived home, he could feel life slowing down to a much calmer pace.

The younger detective entered his house, smelling the stir fry his wife was cooking and it brought a smile to his face. Once dinner was ready, they sat down to eat and he filled her in on how bad his session was, but that he felt okay, at least for now.

“Are you going to go back?”, his wife asked him.

“I don’t think so”, the younger detective answered.

“Then what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know.”

“Have you thought of going back to work? Maybe, you miss it.”

“No, I can’t.”

The younger detective froze. But it gave him a moment to contemplate how to express what he was thinking. His wife looked back at him, as she stopped eating, eager to hear what he had to say.

“I can’t go back”, the younger detective said.

“You used to be so optimistic”, his wife commented.

“You used to talk about all the good you were doing for the world. All the crimes you could solve. The people you could help. What happened to all that?”

“It’s gone.”

His wife didn’t know what to say, while he fell into deep thought again.

“I’m afraid”, the younger detective said. “I’m afraid that if I go back, I’ll become like him.”

“Like who?”, she asked. “Like your partner?”

“Yes.”

He fell silent again for a moment, as his eyes began to well up.

“We’re so alike”, the younger detective commented.

“He and I. And I’m afraid that if I continue, I’ll end up like him. I can’t go back.”

His wife held his hand.

“Hey”, she said. “You’re not him. You’re not him. And you won’t end up like him. I know that. I know you. I know you. You’re not him.”

The tears just flowed, uncontrollably, as the younger detective hid his face from her, trying desperately to keep himself under control, while she got up out of her chair and put her arms around him to console him.

“It’s okay”, she reassured him. “It’s okay.”

The younger detective arrived home in a t-shirt and swimming shorts, with a towel hanging over his shoulder, and holding some goggles in his right hand. As soon as he entered, he made his way to the bathroom, where he had a shower. He was feeling much more upbeat now, even though his body was tiring. Afterwards, he went to the laundry and put his wet clothes in the washing machine before going to the kitchen and making himself some breakfast.

The morning sunlight was lighting up the living room, as the younger detective took his prepared breakfast to the table and turned on the TV. He was flipping through the channels, seeing if there was anything worth watching this early on in the day. And while he knew there wouldn’t be, he was hoping there might be something to go along with his breakfast. However, as he was surfing, one of the channels he flipped to caught his eye. It was a news channel. He had given up on the news by now, but this particular story caught his attention. A reporter was telling the story of an explosion at a gas station. He turned up the volume to listen closely.

“Last night”, the news reporter said. “This gas station exploded. Thankfully no one was hurt. However, a group calling themselves The Shadow Stalkers are claiming to have caused the damage. They have said there will be more attacks to come. And that they are not afraid to hurt anyone who opposes them and their vision for a more prosperous society.”

The younger detective couldn’t believe what he was seeing and hearing, as he was glued to the TV.

“The Shadow Stalkers also released a short video online sharing their intentions”, the news reporter said. “And be warned, the footage is quite confronting.”

The news outlet played the video clip of a number of men, all wearing dark hooded jumpers with their faces blacked out and their voices slurred, reiterating what the

news reporter had already stated in their report.

Once the video clip had finished, the younger detective leaned back in his couch and let go of his attention to the TV. It was in this moment that the younger detective knew that all of this wouldn't end.

Epilogue

Who is The Shadow Stalker? This is the question you might be left asking yourself. Or you might have answered it. Regardless, just know that your response to this question is irrelevant, for you cannot hide from him. He lives in the shadows and watches you when you sleep. You might wake up and see him, and you might run after him and catch him, and think he cannot harm you anymore. But you're wrong. He will come back. He will always come back to the shadows to watch you. And you cannot do a thing about it.

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