

THE GREEN LAMA: Scions

by

Adam Lance Garcia

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“For my Jean Farrell, Melissa Marie.”

*Introduction***THE SHADOW OF TIBET**

The 1930s were dominated by pulp magazines. So named for their cheap paper, the pages between their luridly painted covers burst with tales of crime, adventure, and horror. Masked men battled evil, doling out justice with highhanded morality and little regard for public safety. Much of what we now identify as superheroes—you may have heard of them—started within these pages of rip-roaring prose, formulaic plot, and minimal characterization. *The Shadow*, first born on the radio before making his way onto those cheap pulp pages, became a sensation. Amongst his litany of abilities, *The Shadow* could cloud men's minds, a power learned from his studies in the mystical realm of Tibet.

Back then, Tibet was one of few remaining frontiers in the world and the public hungered for it.

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James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* flew off the shelves, and was soon adapted by Frank Capra into a film of the same name, introducing the world to the idea of Shangri-La. Meanwhile Theos Bernard, dubbing himself "the first white lama," returned from his travels in Tibet to teach the world of Buddhism and the foreign concept of tantric yoga. Back then, the word "lama" had power, a term so strange, so foreign, it showed that there was still some magic left in the world.

It was within that world, *The Green Lama* was born.

In 1939, Kendell Foster Crossen was commissioned by the Munsey Publishing Company to create a new hero for their pulp magazine *Double Detective*. This hero would rival *The Shadow*, *The Spider*, and the other costumed vigilantes running amok on newsstands. Under the pseudonym "Richard Foster," Crossen drew inspiration from various sources, and created not only one of the most unique heroes ever to grace prose, comics, and radio, but also the world's first Buddhist hero.

Much like other pulp heroes of the time, *The Green Lama* had multiple secret identities and a massive supporting cast aiding him in his quest for justice. Unlike his many of contemporaries, *The Green Lama* eschewed guns in favor of radioactive salts, magic, and

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sleight of hand. He rarely, if ever, killed his enemies. His tales also had an advanced sense of continuity, with characters growing and changing over time, plot points introduced in one story paying off several tales later.

The Green Lama is a character of contradictions, driven forward by a faith he constantly betrays. It makes him flawed and imperfect, and in that way, perhaps the most *human* of all pulp heroes. He epitomizes a lost era, when there was still wonder and mystery permeating the world, a time when there was still something fantastic to discover just over the horizon.

What you're about to read is the first of many new *Green Lama* stories fully authorized by the Crossen Estate. These stories are meant to be a direct continuation of Crossen's stories, at times taking place before, between, or after the original fourteen. But if you're looking for a good place to start, you've found it here.

Adam Lance Garcia
September 2, 2013

*Chapter 1***THE SCREAMING SHIP**

1938

New York Harbor was a mirrored surface. Pinpricks of city lights cut through the murky grey fog, twinkling like stars. It was beautiful in a way, Josh Reynolds thought. Not that Reynolds had an appreciation for beauty, at least not in the ways the poets described.

He chewed on the remains of his cigar, enjoying the bitter taste dancing over his tongue. Beauty sat between a girl's thighs. Especially when she was screaming and fighting, so he had to earn it. He leaned forward and watched the bow of the rowboat cut through the icy water. In the distance, he could hear the mournful sound of a foghorn echo out like a dying whale, making him smile. It was a good night for nasty business.

"Bad night tonight, Wilfred. Dark as hell and thick like chowder," he said to the boy working the rows. Wilfred Roth was the wiry sort of kid who grew up mean in the

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narrow alleyways of the city. He was no more than sixteen but looked twice that. Dark black pits sat beneath his eyes, a switchblade in his pocket. Reynolds liked him.

Between them lay the concrete covered form of ol' Drew Salmon, a small divot indicating where his mouth had been. Reynolds could still hear the screams, made him think of boiling lobsters. "Didn't know when to keep his mouth shut, our friend Drew. Pity the boss had to kill him like that."

Wilfred sucked his teeth. "Poor ol' Drew," he said with more than a bit of sarcasm.

"Always better to keep your mouth shut and be thought an idiot than to get shot in the face," Reynolds ruminated, unconsciously using his tongue to pick the tobacco leaves from between his teeth. "That's my motto, at least."

Wilfred rolled his sunken eyes. "Coulda fooled me," he said under his breath.

"Aye!" Reynolds shouted, spitting a wad of leaves into the river. "Let Drew be a lesson for you about smart talk, boy-o." He kicked Drew's cemented corpse with the toe of his boot to underline his point. Without waiting for a response, he stood up and tried to wave away the fog. "Look at this soup, thick enough to cut with a knife. Betcha that Buddhist Bastard could stand right in front of us and not know we were here ... so long as we're quiet, so keep

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your mouth shut.”

“Do as you say, not as you do.”

“Exactly.”

Reynolds had been working this town a long time, before the Feds went about busting liquor barrels, before Tommy guns became the mobster’s weapon of choice and long before men started wearing masks like it was Halloween. At first he thought the vigilantes were a lark, the kind of thing idiots did to make the papers. But like most bad ideas, it caught on quickly and spread like wildfire. Most were nutcases in domino masks, freaks who went about killing anything that moved, thinking that would somehow bring an end to crime, never figuring that vacuums were the sort of thing that always found a way of getting filled. But then there was the Green Lama, who—despite his ridiculous name—lived in the shadows, systemically working his way through the underworld, leaving destruction in his wake without ever taking a life. They had a lot of names for him in the papers—the Verdant Avenger, the Mysterious Man of Strength—but Reynolds had always been partial to “Buddhist Bastard.” No one had ever seen his face or, at the very least, the *same* face. Seemed like everyone had a different story. The Green Lama was white, he was Negro, he was Oriental, he was old, and he was young. You could fill a room of witnesses and no two would describe the same person.

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Reynolds, for his part, had only seen the Green Lama once, when a robbery went sour. A bomb had gone off early, and before the cops could begin to surround the building, the shadows came alive, taking out every member of the gang one-by-one. Reynolds had sprayed bullets left and right when he felt a small electrical shock at the base of his skull and his whole body turned to pudding. He dropped to the ground, unable to move, as the Green Lama dressed in a hooded robe, a red *kata* scarf wrapped around his waist, ran past, his fists subtly glowing like emeralds. A warm stream of urine ran down Reynolds's leg and hours passed before he could move again.

He brushed away the memory as best he could and turned back to the dirty task at hand. He checked his watch, just shy of ten o'clock and a long way until the sun would swing through the sky. "All right, we're out far enough," he said, chucking the remains of his cigar into the water. "Let's put good ol' Drew out to sleep."

Wilfred brought in the oars and tried unsuccessfully to lift Drew's corpse off the bottom of the boat. "Did we have to cover him in concrete?" he grunted. "He weighs a goddamn ton!"

"Only way to make sure he sinks, kiddo," Reynolds replied as he helped lift. In truth, their boss Pete Barry just liked to make rats suffer as much as possible. Reynolds

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would never forget what the boss did to Johnny Lombardo and all the blood that came with it.

The boat rocked violently as they threw Drew's mortal remains over the side. They watched the stone body quickly sink down, ripples the only evidence of its existence.

Reynolds ran his sleeve over his brow, missing the time when this sort of work didn't leave him breathless. "So long, ol' Drew," Reynolds said, spitting a wad of phlegm. "And good riddance." He clapped Wilfred on the back. "Good job there, son. Cleaned the mess real good. We've earned the rest of the night off, dontcha think?"

Wilfred nodded. He silently fell back to his seat, watching the vacant space Drew's cemented carcass had previously occupied.

Reynolds sat down. Fishing into his pockets, he found his matchbook and a single bent cigar, tobacco flakes crumbling off the end. "Let's head home to the city we love," he said as he went to light his stogie, "find us some nice young ladies to sing us some moaning melodies. Work the oars, son, ain't getting any earlier."

Something smacked against the bow of the boat, a loud thunk that jostled the lit match from Reynolds's hand and onto his lap. "Jesus, Mary and Joseph," he cursed, brushing off the smoldering stick. He sucked on his thumb and placed it over the hole in his pant leg, hissing at the

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pain. “Damn, damn, damn. The Hell was that?”

Wilfred leaned over the side and urgently waved Reynolds over, his lips pinched so thin they had turned white.

“Wouldya just tell me,” Reynolds grouched, disappointed in himself at ruining yet another pair of pants.

“You’re gonna wanna see this,” Wilfred said as calmly as he could manage.

Reynolds begrudgingly looked over the side and felt ice water drip down his spine. Floating alongside the boat was the body of a young woman, her head ripped asymmetrically in half. Bits of brain and blood drifted out from the cavity, mixing with the water to create a crimson and grey stew. Reynolds went to cover his mouth but couldn’t prevent himself from throwing up all over the deck.

“Christ on the cross,” he whispered, spitting out the last of the vomit, wiping his grizzled chin clean with the heel of his hand. He had seen and done some terrible things in his time, stuff that would make a priest stop believing, but this tore him open.

“What the hell could do that?” Wilfred asked as if Reynolds had the answers.

“Dunno,” Reynolds murmured. “I dunno.”

“Someone sees us with her, they’re gonna think it was us. Bad enough we had ol’ Drew; a murdered broad is a

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helluva a lot worse.” Wilfred grabbed the oars and started rowing furiously, twice inadvertently smacking the corpse, spreading strawberry colored jam over the paddle. “I’m not getting pinched for somethin’ like this!”

Reynolds waved a placating hand at Wilfred as a chunk of grey matter dripped down the oar, but it was no use. “Calm down, boy, calm down. No need to get yourself worked up. They notice when you ain’t calm.”

“You hear that?” Wilfred asked, suddenly standing up. His eyes were wide and quivering, looking more like those of a child trapped in a dark room than a gangland thug’s. “Reynolds, please tell me you heard that.”

“It’s just seagulls, boy, coming fer dinner.” Reynolds kept his gaze trained on the deck and shook his head, hearing nothing but the waves. He felt his stomach twist again and tried to push the image of the woman’s shattered skull out of his mind. “Just seagulls.”

“Ain’t no seagulls that sound like that. This is something big, something nasty. Sounds like—”

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” Reynolds shouted. “Whatever you’re hearing is just in your head, boy. You keep on like this, the whole damn world will—” Then he heard it, off in the distance and moving closer, warbling and shifting like the tides. His teeth started to chatter. It definitely wasn’t seagulls. “Mary, Mother of God, what is that?”

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"I told ya!" Wilfred exclaimed. "Told ya it weren't no seagulls!"

"It's screaming," Reynolds said under his breath, remembering good ol' Drew's final moments. "It's people screaming."

Beneath the violent shrieks and wails, Reynolds could hear the rush of water, growing louder and louder, almost drowning out the screams. It was a ship; there was no doubt about that—a big one—moving fast the way it was cutting through the drink. With the brume this thick, they needed to get to shore as fast as they could.

"Jesus, what's happening to them?" Wilfred asked, peering into the fog.

"Nothing we wanna find out," Reynolds replied, stealing a glance at the body knocking up against their boat. He slapped Wilfred on the shoulder and climbed over to the oars. "Come on, boy-o, we need to get moving quick."

But Wilfred kept watching the night. "I can hear them," he whispered. His eyes rolled back and his voice grew monotone. "I can hear all of them. Every single one them, dying for the sunken city. Their blood feeds them." He cocked his head unnaturally to the side.

Reynolds's stomach twisted into knots. "Willy...?"

"*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh...*" Wilfred sang, as the screams grew louder. He twisted around, a Cheshire grin distorting

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his face, foam collecting at the corners of his mouth. “They have come here at last, for the stars are about to align.”

The screams suddenly went silent and the fog split open as the ship bore down on them. The boat splintered beneath them and Wilfred disappeared into the mayhem. The metal hull crashed against Reynolds’s chest, crushing his ribcage, before hitting his head milliseconds later, shattering his teeth, flattening his nose and bursting open his skull. Brain matter floated into the water as the tide pulled him down. If Reynolds could have felt it, he would have noticed the water was warmer than he expected. A pleasant relief for a man who had no chance to swim as his arms and legs were broken. Had he been alive as he sank to bottom alongside good ol’ Drew, his last thought would have been that this was all the Green Lama’s fault.

“Unhand me!” Tzu-hao Ming-yu clamored, struggling against his bindings. Raw sewage dripped off his robes and down his legs, trailing along the floor as he was dragged toward the holding cells. He was the sort of man who looked old even when he was young, and at twenty-four had a receding hairline speckled with grey, crow’s feet dashing his eyes. “Do you know who I am, barbarian?! I am royalty! You do not touch royalty.”

Lieutenant John Caraway rolled his eyes, lifted Ming-yu off his feet, and carried him down the hall like a sack of

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potatoes. Ming-yu had been in control of the opium trade in and out of Chinatown for the last few years and was linked to more than two-dozen murders throughout the city. They lost track of him during a raid of one of his brothels and Caraway had spent the better part of a month hunting him up and down the city, finally finding the crime lord hiding beneath an abandoned building downtown. After a gunfight and two men down, the bastard led them on a chase through the subway, down a manhole, and Caraway suddenly became much more familiar with the city's sewage system than he had ever wanted to be.

"Royalty my ass," Caraway growled, a dog at the end of his leash. "Royalty doesn't run around the sewers like a goddamn rat. But don't you worry, your majesty, you'll be king of your own private cell real soon..."

Caraway was a tall barrel of a man; in another life he could have been a boxer or hired muscle but instead chose to spend two long years in the air fighting the Kaiser before coming home to put a badge on his chest. He was a good cop, the kind of man that would have made Eliot Ness's shortlist, not that one could tell by looking at him. Besides his perfectly trimmed and waxed mustache, Caraway was perpetually disheveled, always looking as if he had spent the night sleeping on the couch—which was the case more often than not. Tonight, however, he would be sleeping in his own damn bed, he decided; Francesca had left him

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again and he might as well sleep diagonally if he could.

“Wayland!” he shouted to the spherical officer at the other end of the hall. “Tell me where we can give the King of Stink his throne.”

“Insolence,” Ming-yu swore on his breath.

“Next to Zenner,” Sergeant Evan Wayland said with a nod of his chins. Wayland had joined the force a thin man but had steadily expanded over the years and would qualify as a planet by the time he retired. “We just got the good congressman back for his trial. Well, one of them at least. Hopefully, our visiting sovereign won’t mind listening to the congressman whimper on about how the Murder Corporation was all a setup.”

“He still bitchin’ about that? That was over a year ago.”

Wayland shrugged. “You know how politicians are, the past is always debatable. Honestly, that’s—” He stopped short, his face scrunching up as Caraway approached. He covered his nose and mouth, tears forming at the corner of his eyes. “Holy Hell.”

Caraway tossed over Ming-yu before Wayland could stutter a response. “Hose him down first; I don’t want this place smelling like feces.”

“You might also want to think about doing that yourself, Boss,” Wayland said, holding Ming-yu at arm’s length.

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“Thanks, Wayland, you really know how to make a girl feel pretty.”

“Well, when you look that good, Boss...”

“Shut up, Wayland.”

Wayland chuckled and pulled Ming-yu toward an empty cell. “Come on, Stinky.”

“Do you know who I am, you insolent pig?” Ming-yu shouted as Caraway walked away. “I am the son of the Devil himself. I am the son of Doctor Fu—”

“Yeah, Foo yourself, jackass,” Wayland retorted as the door closed behind him.

Caraway glanced at the clock hanging on the squad room wall, watching as the hands clicked to midnight, marking the end of another day as head of the Special Crime Squad. A wave of nostalgia briefly washed over Caraway, remembering when his days were only filled with rumrunners and pickpockets. That all changed three years ago when a brain surgeon named Frank Pelham put on a domino mask and started calling himself the Crimson Hand. For nearly two weeks, Pelham’s reign of terror spread from New York to Cleveland and would have stretched even further had it not been for the Green Lama.

Vigilante, that’s what the Green Lama really was, no matter how much people liked to call him “hero.”

He had first read about the Green Lama in the gossip section of the *Sentinel*, an unsubstantiated rumor about a

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man in a green hooded robe, knocking around gangsters. At the time, Caraway was more than happy to write the Green Lama off as nothing more than a canard made to move papers, until one night that rumor showed up in his office. Back then, Caraway was just another cog in the wheel, but the Green Lama had seen him as something more. He handed Caraway a card with a green symbol on one side, a phone number—Morningside 7-2363—on the other. The Green Lama bowed his head and promised he would be in touch before disappearing into the shadows like a wisp of smoke.

They had worked together—in a wholly unofficial capacity—ever since, the Green Lama proving to be not only an unparalleled asset in the war against crime, but something more than human, with strength and abilities that defied natural law. Apparently this was thanks to something called radioactive salts—artificial crystalline grains the Green Lama radiated with ions from a particle accelerator, rearranging their molecular structure to release the energy within. It all sounded ridiculous to Caraway, who was more willing to believe in sleight of hand than something that might have come out of a movie serial. He had never even seen the Green Lama's true face and, while he had a number of theories on who was beneath the hood, he knew the Lama was at least a good man and, more importantly, a friend.

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“Lieutenant Caraway... Boss!”

“Good Lord, it never ends,” Caraway grumbled, massaging his eyes, feeling the exhaustion radiating from his bones as Officer David Heidelberger raced over breathlessly. “Give me some good news, Heidelberger. It’s been a long night.”

“There’s been an accident, Sir. A big one,” Heidelberger said, trying to catch his breath. He was a foot shorter than most of the men in the Squad, his arms little more than twigs. Beneath his hat was a black mop of unruly clown hair that seemed to take on a life of its own. He wasn’t what Caraway would describe as the typical cop, but he was definitely one of the bravest.

“How big we talking?”

“Boss, they’re gonna be talking about this one for years.”

The Theatrical Boarding House sat on West Forty-Fifth Street, just off Broadway; each apartment little more than a hole in the wall with a faucet, bed, and mirror. Ma Smith, the house’s matron, was a cantankerous old woman prone to screaming swears that would make the filthiest sailor blush. The place smelled of stale cigarettes and liquor, the nights filled with the sounds of mattresses and moans as the tenants mingled indiscriminately.

Ken Clayton stood outside the decrepit old building

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smoking the last of his cigarette. He had moved to New York as a last minute gamble to restart his acting career, which had faltered after some initial success. Ken had the looks and talent of a leading man—he loved sitting in the darkened theatre and listening to the ladies swoon when he walked on screen—and wouldn't be satisfied with a supporting role, let alone the extra work which had become his sole source of income by the time he left Hollywood. The bet had paid off; within a short time he had landed several major roles in local film productions and starred in the play *Shadow and Substance* for part of its run at the John Golden Theatre. He eyed the Theatrical Boarding House disdainfully; a first rate star didn't belong in a fourth rate sty like this.

That wasn't the truth, but for now, that was the reason he was giving.

He tossed the smoldering cigarette to the ground, extinguished it with his heel and walked inside.

"Oi!" a craggy voice rang from the sitting room. "What're you doin' comin' 'ome so late? 'ave you no sense of decency?"

"None that I know of," Ken replied with a shrug. He spun around to face Ma Smith standing in the foyer, her hands on her hips. She was a head-and-a-half shorter than him so he had to tuck his chin against his throat to look her in the eye. "It's why my dad gave me a wad of cash, a

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suitcase, and made sure I walked out the door.”

“It’s yer walkin’ in that concerns me, Mr. Clayton,” she said pointedly, her jowls wobbling.

Ken smiled and bowed slightly. “Well, I’m just happy you’re thinking about me. Truly, Lady Smith, I’m touched.”

“Lady Smith!” she exclaimed cynically. She jabbed a finger into his chest. “You’re just lucky your checks never bounce, Mr. Clayton!”

“And why should they?” he asked, walking backwards up the stairs. “There’s plenty bouncing around in here already!”

“I run a reputable home here, Mr. Clayton!” she protested.

“I know!” he laughed, knocking his fist against the wall. “It has the reputation as the only place in the city where walls shake on their own!”

His room—he wouldn’t dare call it an apartment—sat at the far end of the second floor, overlooking a dank alleyway and brick wall going to rot. He fished into his pocket for his keys before deciding against it. He leaned his head on the door and sighed.

Every day was a performance, a constant pantomime to give everyone what they wanted to see, and it was beginning to wear on him. Even Chaplin stopped playing the Tramp. But there were no cameras to turn off for Ken,

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only an ever-present audience, always waiting to see the next act. The show would never end, no matter how much he wanted it to.

Thankfully, he had one person who would let him take off his mask.

He walked down the hall to the room marked two-one-four and lightly rapped his knuckles against the door. “Red, it’s me.” He could hear voices whispering within and waited several seconds before he asked: “Can I come in? Red?” He checked the knob and found it unlocked. His stomach knotted. “Red, you there?”

Ken took a deep breath and grabbed the sidearm strapped beneath his jacket. Such a strange thing for a movie star to have, he reflected. He closed his eyes, took a long breath in, and prepared himself for what he was about to find. He slowly turned the knob, cocked back the hammer, and burst into the room.

Jean Farrell jumped out of her chair, her pistol aimed squarely between Ken’s eyes. Her face instantly relaxed at the sight of him, but not before he saw the deadly expression that had descended over her normally beautiful visage.

“What the hell, Clayton?” she exclaimed, lowering her gun, her Montana accent still evident after all these years. “I could’ve killed you!”

“You didn’t answer the door!” he shouted back.

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“Just because I don’t answer the door doesn’t mean you get to barge in with a gun, goddammit!”

“I was nervous!”

“You barged in. With a gun.”

“And you pointed one at me!”

“Like you’ve never had a gun pointed at you,” she said with a coy smile, her hand on her hip.

“You couldn’t answer the door?”

“I was a little busy,” she replied, tucking her fire red hair back behind her ear as she paced the room. It was only then that Ken noticed the shortwave radio on the table next to her bed.

“I can see that,” he commented with a raised eyebrow. “Red, can we talk?”

“A ship just crashed into Liberty Island,” she said off handedly.

“Excuse me?” he said, sitting down on the corner of her bed.

“And a big one at that,” she added excitedly, her green eyes sparkling. “We’re talkin’ ocean liner, Blondie. Any bigger and we’d be in *Titanic* territory.”

“You’ve been listening in on the police?”

“Of course. What do you think I got that for?” she asked, waving at the radio.

“Don’t you need a permit for that?” Ken lifted up the headphones and placed it against his ear. There was a

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smattering of voices talking back and forth, one he recognized as Lieutenant Caraway. “Hm. The *S.S. Bartlett*. When did you get this?”

Jean shrugged. “Couple of days ago.”

“This isn’t something you get at the corner store, Farrell,” he said, holding up the headphones as if to prove a point. “This is something—Did you lift this off the cops?”

“What? No. A...” she trailed off and frowned, searching for the word. “A friend bought it for me.”

“A friend. A friend in a big green cloak?”

“And electric powers. Yes, that friend,” Jean said quickly.

“This is why you don’t land any major roles, darling,” he sighed. “You’re too busy working for him.”

“Working? I thought this was all on a volunteer basis. I can leave whenever I want.”

“Be honest. You do it because you like him.”

Jean rolled her eyes. “Don’t be insane, Clayton. As far as the world knows you and I are bound at the hip.”

“As far as the world knows,” he said, his heart fluttering in his chest. Now was the time to tell her. “Everyone in this room, however—”

“Hey, for the record, you rejected me,” she retorted as she picked up her phone.

“Who’re you calling?”

“Who do you think?” she replied, lifting the handset to her ear. “Cory, get off the party line!” She placed a hand over the mouthpiece. “That Midgarden kid always yammering on to his mother in Poughkeepsie,” she said to Ken. “Yes, now. I don’t care if your dog had a litter of puppies, you can deal with that bitch later. No, I wasn’t talking about you, Mrs. Midgarden.”

Ken sighed, realizing the moment had come and gone. He got up and walked to door. “Red, you’re going to make some man very happy one day.”

“So will you, Blondie,” she said, dialing in MORningSide 7-2363. “Hey, what was it you wanted to talk about?”

Ken smiled wanly. “Not important. Let me know if he needs us.”

“When doesn’t he?” she grinned.

Cigarette smoke hung over the Café Society nightclub like a cloud, yellowish white, seeping into the walls. The lights were dimmed, the shadows thick and velvety. The band was coming back from their break, fiddling with their instruments in a cacophony that was both lurid and maddening. *Herald-Tribune* reporter Betty Dale grimaced at the sound, fidgeting uncomfortably in her chair as she waited for her subject to return to his seat. Despite his celebrity, she had spent the better part of the last month

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trying to track him down, finally finding him here in a jazz lounge off Christopher. What kind of respectable millionaire would come here, of all places? It made her uncomfortable, feeling like a bright white beacon that cried, “I don’t belong.” But she was known for doing almost anything for a story. She’d be able to handle a night on the other side of the tracks.

She wasn’t sure what her editor would say once she handed him the finished article—there would probably be a lot of screaming—but there was no doubt in her mind that it would make the front page. She checked her watch as the hands moved past one o’clock and dangerously toward two. She drummed her fingers against her notepad as the trumpeter played his first notes and the rest of the band followed along.

“Thank you for meeting me so late, Miss Dale,” Jethro Dumont said with a smile, handing her a Manhattan as he sat down across from her, a glass of whiskey for himself. He loosened his tie as he sat down across the table, running a hand through his ruffled brown hair, his blue-grey eyes studying Betty. There was no denying that Dumont was handsome—though Betty had known more attractive men—looking significantly younger than his thirty-five years. Perhaps it was due to his time spent in Tibet, but that wasn’t why she hunted him down, at least not directly. “Didn’t mean to keep you waiting, of course, but Joan’s

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still enjoying her post-divorce days and insisted we have one more dance. I wasn't about to refuse."

"Then I suppose I should be thanking you for taking time out your busy schedule," she said dryly.

Dumont's smile broadened. "No rest for the wicked."

"Yes, well, it took me so long to get in touch with you, I was beginning to think you were nocturnal," she said, pushing a lock of golden hair out of her eyes.

"That's because I am, Miss Dale," Dumont said, raising a devilish eyebrow. "Or very near close to it."

"Or you're just still on Tibet time?" she suggested.

Dumont chuckled. "If that were so, I'd be chanting, unless you count this as ceremony," he said, rattling his glass.

"A glass of whiskey isn't what I would normally consider sacrament, but I'm sure I can find a few people who'd convert for you." She sipped her drink, finding it much more bitter than she cared for. "Needless to say, I'm not sure I've conducted many interviews in such an... interesting setting."

"Don't like jazz, Miss Dale?"

"Not my cup of tea, Mr. Dumont. Guess you can call me old fashioned."

His eyes roamed over her. "Girl young as yourself, I'd say that's the most depressing thing I've ever heard."

Betty gave him a thin smile as she fished a cigarette

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holder out from her purse. “Don’t you smoke, Mr. Dumont?”

“Not anymore, no,” he said. Betty couldn’t help but notice the tinge of distaste in his tone. What kind of man didn’t smoke?

“Guess I shouldn’t ask you for a light, then,” she said, cigarette hanging from the corner of her mouth.

“I’m not without class, Miss Dale,” Dumont said, drawing a chrome lighter from his vest, the letters JPD engraved on one side. Betty leaned over the table to let Dumont light her cigarette. “So, what’s this article about? You’ve called my people, called my houses and apartments, chased me across the city, and finally tracked me down. However, at no point have you mentioned what it is you’ll be writing about. I’d like to believe it’s something a little more substantive than a *Broadway Brevities* piece, but then again the public does love a scandal.”

“No offense, Mr. Dumont,” she said, taking a drag from her cigarette, “you’re scandal personified.”

“Miss Dale, you’re going to make me blush.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“You know, I remember hearing about another Betty Dale who disappeared after the *Cleveland Post* printed her article about the murder of Lew Giggi.”

Betty grimaced. “I have no idea who that woman was,

but she thoroughly screwed my career for six months after that fiasco. I ever find her, I'm going to give her a piece of my mind."

Dumont flashed a sly smile. "I'll make sure to let you know if I ever run into her. But we're going off on a tangent, aren't we?"

"We are." Dale picked up a pen and flipped opened her notepad. "There are a lot of questions, Mr. Dumont, as I'm sure you're aware, about your ten year sojourn into Tibet."

"I am aware," he said with a nod. "And all of these questions will be addressed in my friend Richard Foster's upcoming book, *Jewel in the Lotus Flower*. It's quite an interesting read, I promise you. Full of illustrations and photos. I'll have them send you a copy."

"You left shortly after the death of your parents, correct? From what I understand you were attending Harvard at the time and simply walked off campus."

"In the middle of a snowstorm, yes." He laced his fingers together and kept his penetrating gaze on Betty. "Though I assure you it wasn't as histrionic as it sounds. I took a cab to the train station."

Betty nodded and jotted down a few superfluous notes. "There's also your more, shall we say... dramatic return to the States almost five years ago."

Dumont's body stiffened and his eyes steeled over. "If

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you're referring to the three children who were gunned down while I was disembarking the *S.S. Heki*—”

“There are some who believe those guns were aimed at you, Mr. Dumont.”

“Are you trying to imply I'm somehow connected to the mob, Miss Dale?”

“I'm implying nothing. I'm simply asking the questions many others have already asked themselves.”

“And they would be wrong,” he said sharply. “If you'd like this interview to continue I'd advise you to tread lightly, Miss Dale.”

“I mean no disrespect, Mr. Dumont,” she said, her eyes saying different. “As I said, I'm merely asking questions.”

“Lies spoken are slander, easily ignored and forgotten,” he said, methodically. “Put them in print and that's libel, and my lawyers absolutely love libel.”

Betty took a thoughtful drag of her cigarette as she measured him. “Then why don't we snub any falsehoods printed or spoken before your lawyers get wind of them?”

“Ask your questions then,” he said with a dismissive wave.

Betty took once last pull of her cigarette and placed it in the ashtray. “There are some who believe that the death of your parents was no mere accident, that you absconded to the East because of some serious debt either you or your

parents had accrued from some very dangerous people.”

“Are you asking to look at my bank accounts, Miss Dale? I assure you the quantities are all in the nonuple digits.”

“It just seems a little suspicious, Mr. Dumont, that you should disappear for a decade after the death of your parents only to return to gunfire?”

Dumont rested his elbows on the table and tapped his fingers together while he considered his answer. “Miss Dale, I will try to speak as plainly as possible so as to avoid any misunderstandings,” he said after a moment. “The death of my parents was the most tragic event of my life, completely upending everything I held dear. It rattled me, Miss Dale; rattled me right to my very core. I realized that I had nothing. No purpose, no reason. For all the money I had, I realized I was impoverished. So, I went to find what I was missing. I travelled through China and India until I made my way into Tibet and there I found—” His glassy eyes momentarily dropped to his right hand. Betty followed his gaze and saw for the first time the rainbow ring of hair wrapped around his middle finger. He pressed his hand to his chest. “Or I suppose you could say it found me. Buddhism gave me peace, gave me purpose. I returned to the States to teach others what I had learned: ‘Lamaism,’ as our Western scholars insist on calling it. What happened on the pier that day... It haunts me, Miss Dale. Not a day

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goes by where I don't replay it all in my head and wish I could have saved those children."

Betty pursed her lips. "You expect me to believe it's all just coincidence?"

"There are such things, Miss Dale."

"I've learned otherwise."

"Have you now? Then, let me ask you a question, Miss Dale. What have you seen that has left you so jaded?"

Dale arched an eyebrow. "Things you wouldn't believe."

He leaned forward, a caustic smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. "Try me."

A waiter approached the table and stood awkwardly, hands laced together. "Excuse me, Mr. Dumont, Sir, but you have a call from a Mr. *Sah-wrong*."

Dumont's debonair smile instantly returned as if it never left. It was a mask, Betty realized with little surprise. "Ah, my assistant, Tsarong," he said to the waiter, then to Betty with unexpected warmth: "If you'll excuse me, Miss Dale."

Betty gave him a terse nod and watched him disappear into the crush of people.

An hour later, Betty, resigned to the fact that Dumont wasn't coming back, finished her drink and dropped a few bills on the table. She began to collect her notes when she glanced at Dumont's drink, realizing he had never

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taken a sip.

Frankie Annor, Jr. sat with his feet hanging over the edge of the dock, watching as dawn started to show on the horizon, a band of orange mixing with purple and black. The night shift was agony, but the money was good and for a Frenchman of color good money was hard to come by. The Americans liked to say their Civil War made everything right, but if your skin was any shade darker than white you had an impossible hill to climb.

It wasn't that he didn't like this country, or this city for that matter; he loved it. The way it moved, the way it smelled, the way it tasted, but there was no ignoring the bitter aftertaste, the putrid smell that lay beneath the streets.

At least the sunrises were always beautiful.

He sprinkled a pinch of tobacco into his pipe and dug into his coat pocket for his matchbox, shaking it to make sure he had one or two still left inside. Satisfied, he pushed open the box and moved to strike a match when he heard something splashing in the river. Curious, he leaned forward to find a young man—a boy, really—dog paddling toward the dock. Frankie lit his pipe and took several puffs before he called, “Do you need some help down there?”

The boy turned around in the water to face him, surprised by Frankie's presence. “Ah, yes,” he said

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bashfully. "I think I do."

Frankie bit down on his pipe, wrapped his left arm around a dock post, and extended his right. The boy swam over and when he was close enough, latched on to Frankie's hand.

"We are going to do this on three, *oui*?"

"Three, okay," the boy replied breathlessly. How long had he been in the water, Frankie wondered?

"*Un... deux... trois!*" He pulled the boy out of the water, grunting loudly as his worn forearms screamed in protest. The boy grabbed at the dock and pulled himself up the rest of the way, collapsing into a gasping, shivering heap.

Frankie took off his jacket and offered it to the boy, who took it with a nod of thanks. Frankie couldn't help but notice the scar on the boy's neck: a long, diagonal gash with three uneven dashes on the left, two on the right. He unconsciously cocked his head to get a better look at it, thinking it looked more like an infected vein than a scar.

"You want to try to explain what you're doing swimming 'round the docks?" Frankie asked, puffing his pipe.

The boy looked out to the river for several moments. "I don't really know," he said at last, water dripping off his nose. "I was... in a boat. I think. I don't remember anything else."

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“A ship crashed into the island with the Lady on it,” Frankie said, gesturing with his pipe. “You part of that?”

The boy shook his head. “Don’t believe I am.”

Something bad had happened and the kid was doing his best to forget. Whatever it was it wasn’t worth prying. Frankie got to his feet and tapped the boy on the shoulder. “The morning is cold and you should stay warm. Come, coffee and a meal will do you right.” He helped the boy to his feet and they started walking away from the water. “You have a name or should I give you one?”

“Wilfred,” the boy said. “Wilfred Roth.”