

# The Griffin Affair

Lunch Counter Stories XII



*Kim Taylor copyright ©2023, all rights reserved*

# Table of Contents

Meet Sam Jones.....	1
Stan Asks for Help.....	7
Art Puts a Tail on Ingrid.....	16
Art On the Case.....	24
Ken and Megan on the Case.....	31
Megan and Tilly's Kids.....	37
Interview With a Shaman.....	44
Oki On The Job.....	50
The Stake-out.....	57
Lechmu Interviewed Again.....	66
Four Goons.....	72
The Cops Are In.....	77
Ray and Stan Sniff Around.....	83
A Visit to the Cottage.....	90
Not Romeo and Juliet.....	95
The Dance Scam.....	103
The Winged Lion.....	111
More Dead Ends.....	118
Stan has a Thought.....	124
The Trash Monster.....	130
Things Heat Up.....	136
Pez Dispensers.....	141
Marital Troubles.....	146
The Private Resort.....	152
The Truth from Ruth.....	160
The Posse.....	168
Ingrid's Case.....	174
The Chase.....	177
Sam Jones, Detective.....	182

## Meet Sam Jones

"Is this thing on? Hello? OK, it was a Dark and Stormy..."

Ten Minutes Later

"When they arrested me, I was really hoping that this was one of those framing devices, you know, open half way through the story and then put up a title card that says 'three weeks earlier', that sort of thing. But no, the story began right here, with me being grabbed off the street, manhandled into a car, making sure to slam my head into the door-frame.

"Head spinning, hands cuffed behind me, it wasn't a nice trip to the police HQ. They hadn't told me what I was charged with, and they sure as hell hadn't read me my rights. Do they do that in Canada? They've never read me anything here, when they've arrested me.

"So I'm sitting in an interview room, no one way mirror, just a camera up there on the wall. I asked Officer Grumpy if I got a phone call and he told me I watch too much TV. He gave me a tape recorder and told me to confess and then he left.

"Confess what? I don't know what I'm supposed to confess to. I really don't have a clue why I'm here. I was walking home from the bar and that's it, a dozen police cars come screaming around the corner and they jump me. I didn't think to run, I mean there's a lot of cops in this town, and it's not unusual to see six

or seven cars together. It's a quiet town, so when something happens, you get what seems like dozens of responders. Only they don't often jump out and beat nine kinds of hell on me.

"So what's their beef, what am I supposed to confess to?"

Officer Grumpy comes in and takes the tape recorder away. Officer Friendly comes in and sits down saying something like 'we hope this little misunderstanding,' and slides a piece of paper across the table. He hands me a pen and says 'sign.'

I didn't even read it. I signed and got out of there, determined to find out what the hell they were talking about. I mean someone must have been mugged or something.

The next morning I read in the papers, yes I read the papers, I don't trust that internet stuff, I like something I'm pretty sure was written by a human. There are so many bots on the net that I always say it's a bottle neck. Good eh? Anyway, I read in the papers that a local rich family's daughter has been kidnapped.

They figured I'd done that? I know that kid, she's a partier, she's probably passed out in some hotel room. I go to the office and crack a new bottle of whisky, pour it into the cleanest glass I can find, and start drinking. The booze helps some, and I go into the bathroom to check the cut on my head. It looks like I'll live. I'm just going through the papers on my desk, trying to figure out which wife or husband I'm going to follow that day when she walks in, the kid that is. She's banged up a little, but no more than a good night of sex would do. I'm mystified.

She sees the bottle, raises her eyebrows and I push the glass I've been drinking from over the desk. She looks at me, shakes her head and drinks right from the bottle. I like this kid. It looks like the whisky helps, she sits down and sort of collapses.

"I need your help, I'm in trouble."

"What sort of trouble, you're not married and I mostly chase wandering spouses."

"You're also the only detective I know in Guelph. I killed a guy last night, and I need you to figure out why."

"Why. Not who, not who really did it, but why?"

"You deaf, I killed someone, I know I did, I hit him with a bottle and I heard his neck snap. He came at me and beat me up a bit but then he died."

"Look, either I'm slow or you're not remembering things right, you mean he came at you and beat you up, then you hit him with a bottle and broke his neck."

"Jesus, you are slow, I broke his neck and then he came at me."

I stared at her for a while, took another drink and said, "Like a zombie, a dead guy beat you up."

"I don't know what he is, was. I hit him with the bottle and

then, yes, with a broken neck, he comes after me and gives me these bruises. Then he falls down dead."

"And you want me to tell you why you hit him."

"I want you to find out why I killed him, yes. I can pay you."

"You don't know my rates."

"You chase cheating spouses, I can afford you."

I pull over a notepad and a pencil. She short of goggles at this, and pulls out her phone, hits the record app and puts it down between us, "Just in case you're a slow writer too."

I'm tempted to push her out the door, but damn, break someone's neck and then get beat up a bit by the guy? Not to mention that the cops roughed me up for kidnapping this girl, I know damned well it's just because I was in the neighbourhood, but still.

"Where did all this happen?"

"In that short little alleyway between the King Eddie and Dave's Chinese."

"That thing is chained off."

"I know, I had to climb over to get out."

"How did you get in?"

"That I don't know. I want you to find out."

"OK let's back up. Where were you before all this happened?"

"I was in the Albion, drinking."

The Albion is closed, has been for years, but then again, the King Eddie is something else now, and Dave's Chinese is a burrito shop. I've been in town for a long time, she has been too, maybe she said King Eddie by mistake, but there's no way she was in the Albion. "You sure it was the Albion? Maybe the Royal Electric?"

"The what, no I was in the Albion."

"OK did you get hit on the head? Maybe we should get you to the hospital and get you checked out."

"What? No. I'm staying right here with you until you figure this out. Maybe you didn't hear me, I killed a man and I want to know why."

"Alright, put Jessica's coat on and let's go check out this alleyway."

When we got there, the place was full up with junk, old machinery, chairs, a counter top, but no body. I looked at Ms Griffin and she looked shaken.

“I swear it was here, this is a small town, where else would it be?”

I looked up the fence and there was a piece of her dress on the top, she climbed over this thing for sure.

“Alright, I believe you were in there, let’s just take a look around shall we? Where were you drinking?”

“In the Albion, right there... I don’t understand, it’s closed.”

“And here is La Riena and Fat Bastard, not the King Eddie and Dave’s.”

“But...”

“Like I said, did you hit your head?”

“Look, Jones, I didn’t hit my head, I don’t know what’s going on, but I want you to find out, you understand me?”

“Sweetheart, let’s go back to the office, Jessica will be in by now and she can take a good look at you. She used to be a nurse. Then we’ll talk again.”



## **Stan Asks for Help**

“Art, you did that detective thing when Ingrid was accused of killing the Morrigan right?”

“Hello Stan, have a seat, you want a coffee? Mike can we get another coffee over here?”

“Yeah, sure, but you were pretty good with the detective stuff, right?”

“What’s this all about Stan? You don’t worry about that sort of stuff do you?”

“Not usually, but there’s a girl all screwed up in some of our business and she’s gone and hired Sam Jones.”

“What, the divorce guy, is she getting divorced?”

“It’s Ruth Griffin, she’s not married.”

“Those Griffins? The kid? She doesn’t get mixed up in much of anything except parties and bars.”

“Well she was drinking in the Albion last night and got mixed up in all sorts of shit.”

“The Albion’s closed, Stan.”

“Yeah, and some of us like the place so we opened it again.”

“How... no don't tell me. So she was there last night, and?”

“And she killed a guy, a spirit being, she hit him with a bottle and broke his neck.”

“Why?”

“We don't know, maybe he made a pass, maybe she didn't like the colour of his shirt.”

“What colour... never mind. So what happened?”

“The guy tried to beat her up, but he died.”

“Tough guy then, who was he?”

“We don't know. We also don't know where this guy's body went, or how the two of them ended up in an alleyway down the street.”

“Down the street. Somebody flicked them there? Who was in the bar that could do that?”

“Me, a couple more, um, Ingrid. But nobody flicked them, I asked.”

“So that's where she was last night, she didn't say. Was Woody there?”

“No, Ingrid just dropped by when she noticed the place was open, had a few beers.”

“She saw the incident?”

“As much as any of us did. This kid shows up somehow, we don’t know how she got in, anyway the first anybody knows what’s going on, she’s breaking this guy’s neck, he goes for her, they’re both gone. It’s in the paper this morning that she’s been kidnapped.”

“No body?”

“None, a few of us looked. She’s at Jones’ place right now.”

“Maybe I should go over there and talk with her.”

“You can’t do that, Art, none of those guys know anything at all about the spirit people. You can pass for human but we’d rather you didn’t talk with them at all.”

“OK who is this ‘we’, you and Megan?”

“No, it’s the council, we were having a meeting, that’s why we were in the Albion.”

“Megan was there?”

“Uh, no, it’s sort of an unofficial council of the native spirits.”

“It’s a bunch of your drinking buddies then?”

Stan ducked his head, “One of the guys figured out how to open the Albion and we’ve been meeting once in a while.”

“OK Stan, now I do need to know, open it how?”

“Well, I’m not really sure, it’s sort of in between.”

“In between what and what?”

“Um, now and 1980 I think?”

“Stan, you know that time doesn’t like to be fucked with, right? Megan is going to have something to say about this.”

“That’s why I’m asking if you’ll look into it, on the down-low, you know, sort of quiet-like.”

“I can’t talk to Megan?”

“I’d prefer you didn’t, unless it’s really necessary. We’re getting along these days and I’d like to keep it that way.”

“Oh my Goddess. All right Stan, I’ll talk with Ingrid, see if she has any ideas, give me two other names I can talk to.”

“Well there was Ray Keen.”

“He’s not native, and neither is Ingrid. Just how exclusive is this council?”

“Not very, and there’s Dave, he was there.”

“Dave Robbie? He’s not a spirit being at all, was Kit with him?”

“No, just Dave, he saw we were open too and dropped in.”

“How did... And nobody knows who the dead guy was, or where he came from, or how he got there.”

“Front door.”

“What?”

“He came in the front door, Lou saw him come in.”

“Lou?” Art just barely stopped himself from asking ‘Lou who’.

“Lechmu, he’s Oji-Cree, been around town for a few days now.”

Art leaned over the counter and shouted, “Liz do you know a Shaman named Lechmu?”

Liz shouted back from a foot behind Art’s stool, “Yeah, Lou’s been around for a while, comes from Manitoba.”

Art jumped, “Oh, sorry Liz, I thought you were in back.”

“I was.”

“Oh, so he’s OK? Stand up guy and all that?”

“If you’re asking me to vouch for him, I can’t. Don’t know him well enough, but he’s powerful enough for most things.”

“Healing and talking with the spirits?”

“Yes, he’s competent by all accounts.”

“OK thanks, Liz.”

Liz nodded and went back into the store room. Art looked at Stan again, “Stan, tell me straight to my face that all you guys were doing last night was drinking.”

“And talking, yes. Nothing else, just discussing the general state of the world, complaining about our partners, that sort of thing.”

“Was Ingrid...”

“She likes you, Art, you ought to know that. Relax buddy. Although she did say something about snoring.”

Art just shook his head, if anyone snored, it was Ingrid. Great, rasping, honking, snores that sometimes shook the knick

knacks off their shelves. Stan knew that because Art had complained to him about it, several times.

Art figured the best place to start was Ingrid, she wouldn't have any reason to lie to him or hold back about what happened in the bar.

Although he began to doubt that.

“So are you having me followed Art?”

“Of course not, Stan asked me to look into the murder, and he mentioned you were there.”

“You're not going to drag Woody into this are you?”

“Why would I? He wasn't there was he?”

“No, but you know it will get real serious really fast if he gets involved.”

“Yeah, I remember.”

“So am I going to be your partner this time?”

“You're a witness right now, later I'm going to have you followed. Because I suspect you of cheating.”

“Really? Marvellous, it's about time you got properly jealous.”

“Sweetheart, can you tell me what happened in the bar please.”

“Well I was walking Hildy when I noticed the Albion was open, so we went in.”

“It was outside time, how could you see it?”

“Goddess, dear, I’m a Goddess, I’m outside time too.”

“Ah, right, and so you went in.”

“There was some sort of doorman there, or at least I thought he was a doorman, I handed him my coat. Some local spirit I’ve never seen before.”

“By local you mean North America?”

“Yeah, one of Megan’s lot, a native. Actually I think he might have been a Shaman, so first nations rather than native.”

“And then what?”

“And then Hildy and I drank a lot of beer, but toward the end of the night some human girl took a bottle and hit a guy hard enough to break his neck. He had some fight in him and smacked her a couple of times, but before I could get there, they had vanished.”

“They vanished after this guy hit the girl. OK did you notice anyone flick them away?”



“No, as far as I was aware, they were just vanished, dead.”

Art looked hard at Ingrid.

“Goddess of War, remember? I’ve seen a lot of dead, dear, come to think of it, I’ve seen a lot of dead deer too. You know, Wild Hunt and all that, what?”

Art thought that sometimes she sounded just like her ex. “No, they were moved to an alleyway down the street, and they were in the present, not wherever the Albion was.”

“Who were they?”

“The girl was Ruth Griffin but nobody knows who the guy was.”

“Let’s go look at him, I know most of the spirit beings around town.”

“Stan looked, the alleyway is fenced off, there was nobody there, he told me she had gone to Sam Jones, the detective.”

“Art, he doesn’t know anything about the spirit world around here, he’s a divorce dick.”

“That’s where she went.”

“Not even I could disappear without a trace. If he was in that

alleyway, there's something. I'd say call Mishelle, but she's still with Woody, how about Mara? She's got a good nose."

"All right, I'll call her."

## **Art Puts a Tail on Ingrid**

"She's OK Sam, just bruises, but who hit you? That cut is nasty."

"Just the cops rounding up the usual suspects, no big deal."

"It is to me, Sam. I've cleaned the wound, it should be fine, but next time you get beat up, call me right away."

"I didn't get beat up, well not much, but I'm good now, don't worry so much."

Jessica looked like she wanted to say something but she kept quiet. Sam got beat up regularly by husbands and by the police, who didn't like him getting involved in their business. Jessica had to heal Sam far more than she'd like, but damnit, he needed her.

Sam, on the other hand, had already forgotten what he was talking about with Jessica, and was wondering about Ruth. "So do you think the kid has a concussion or something? She's

telling me she killed a guy in the Albion, but it's closed and there's no body."

Jessica had checked, "No I don't think she hit her head, or if she did it wasn't hard, there's no bruises."

"Well I'm tempted to hand her over to the police. I can't make head or tails of her story."

"Sam, didn't the police haul you in on suspicion that you kidnapped her? What happens when you walk in with her?"

"They realize I didn't kidnap her and I'm due for a reward for finding her."

Jessica kept looking at Sam.

"No, they'll be convinced that I took her, won't they?"

Jessica nodded, "Normally I'd say we go over her story again, but she's believably consistent. I think she's told us all we are going to get out of her."

"So what's our next move?"

Sam often wasn't aware of how many times he asked Jessica that question, or how many times she answered it, but this time there was a knock on the office door.

"Next room, Ruth, in case it's the police."

Jessica opened the office door while Sam sat at his desk with his hand on the knife taped underneath.

“You Sam Jones, the divorce detective?”

“Who wants to know?”

“My name’s Art Pendry and I want you to check on my wife, I think she’s cheating on me.”

“Got a case right now, can’t take yours.”

“Well maybe you could just keep an eye out when you’re around town. I’ll pay your retainer.”

Art flicked his eyes to Jessica who was looking at him just a little too closely.

“OK I can do that. You got a picture and an address?”

Art handed over a photograph and a card. Sam nodded and said, “We’ll discuss the retainer later, busy now.”

Art nodded and with a last glance at Jessica, he left the office.

“What did you see?”

“That secretary is a spirit being, Art, but I’d guess she doesn’t know. I think she’s a healer, no wonder that guy never seems to

be hurt after he gets beat up.”

“Hard boiled detectives get beat up a lot, I wonder if they attract healers as secretaries.”

“I don’t know, but now I’ve had a good look at him, I saw the girl too, she was in the next room. Just human, like Sam. I told him I wanted him to follow Ingrid.”

"Oh thanks, well Ingrid will have fun convincing him she’s cheating, not cheating. She likes that sort of game.”

“You called Mara?”

“She ought to be here now,” Art looked up and down the street, and nobody seemed to be looking, “go ahead.”

Ray grabbed the padlock and it snapped open just as Mara came around the corner. Even before Ray had pushed the gate open she wrinkled her nose.

“There’s a body there, it’s under the junk.”

“Someone flicked it underneath?”

“No, it’s goo, it looks like he melted through and ended up on the ground.”

Art looked confused, Ray shook his head, “You’re on the right side of the law buddy. You know there are shape sifters, well

there are un-shape shifters too. They usually hire out as thieves, they melt under doors or through bars. Very useful to the gangs.”

“Gangs?”

Mara rolled her eyes, “Art there are as many gangs in Guelph as anywhere else. Human and Spirit. James was half way into one of them before he came to Algonquin on a trip. That’s why I spent so many years as a tripper, to keep those kids out of the gangs.”

“Ray could you get that goo out of there?”

“If I touched it and went through the Keen world, sure, but all that would do was leave a streak all over the place. We need someone who can flick it into a tub or something.”

“Stan.”

Stan showed up with a tub. “First, didn’t I ask you not to go visit the detective?”

“I didn’t, it was Ray looking like me. We wanted a line to his office and now Ray has it.”

Stan nodded and then waved his hand, the tub was full of grey goo. “Where do you want me to take this?”

“I don’t know, somewhere we can have folks look at it? Can

we tell anything from this?”

“How about the University, under Massey Hall? The coffee shop is long gone and we can get the Professor to have a look.”

Art’s lip curled, “That guy is creepy.”

“He just has a creepy way of analyzing things, relax you don’t need to come.”

“He’s going to taste that stuff, isn’t he?”

“It’s what he does to analyze it, you don’t have to come.”

“Ugh, no I’ll come.”

With that they were all in the basement of Massey Hall. Stan waved a hand and the Professor was there, “as for Mass Spectrometer / Gas Chromatography... Are you kidding, Stan? I was in the middle of a lecture.”

“I’ll put you back, this is a dead un-shape shifter, what can you tell us about him?”

“Stan...”

“No tricks, I promise.”

The Professor stuck a finger in the goo and sure enough, put it in his mouth. Art gagged, earning a dirty look from the

Professor.

“Where did you dig this up, Stan? This guy has been dead for decades.”

“Oh, hell, no he died in the Albion which was somewhere toward 1980 last night.”

The Professor frowned, “Firstly, why didn’t you call me? I miss that bar. Second, that means the guy died back then.”

“Is there anything else?”

“He wasn’t from around here, I’d guess Manitoba. Mara? What do you smell?”

“Yes, Manitoba, the chemical composition is right.”

Art looked hopeful, “Can you tell what he looked like? What his name is?”

The Professor looked at him like he was a first year undergrad, you know, that look, “You are kidding right?”

“Well I thought maybe with DNA and all that.”

“His name?”

“OK never mind. So we know he was there in the alley and that he was from Manitoba. That’s something I guess.”



“And now, my lecture?”

Stan flicked his hand, the Professor was back when he left, “What was I just droning on about?”

The class laughed, “Oh yes, detection methods...”

“Is this tub of whoever it is of any more use?”

“I don’t think so, can you flick it into...”

Mara put her hand on Art’s arm, “Wait, doesn’t your detective think Ruth is crazy? Why not give him a body?”

“What, can we do that?”

Ray nodded, “Not put it back like he actually was, but how about a burned up body that’s unrecognizable?”

“Under a layer of junk in the alleyway.”

“OK do it then.”

Ray put a badly charred body together.

“Does that look like a broken neck to you?”

Stan gave it a good kick, stepped back and said, “Yes.” He flicked it back into the alleyway.

## **Art On the Case**

"Dave, you were at the Albion last night with Stan and the rest of his buddies, can you tell me what you saw?"

"I saw everything, Art, you know I see it all."

"OK let me rephrase, what did you see of that girl and the guy she hit."

"I saw a hell of an argument, he said something and she picked up the bottle and hit him a good one."

"Do you know what they were arguing about?"

"Not a clue, I was across the room and it was crowded, but I can tell you that she knew the guy."

"She did? That's good. We know the guy's from Manitoba, I wonder what the connection is?"

"I don't know, I've never seen the guy in town, but don't the Griffin's have some sort of business out there?"

"I'll look into that."

Liz looked up, "They've got mining concessions, and they run

some supply companies. I've seen their properties."

"Mining and supply. Do you suppose they have anything to do with the dead guy?"

"No clue Art, too bad you don't have a picture of the guy to show around."

Dave smiled, "You want a picture? No sweat, I'll do you one."

Art slapped his forehead, "I am so stupid, Dave can you do several pictures of the people at the party?"

"No problem."

"We just have to get them to the girl to see if she knows anyone else who was there. She seems to have lost her memory of the night, she says she just remembers hitting the guy and nothing before that."

"Did someone wipe her memory?"

"No idea, how are we going to get the pictures to her."

Ray spoke up, "Not a problem, I'll take Dave's pictures and make them into photographs and put them on her phone. Leave that to me."

Dave was hurt, "I can make them photorealistic, you don't have to convert them Ray."

"Oops, sorry Dave."

Sam Jones was in the office early in the morning. He was reading the paper when Jessica brought Ruth in, Ruth had spent the night at Jessica's place.

"They found a body in the alleyway, it was under some junk, burned to a crisp."

Ruth was shocked, "Burned, who burned him?"

"Who knows, they're saying he was homeless and tried to warm up by lighting off a propane tank."

Jessica shook her head, "You can't do that."

"Well who knows how the cops think, maybe they figure the public will buy that. Ruth where was he when you climbed out?"

"He was on top of the junk, not under it."

"Do you think he was still alive when you left? Maybe he tried to get warm, pulled some things over himself."

"I don't know."

"Do you remember anything else about the bar? Which was it? Maybe who was there?"

"No, hit a guy with a bottle in the Albion, got beat, in the alley. Nothing else."

"Damn, I wish... whose phone is that on the desk?"

Ruth looked at it, "It's mine, it was in my purse, how did it get there?"

Sam shrugged, but Jessica's eyes lit up, "Photos, did you take photos last night, or maybe call someone, we can trace your movements through your call history if we get the pings off the cell towers."

"Er, yeah," said Jones, looking at Jessica.

Ruth picked up the phone and went to the photos, sure enough there were some from the night before. What looked like a selfie was the last one, and it was of Ruth and a man. Ruth almost dropped the phone, "That's him, that's the man I killed!"

"OK now we have a face. Do you recognize anyone else?"

"There's people from around town, look, it's the Albion, I told you I was there."

"OK that looks like the Albion from a long time ago, but yeah, it's the Alb. What's the time stamp on the photos?"

Jessica gently took the phone from Ruth's hand, "They fit, Sam, they're from two nights ago."

"OK I recognize most of the people here, and there's Ingrid, the woman Art Pendry wanted me to follow. These strangers, do you know any of them Ruth?"

"No, I don't remember taking these shots even."

"All right, we have a body and a face for the body, and now we know that your story is correct, Ruth. I'm going to go talk with some of these folks I recognize, see if they know anything else. Meantime, you stay here in the office and stay out of sight, Jessica will stay with you."

"Be careful Sam."

"Always doll, always. Email those shots to my phone will you please."

Sam walked out of the office and was heading across the street on his way to Jim's Lunch Counter where he knew some of the people in the photos hung out. As he was walking across the street, a truck ran the red and Sam jumped out of the way just in time.

Heart pounding, he walked into the lunch counter. Art Pendry was there with Ray Keen. He walked over to their table.

Art looked up, "Mr. Jones, you look like you just had a scare, what happened?"

Sam looked suspiciously at Art, "I just about got run over, no harm done. You guys mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Sure, sit down, you want a coffee?"

"Thanks, yes. Mr Pendry, can you look at this photo please, there's your wife Ingrid at what looks like the Albion at least twenty years ago."

"So it is, I didn't know her then."

"Yeah, but the date stamp says it's two nights ago."

"Strange, well metadata can be changed right?"

"Sure, but I'm on a case and I know these shots were taken two nights ago."

"How can they be, you said yourself they were taken twenty years ago. Photoshop?"

Sam turned to Ray, "You're here in this shot Mr. Keen, and it can't have been twenty years ago, you look just like you do now."

"Don't know what to tell you, Mr. Jones. I wasn't in the Albion twenty years ago, and it's closed now."

"Call me Sam. These photos were on my client's phone and I don't think there was any way they were photoshopped."

"What's your case, Sam?"

"I can't say, client confidentiality."

"All right, fair enough, I'm sorry we couldn't be more help."

Sam figured talking to others in the photos would be just as useless, but... "Listen, can you identify these other people in the photos?"

"Sure, I know most of them, so do you, but that guy there in the selfie is a stranger to me, and so is that guy over by the door who's looking at them."

"He is looking at them, isn't he? All right, thanks. You might want to talk to your wife and ask where she was two nights ago Mr. Pendry."

"I'll do that, thanks, please keep an eye out for her."

Sam tapped his forehead and headed out the door.

Ray shook his head, "Why are we helping him?"

"Because he might come up with something we don't, and he's got the girl. We aren't going to kidnap her and root around in



her head."

"We're not?"

## **Ken and Megan on the Case**

"Look, Vinnie, you haven't been able to beat me up since high school, why are you trying again."

Vinnie was cracking his knuckles, "Nothing personal Sam, a job is a job right?"

"Let's step into this alleyway shall we, and keep this private, the last time, the cops beat me up after you tried."

As they stepped around the corner, Sam kept turning and kicked Vinnie in the knee, slugged him in the side of the head and totally missed the guy with a sap who hit him on the side of the head. As he was passing out, Sam heard, "Lay off the Griffin broad or the next time you're a dead man."

From across the street, Ray shook his head, "Who doesn't check for a second goon? They always come in twos. Art we should maybe keep an eye on this guy, it looks like whatever this is, it's serious."

"I'll call his secretary to come get him."

Sam's eyes opened to see Jessica's impressive chest, he looked up a bit further to see big brown eyes looking concerned. "Sam you have to be more careful, you took a hell of a hit on the side of your head."

"Tough head doll, take more than a sap to bust my skull."

In fact, Jessica had just healed a broken skull and she was worried about brain damage, but she didn't see any yet. She'd check later for swelling. "Well let's get back to the office, I left Ruth there with the doors locked."

As they climbed the stairs, they heard a hell of a crash, it was the unmistakable sound of the office outer door being broken down for the third time that year. Sam pulled an expandable baton from his pocket and ran ahead of Jessica. Sure enough, there was a guy just moving through the door, looking around for something, Ruth probably.

Sam went in after the man and laid a huge hit on his shoulder blade with the baton. The man staggered, turned, swiped at Sam with a blade and ran back out the door.

In the meantime, Jessica was out of the man's way because she was dealing with the man's partner. She spun away from a knife thrust, grabbed his wrist and threw him down the stairs after his partner. The two of them took off out the door.

By the time Sam got back out of the office, Jessica was folding

the switchblade up and dropping it over the railing. "Did you see which way they went?"

"No Sam, have you checked on Ruth?"

"Damn, no," and Sam spun around to do just that.

Jessica shook her head, if she wasn't in love with the big lug, she would quit, she had to keep an eye on him constantly.

Ruth was fine, she had locked herself into the inner office with a baseball bat at the ready. As Sam went in he barely got an arm up in time to catch her swing.

In the meantime, Art had decided that it was time to call in some extra help. Whatever it was that was going on, someone was serious. The guys going after Sam weren't the usual irritated husbands, someone was hiring muscle.

"The only guys in the Albion we don't know are from Manitoba, and the Griffin family has business there, I want to know if there's a connection."

"How about Ken Kobold, he can find out if there's something between them."

"Good thinking Ray, let's go see if he's in."

Ken was leaning back in his chair, his feet up on his desk,  
"What can I do you two for?"

Art began, "There was a murder a couple nights ago in the  
Albion..."

"I told Stan it would be trouble for him and his buddies to mess  
around with the timeline like that. I know about the problem  
gentlemen, what do you want me to do about it?"

"It involves Ruth Griffin and some strangers from Manitoba,  
one of them is a Shaman named Lechmu and the other one is  
the stiff. Is there a connection with the Griffin family business  
out there?"

"I see. Give me a few hours gentlemen, but I know a bit about  
the Griffins, you might want to call Megan in on this."

"Stan asked us to keep her out of it."

"And Stan is one of our more subtle thinkers right? The guy  
who is messing around with time so he can drink in the  
Albion?"

"OK good point, we'll talk with Megan."

"Don't bother, I'll talk with her. You'll be hearing from both of  
us soon, and keep your eyes open boys."

"Ah, I see, OK thanks Ken."

As they were leaving the bar, Ray turned to Art and asked, "Does he seem a little dark today?"

"I don't know about you, but as long as I've known him, he still makes me nervous."

"I wonder what he really does? Beside run the bar."

"You ask him, I like my legs unbroken."

The two friends wandered off to keep an eye on Sam while Ken called a couple of his specialist agents. "Griffin Mining, in Winnipeg, have a look for me."

A moment later, the accounts of that particular company were laid open like a fish on a filleting table. Three hours later, Ken Kobold had his report. Ten minutes after that, Ken called Megan.

"This is your area, Megan. This company deals with a lot of work on native land, but there's no way mining and supply provides that much income. My people figure it must be drugs."

Ken saw a huge white wolf for a moment. He nodded and said, "So I can leave this with you?"

"Thanks, Ken, I owe you one."

As she went out the door, Ken thought that maybe he would sell his holdings in Griffin Enterprises. If he had any that is.

Not long after that, Megan had called in some agents of her own. The Griffin family business was soon under scrutiny of a rather supernatural nature. The problem was, there were blocks, so serious that Megan went out there herself, to see.

What she found was a company that was completely opaque. She would have to go in with a bit more than her usual subtle methods. She tracked the being that was blocking her agents and herself.

Lariat was having a drink in a nice, out of the way dive when 'she' walked in. He'd rarely seen a woman as impressive, and he wasn't interested. Frankly, he liked his women a bit more timid, a bit more submissive perhaps. He looked again, and she was that woman. 'Are you kidding?' he thought, and looked closer at her, but he saw nothing except maybe the woman of his dreams.

She came right over to the bar and sat two stools away, ordered a frilly drink in a high, squeaky voice.

"Can I buy that for you babe?"

"Oh, thank you mister, you sure can. My name's Candy."

"And I bet you're real sweet."

Megan giggled, "Oh my, well maybe." In the meantime, she was stifling a gag reflex. This guy she knew, from a lifetime of bad relationships begun in bad bars.

It wasn't long before they were heading to Lariat's apartment and not long after that Megan had all she needed to break the wards around the company.

## **Megan and Tilly's Kids**

As Megan left Lariat's room, she snapped her fingers and his brain stopped working. He was tied up and gagged by the same equipment he had meant to use on Megan, and she had taken a look at the little trophies he had collected from his previous encounters. She would make sure the police got that information for when they discovered his body. The families deserved to know.

Megan headed for the supply warehouse of Griffin Mining. What she found there was an operation that was confident in its wards, and in the bribes they'd paid. Nothing was hidden. There were containers of various types of drugs that had obviously come over the border to be stored here before being distributed. With a small amount of searching, Megan found the drug she had detected in Lariat, a nasty concoction that was highly addictive to spirit beings.

Looking further, she saw several of those addicted beings working around the place. Megan saw to it that one of them dumped that particular drug down a drain with plenty of water after it. When that worker later realized what he'd done, he headed for the North to sweat out his addiction. He was a dead man if anyone caught him.

Megan let him go, but she wanted the Griffins. She could burn the place to the ground, but contacts and contracts would have it up and running again somewhere else. She needed the people responsible. Thinking about it, she decided that many bodies, even if they had just disappeared, would make a mess. Megan hated messes, so she decided the Humans would have to clean this up.

As she was watching from the bush outside the warehouse, she detected him. Shortly after that, she felt a hand on her shoulder, "Hello Step-mother."

"Hello Okami, and it's Megan you brat, what are you doing here?"

"Ken thought we'd better come along to see that you didn't get into any trouble."

"We?"

"The Twins are here too."

"Ken and Kam junior? Where are they?"



Megan thought of these men as ‘Tilly’s kids’ which was in no way derogatory. They were all whelps of Coyote, by way of being Great Grandkids, and there were more and more of them with each passing decade.

“We’re right here,” “right beside you,” “you can’t see us,” “because we’re armoured.”

They appeared, one of them was Ken and one was Kam but even Megan had trouble telling them apart. Like most people she just called them the Twins. They were like one person anyway, one person and two voices.

“That’s quite the armour boys. Is your sister here?”

“No, Lila is home,” “watching the little ones.”

You had to be careful they didn’t get on either side of you or you’d get a headache.

“Why are you here?”

“We have something for you,” “Something really nice,” “You’ll like it.”

The Twins held up a wrist band and offered it to Megan. She looked at it, it was very plain, with a couple of buttons but that’s it. “It could use a bit of carving and maybe some turquoise. What does it do?”

“Put it on,” “Try it out.”

Megan put it on and it had some nice carvings and, yes, blue stones where the buttons were.

“It’s attuned to your brain.” “What do you think?”

What Megan thought was that a sort of noise in her head had stopped, it was jarring, almost like tinnitus that stopped suddenly. “What was that?”

“You’re very powerful,” “but all those beings out there were trying to get into your head.” “The armour stops them.”

“Well thank you, where did you come up with this idea?”

“Oh, from the smith,” “he’s a genius,” “But Kam senior left his wrist thing around,” “and we reverse engineered it,” “with a few improvements.”

“Such as?”

“Well it’s powered by Coyote,” “so it will never need recharging.” “Amber gave us a brush full of his fur,” “and we used a few hairs in each device,” “so it’s mind controlled.”

“That sort of magic is strictly forbidden boys, by convention a very long time ago.”

“Oh, he doesn’t know,” “and what he doesn’t know,” “can’t hurt us.” “Besides, Great Grandpa likes us.”

Megan thought he must like them because there’s no way he doesn’t know these guys had a brush full of his hair. If nothing else, Amber would have told him. Knowing him, he probably uses the hair to keep track of them and it would amuse him to have them think they’d fooled him.

These kids were powerful, coming through two ‘Mothers of Gods’, Mavis and Tilly, they combined powers that were potentially dangerous. Megan wondered if Coyote had put his own blood into the line just to make sure it didn’t go sideways. There’s no way a being that was only half in the world would fall for Mavis by her powers. Stan, now Stan was another matter, he’d fallen for Tilly just because she was good looking, and she’d pulled a child from him, against his will.

Okami was looking from her to the Twins as if he had something to say. Gods, the boy had contained a volcano with the help of his sister until Coyote got there to eat it. If Stan hadn’t trained him... Megan suppressed a shudder.

“What is it Oki, you’ve got ants in your pants.”

Okami’s face went red, he was grown up now, damnit, not as old as Megan, but still, “They’re coming.”

Sure, of course they were coming, they would have known she was out from under their supposed control when she put the

bracelet on. The Twins were bouncing up and down, “Can we, Megan,” “can we take them?” “We’ll show you what the armour can do,” “please, please.”

“Oh, for... go, have fun.” She and Okami would step in if they needed to, in the meantime the Twins were off the leash. “It’s bulletproof,” “and won’t let anyone else control it,” “or let their brainpower through.” “You can project the armour,” “use it to pierce and spread.” “All sorts of things.”

The beings who were attacking were all similar to Lariat, ordinary looking but mentally strong. You could see they were confused that the group wasn’t responding to their mental commands, but some of them were bright enough to pull guns.

“Oh look,” “isn’t that cute.” The Twins were walking forward and bullets were smashing into some sort of force field in front of them.

One of them made an adjustment and the bullets were bouncing back at the opponents. “Hey, look,” “that’s cool.”

Then Megan could sense some sort of wall going toward the middle of the group, as it passed them, they were thrown to both sides violently. “That’s what we use when the hoist isn’t working,” “the cars just go right up, and then we lock the hoist,” “but one time the lock failed,” “and my armour stopped the car.”

Okami spoke up, “Who are those guys, I’ve never seen them

before.”

“I’ve got their scent, we’ll find out soon enough. Some sort of Witiko I think. Come on boys, time to get back to Guelph and make sure the humans take down the bosses.”

“Aw, can’t we,” “this is so much fun,” “we don’t mind taking them down,” “and the building, we could lift it,” “and drop it.”

“No, that won’t stop the business, they’d just rebuild, we need to cut off the head.”

“We can do that,” “just slip the field through the neck,” “and separate.”

Megan looked hard at the Twins, “Have you ever killed anyone?”

“No,” “Never.”

“Well you’re not going to start today, Okami, you will have a chat with your brothers.”

“Yes Step-mother.”

“Not funny, boy. You and I are going to talk to the Shaman, and you two, get back to the garage and stay out of trouble.”

“Yes Megan,” “yes Nanabozo.”

## **Interview With a Shaman**

What Megan did next thoroughly scared Okami, and he was pretty fearless. She dropped them into the Albion at the very time the party was going on.

“I thought we weren’t supposed to mess with time, Megan?”

“Yes, well shouldn’t and can’t, aren’t the same thing.”

“Oops, sorry... wait, I went right through that guy.”

“Oki, we can’t be here in person, but we can watch and learn.”

“OK now I’m even more freaked out.”

Megan smiled, then pointed to Stan at the bar.

“Are you going to give him hell?”

“No, what’s the point, he won’t change, and he’s actually very careful when he does things like this, the bar is outside time so it won’t affect the timeline. You have to let the children play sometimes.”

Okami looked at Megan who winked at him. She pointed across the room, “There’s the girl and one of those beings we

just beat up.”

“She knows him, she’s yelling at him.”

“Good, you’re thinking as well as seeing.”

“Oh, she’s really mad, she’s just broken his neck.”

"Yes, we're going to let the Humans sort that out, I want the Shaman, ah, by the door."

Megan walked over to the door and put her hand on Lechmu's shoulder. He jumped, but got hold of himself, "Who are you, spirit, and what do you want with me?"

"No spirit, I'm Megan, I suspect you've heard of me?"

"Nanabozo, what can I do for you, mother?"

"What's with the mother all of a sudden? Never mind, Lechmu, what are you doing here in Guelph and what's your connection with the Witiko and the girl Ruth?"

"I'm here following that one with Ruth, he's one of the family retainers, she knows him and I believe she's just found out her family is into drug dealing."

"You're not part of it." It wasn't a question, Megan would know if he was lying if she was holding him, and generally people didn't try to lie to her.

"No, I'm not, but I've seen too many of the people damaged by the drugs, I'm looking to stop it."

"So am I. Tell me, are you about to wipe the girl's memory and flick them to somewhere else?"

"I can't do that, Mother, it is beyond my ability."

"Very well, do you know if there are any more of the Witiko here?"

"Ah, you recognize them, they are far from the real Witiko but they are a group corrupted many years ago, there are still some around. The Griffins have addicted them and made them slaves. Before that they barely survived."

"Do you see any more here?"

"No, just the one with Ruth."

"Is Ruth part of the family drug business?"

"No, not at all, she just killed that slave."

"And now she's gone. Very well, we will talk further, there's nothing more for me to see here."

With that, Megan let go of Lechmu and took Okami's arm, they were back in Ken's office.



"Hello Megan, did you find what you were looking for?"

"I did, but how did your agents get past the magical wards to look at the books?"

"Didn't need to look at the books, just the bank records. I figured you would find what you needed in the warehouse."

"You were right, it's a drug business. The girl is innocent, I suspect she was being set up for a murder charge because she found out about the drugs."

"What are you going to do?"

"Let the Humans nail the Griffins. When they do I'll clean up the spirit beings so they don't get any ideas. By the way, you sent the Twins and Oki, why?"

"Mostly so you didn't get any ideas of destroying the whole operation."

"Ken, you know I'm a lot more tidy than that."

"I also know you've got a temper, Megan."

That earned him a scowl, mostly because it was true.

"Alright, Oki, go on back to what you were doing, and don't tell Stan I'm on to him. He needs to believe he can fool me."

"Yes, Megan."

"Ken, do you know those Twins of yours have been reverse engineering equipment from the Smith? Kam seems to be a bit sloppy about keeping it from them."

"I see that nice bracelet you've got there Megan. They are old enough to be let loose with their abilities, we're keeping a very close watch on them, not to worry. Did they give you an instruction manual with that thing?"

"Not really, just that it's armour."

"Oh it's more than that, they've combined it with the hammers, come on out to a storeroom and I'll show you what it can do. They gave me one too and it's fascinating."

"Did you tell the Smith?"

"Are you kidding? That man would not handle the Twins well at all. He likes to believe he's the genius, and he is of course, but the Twins are something else."

"They're something else all right. All of Tilly's kids are dangerous."

"Maybe so, but with the right training..."

"You're keeping an eye on them?"

"You know I am, as are you. They are getting the training, and Tilly is raising them well. Ray hangs around to help raise them and Coyote watches closely."

"Coyote. Hah, I spend a lot of my time cleaning up his mess."

"Recently? Be honest Megan, since Amber has been with him he's been screwing with reality a lot less."

"Alright, that's true, but then there's that idiot mate of mine, messing with time just to have a beer in a closed bar."

"You going to have a word?"

"Not just yet, he's careful."

"It seems to me that both Ray and Stan have turned into Fathers rather than hell-raisers."

"Amen to that. I also note a little bit of caution in you my friend, keeping an eye on the Twins, training them at a distance."

"I didn't appreciate Tilly giving me a couple of kids at my age but I have to admit, it has been fun."

While Megan and Ken went into the storeroom to explore the bracelets, Okami went upstairs to the lunch counter where he found Ray and Art.

"Ken and Megan have found out that it's a drug operation, and the Griffins are mixed up in it, but not Ruth. There's some mental control Witiko involved, and we beat a lot of them senseless. They're warned, and they'll be coming for Sam Jones and Ruth Griffin, but Megan wants the humans to take the Griffins down."

Art nodded, "She's been busy this morning. I think they are already trying to kill Jones. Any chance you could keep an eye on them in the office?"

"What, as a stray dog or something?"

Art was deadpan.

Okami sighed, "As a stray dog, fine, OK, I'm off then."

Ray and Art looked at each other. Ray laughed, "Do you think he knows he'll be in the line of fire first?"

"Oh he knows. He's a protector."

## **Oki On The Job**

Oki was trotting down the street, big floppy dog with an interesting collar. He turned into Sam's building as someone

went out, before they could stop him he was upstairs and scratching at Sam's office door. Jessica opened the door, took a long hard look at the dog and stepped aside to let him in.

Sam saw the dog and was about to kick him out again when Ruth spotted him. "Oh what a nice dog, is he yours? He can stay with us can't he, I'm ever so bored here and he can be company."

"You're not here on vacation, Ms. Griffin, you're here because you killed someone, remember?"

"Oh yes I remember. Have no fear of that."

'That didn't take long,' Okami thought as he shifted sideways and knocked Ruth off her feet. He leapt up onto Sam's desk, which caused Sam to duck just as the window shattered. Okami used the armour to deflect the bullet a bit to the side, so that it would look like a miss, and then projected the field across the street to the rooftop. Moments later, someone fell from that roof and landed badly on the street.

Okami checked carefully, but that was the only attacker present, so he barked a few times for the look of it and then jumped down off the desk.

"Sam, let me check you over," said Jessica as she was moving toward him.

"I'm fine, woman, I can see where the bullet hit the far wall, he

missed, and the glass didn't hit me."

"Fine, good, dog, stand still while I check you."

Okami created a cut and dropped some fur onto the floor,  
"Only a scratch, you were lucky."

"Ruth?"

"I was behind the desk, good thing that dog was here. It's like he can understand you."

Okami woofed and wagged his tail, let his tongue hang out and did his best to look stupid.

"Well maybe not, but he's a good boy anyway." Ruth ruffled his fur and gave him a hug, which Okami didn't mind at all.

While Jessica phoned the glazier, Sam sat up again, after checking carefully out the window and shifting his chair to the side of the hole. "We need to summarize what we know. Ruth, you were apparently in the Albion drinking and taking photos. You took a selfie of you and the victim, who you killed, but don't know why. You don't recognize him either. It's obvious there's more to this than a bar fight, that's three attempts on my life today, and I was warned away from you."

As he was talking, sirens were heard outside as the police pulled up near the dead man on the sidewalk. One of the police looked at the roof above, then at Sam's window and seemed to

nod to himself. He headed across the street.

Sam, having heard the sirens pulled his head back from the window. “Crap, here comes Dodds, just what I need right now. Ruth, into the other room and take the mutt with you.”

Jessica let Detective Dodds in the barely there door, and he stormed through into Jones’ office. He looked at the broken window, Jones, the bullet embedded into the wall, and lined them up. “Who wants you dead this time, Jones?”

“I swear, I haven’t a clue Don, I really don’t.”

“Bullshit, I’ve got reports that someone was almost run over, a fight in an alleyway, and now this.”

“Don’t forget the goons who broke in... oh shit.”

“Jones! Spill!”

“Look, I really don’t know who’s trying to kill me, but I know someone is. They’re serious, I know that because my office is drafty now with the busted door and window.”

“Who’s the shooter splattered all over the sidewalk?”

“Don I don’t know, and before you suggest it, I didn’t throw him off the roof. He must have slipped as he got up to leave when he missed.”

Just about then, Detective Dodds got a report from one of his men on the roof, “That’s a serious weapon up there, Sam, not your usual hunting rifle owned by a pissed off husband. What are you mixed up in?”

“I swear to you, I don’t know who these guys are that are coming after me.”

“If that’s true, you ought to get out of town for a few days, maybe a year.”

“Gotta make a living Don, gotta make a living.”

Scowling, obviously wanting to search the other room, the Detective left the office with a final bit of advice, “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

As he was heading down the stairs, Sam muttered, “That someone is trying to kill me? Yeah I get it.”

As Ruth came back in, Sam turned to her, “What sort of thing is your family mixed up in, Ruth?”

“What do you mean? They’re into mining.”

“Look, unless one of your boyfriends has a lot of money, and is pissed off at you, I’m going to guess your family has hired some muscle to get rid of me. And before you say anything, don’t forget the two breaking in were after you. Now, who in your family might want to kill you.”



“You’re kidding right? It’s just my folks and me, and they don’t want me dead.”

“I don’t like this, way too little information, and you’re conveniently out of memory, I’ve got half a mind...”

“Sam!”

Sam looked at Jessica who was staring hard at him. “Right, right, OK I’m going to go talk to some people. You guys stay here with the mutt, he’ll probably scare off anybody who wants to get rid of Ruth, right?”

Sam stomped down the stairs and went to Jim’s Lunch Counter in hopes of finding Art and Ray. It was a good bet, they were there, a bit out of breath for some reason, but with coffees.

“Mr. Pendry...”

“Call me Art, and that’s Ray,” Ray nodded.

“Art, did you ask your wife about that party in the Albion?”

“I did, she says she was in her Yoga class that night.”

Sam made a sour face and turned to Ray, “What about you? Did you remember being in the Albion two nights ago?”

“Can’t have been, it’s been closed for a long time. Listen, sit

down and have a coffee, you look like you could use one.”

“You know it. Say, do you guys know the Griffin family?”

“Rich, live up on Grange Hill? Sure I know them.”

“Are they legit?”

“I’m a bit hurt that you would think we would know that.”

“Are they legit?”

“Well, you hear rumours, you know? They’ve got small mining concessions out in Manitoba, but some say they have a little under the table side business going on. That’s where their real money comes from.”

“Rumours. Who would know for sure?”

“Maybe that missing daughter of theirs, can’t see how she couldn’t know.”

“Anyone else?”

“Look, I don’t know anybody who’s dealing in this town, but I know there are some. Have you asked the cops?”

“Aw shit.”

## **The Stake-out**

“When in doubt, go on stake-out.” I’m not going to talk to Dodds just yet. Jessica, you stay here and see what you can dig up on the Griffins, and Ruth, you come along, maybe you’ll remember something. It would be nice if you remembered something.”

Ruth gave Sam a sour look and gathered up her purse, Jessica handed her coat to Ruth and they went out to start up Sam’s ten year old Mazda.

“I thought you detectives earned more money than that.”

“It’s expensive repairing the office every other week, and besides, who’d look twice at this wreck?”

“Just what do you expect to find at my folks’ place?”

“Nothing, something, I don’t know, a stake-out is a good place to sit quiet and think. All my lines of investigation seem to lead back to your family, when they don’t lead to fairies and ghosts that is. God I hate this case.”

“And me too Sam?”

“Don’t start. I’ve been handled by operators a lot more experienced than you. Every cheating wife figures she can get

me off the case by getting me off.”

“Jezuz, I was just being cute, making a joke you know, I wasn’t trying anything.”

“Seriously, stop.”

Ruth pouted a bit but then started looking around the car, it was filthy, fast food bags crumpled everywhere, dust, spilled coffee, and what looked a lot like blood on some papers in the back seat.

“Is that...?”

“Yeah, it’s my blood, some guy took a poke at me through the window and connected. The wife had me following him, but he wasn’t cheating, he was meeting the boys for beer, just like he said he was. The wife didn’t believe me or him and left anyway. I figure she was just looking for an excuse.”

“So he punched you for telling her the truth?”

“It’s a living.”

Ruth looked around the car, “Apparently not.”

“Oh ha ha, where’s your folks’ place.”

“That big white one with the green trim and the lawn jockey.”

“Tasteful.”

“You wonder why I don’t live here any more?”

Parking down the street, Sam settled back with a week old newspaper handy for when someone walked by. Ruth was bored in about ten minutes. She started to clean up the car when she noticed a Pez dispenser. “Hey, my folks’ had a real collection of these.”

“You can have one if you want, a little hit of sugar helps keep you awake.”

“I hate these things, I tried one when I was a kid and my mother whipped me good. Said they were collectibles and I wasn’t to touch them. Tasted like shit anyway.”

Sam grunted and held out his hand, bent back the dragon head and took a dusty square of sugar, popped it into his mouth and promptly spit it out. “Might be a bit old, that one.”

Megan was in the lunch counter listening in with Art and Ray. “Lariat had a Pez dispenser on his dressing table. I wish I’d grabbed it, I wondered at the time why a guy like that would have a Pez... let me think... yes, in the warehouse there was a press that could have made the pellets. I bet that’s how they distribute the drugs.”

Ray nodded, “You want me to go in and see if there’s any in the house now?”

“Go, be careful not to be seen and come right back.”

Ray was back in no time at all, “Can’t get in, they’ve got the place warded.”

“Shit, more of those Witiko, of course they’d have some here. Well never mind, the image is in Sam’s head, he’ll figure it out.”

Art and Ray looked at each other. ‘Maybe?’

Ruth was restless, and had a big pile of garbage collected up. “I’m going to go find a garbage can.”

“Stay in the...”

She was out and walking down the street, and Sam made a sour face. The next thing he knew, the guy she had killed was heading down the street after her.

‘Damnit’, thought Sam as he got quietly out of the car. He followed along behind the guy, hand on the expandable baton in his pocket. It was illegal but Dodds never commented on it, one of those weapons that the cops could overlook if they wanted to.

Ruth had found a garbage can by the road that hadn't been taken back to a house yet, and dropped her bundle in, then turned. Turned to see the man she had killed, she screamed.

The man reached for her and Sam tapped him on the noggin. He went down and Sam shushed Ruth.

“He’s the man I killed!”

Sam shook his head, “Can’t be.”

Ruth looked at him.

“This guy is alive. You know him?”

Ruth shook her head.

“Interesting, he came from your house without a coat, like he lived there, but you don’t know him.”

“I haven’t lived here for years, we used to have a butler and a maid, but they were let go after I left.”

Sam looked around the neighbourhood and then bent to go through the guy’s pockets. Just as he found a switchblade in his back pocket he heard the sirens. “Shit. OK Ruth, here’s the keys, back to the car and drive it to the office, tell Jess I’m at the station again.”

Ruth was long gone when Detective Dodds showed up beside Sam. “Business that poor, Sam, you gotta mug folks.”

“He went after a client, I slugged him.”

“You planting evidence too?”

“I took that out of his back pocket, Don. You know I don’t do things like that.”

“I don’t know anything of the sort. Alright take this man down to the station, and call an ambulance to take this guy to the hospital. Try not to drop Mr. Jones on his head as you take him downtown.”

Ray dropped out of the lunch counter and was back in a few minutes with a couple of Pez dispensers. “The wards went down so I jumped. Here you are Megan.”

She looked at them closely and nodded, “Don’t eat this, guys, it’s designed for spirit beings, a pretty powerful inhibitor of will power, and highly addictive. Pretty much a zombie drug if my guess is correct. I hoped I had got rid of it all at the warehouse out west, but of course there would be lots scattered around. Did you take enough to be noticed, Ray?”

“No, there’s dozens of them in the house, I took a couple that were tipped over behind lots of others.”



“Good, then they won’t know anyone’s been in the house. Ah, the wards are back up.”

“So they are.”

Ruth had driven back to the office and was greeted by the dog and Jessica as she entered. “Mr. Jones has been taken downtown by the police.”

“Who took him?”

“I’m not sure, Mr. Jones told me to scam before the cops got there.”

Jessica called the station, she had it on speed dial. When she got off she said, “He’ll be fine, he’s with Detective Dodds, Don and he go back a long way. Sam will be back in an hour or so after they sweat him a while.”

“What do we do now?”

Jessica smiled, that was Sam’s favourite question. “Now we sit tight.”

“Do you think we could go to my place and get some clothes, these are starting to stink.”

“And what will we find at your place?”

“Oh.”

“You have any cash on you?”

“Some.”

“Give it to me, stay here with Shaggy, and I’ll go buy you something.” Jessica looked Ruth up and down, nodded and then headed out the door. There was a shop not far away and Ruth would wear what she picked out for her. Jessica figured it was time Ruth became a lot less fashion forward.

When she came back, Ruth looked like she was about to argue, but Jessica simply said, “Disguise.” Ruth nodded and changed.

“OK Sam, the guy you clocked woke up in the ambulance and then vanished.”

“You mean he somehow got out?”

“No, the attendants said he vanished, as in disappeared, as in poof, by magic. Just what the hell are you playing at here, Sam?”

“I don’t know, I swear Don, I don’t know. Listen, have you ever had any indication that the Griffin family is into dealing”

“Dealing what, Metals? That’s what they do.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I do. Why are you interested, do you have something to do with Ruth Griffin’s disappearance?”

“No.”

Dodds looked hard at Sam, “Do you have any information relevant to Ruth Griffin’s disappearance?”

“Client privilege.”

“Jesus, Sam, be careful, those are not nice people. You will come to me with what you find won’t you.”

“You know I will, Don, as soon as I find anything that makes sense.”

“It’s this town, I swear. You bring me anything, even if it doesn’t make sense, you hear me?”

“I hear ya.”

“Get out of my building.”

## **Lechmu Interviewed Again**

Megan was in Ken's office. "I want it all rolled up, every last little mule. Can you find them all Ken?"

"You want me to collect them?"

"I'll take care of it, you shouldn't get involved in that shit. You just find them for me, please."

"I've done that sort of work before, but I appreciate it. I can find them for you, Megan. They'll be pretty well spread out. If they find you're hunting them, they'll scatter."

"I've got people, Ken, don't worry about them finding out and running."

Ken wondered once again just how connected Megan was. He had a pretty good network of agents, but he'd never got a handle on her operation. Well, as long as she was working close enough to his interests, Ken wasn't going to look too hard. He almost felt sorry for the dealers, Megan and Stan weren't the most forgiving of beings. Still, "These addicted beings, will you try to find a cure for them?"

"We'll see when we get them rounded up. I want them out of it but I want whoever created them a lot more. I'm hoping the humans can take down the Griffins but I don't think those two are smart enough to create these Witiko. I want that guy."

"You have samples of the drug, let me have some, I've got some pretty good chemists who might develop a counteractant."

"I'd appreciate it if you did, thanks Ken, I don't like putting anyone down if I don't have to."

"Glad we're on the same side, Megan, you're a pretty intense being."

"Yeah, I've been told that before."

Art and Ray were looking for Lechmu, and they weren't having much success. The guy seemed to disappear. They figured he was able to damp down their search somehow, which was suspiciously like the wards on the Griffin house.

They had gone to the lunch counter for coffee and there he was, three coffees on a table as if he was waiting for them.

"I've been waiting for you. You wanted to talk to me?"

"How did... never mind, yes, we wanted to check what you saw in the bar again. And get a bit more background."

"And for me? What do I get?"

"We know the Griffins are running a drugs operation through their Manitoba warehouses, Megan got rid of some zombie drug there, but we've found more in their house. Megan is looking for the network."

Lechmu nodded, "All right, the beings they are using are Witiko, or rather some sort of humans that have been turned into Witiko. I came to Guelph to look at the Griffins and I thank you for confirming what I figured was happening. If Megan is looking into the network, will she kill them all?"

"That's hard to say, she and Stan aren't consistent, or maybe we can't see their reasoning all the time. They have a larger goal in mind, a larger viewpoint that sometimes goes beyond what we'd call justice."

"That's Nanabozo, certainly. Their viewpoint is beyond ours. Well some of those Witiko are from the people. I'd like to get them back, as many as I can."

"Are they all from the people?"

"No, some are Europeans, some are spirit beings. All of them are greedy and somewhat stupid to have been addicted. Still, I won't cry if they are killed, the other drugs they're distributing are destroying whole villages back home."

Ray spoke up, "These Witiko, are they the same as the Wendigo? My daughter ran into a Wendigo and destroyed it."

Lechmu seemed shaken, "She's a Shaman?"

"She became one later, but she had help."

"She must be a powerful being. No the Wendigo is a spirit that possesses humans. The Witiko is more a mental illness, but a very powerful one, the victims tend to end up looking the same, and I suspect this drug they're addicted to is promoting this psychosis. The other thing is, this drug seems to have substituted for the cannibalism that they usually fantasize."

"The drugs are distributed in Pez dispensers."

Lechmu stared, and then laughed, "Pez, instead of human flesh, there's a very warped mind somewhere in this."

"Is there anything else you can tell us?"

"The girl is not involved, that's certain. When she found out from her parent's former cook that he was addicted and helping with a drugs gang run by her parents, she killed him."

"The memory loss and the move to the alleyway from a bar outside time?"

"There's no way a Witiko could do that, but we were just talking about some other being behind the scenes weren't we?"

"Shit. I thought we had this."

"Well, if Megan is on it, and you two as well, I'm tempted to go home."

"We'd rather you stuck around, we may need your help again."

"Very well, I'll be around."

Lechmu got up and went through the door, after a moment or two Art asked, "Do you trust him?"

Ray shook his head and put a finger to his lips.

Sam came into the office in a thoughtful frame of mind. Jessica looked closely for any bleeding, limping or slurred speech, but found nothing.

"Ruth, I may have to bring Dodds into this, but I haven't told him I'm working for you yet."

"Well, I'd rather not be charged with murder, but since I did it..."

"It may have gone a bit beyond that. Look, we've been tackling this head on, maybe we need to sneak up behind."

"What?"

"Why did you leave home?"



"My parents aren't nice people, you saw the lawn jockey, they're racist. I left when I found out they were using natives in the processing plants. Not that they were hiring them, but that they were underpaying them, they got nailed for labour abuse, safety abuse and pollution. I left then."

"So you think your folks could be running a drugs operation?"

"I have no doubt they could be. They were users when I was there, like I said, they were not nice people."

"But you had no idea they were dealing when you left home?"

"How do you tell the difference between using and dealing? No I didn't know, and I didn't care, I just wanted out of that shithole."

Jessica said, in a gentle voice, "Abuse?"

"Sure, my mother loved her whips and restraints, and as for my loving father..."

Sam nodded, that explained why she was a party girl, but, "Where does your money come from, Ruth?"

"Not from them, that's for sure, I've got a trust fund from my Grandfather, I got it when I was eighteen, it's large enough that I don't have to work."

"Your parents inherited money?"

"You don't think they were smart enough to build up a business on their own do you? No they inherited and then got even more greedy I guess, started dealing drugs."

## **Four Goons**

"So let's assume your parents are drug users and dealers, and you left home because they weren't nice people. How does that get us any further toward finding out why you would kill someone, and in a bar that's been closed for years? And how you got thrown into an alleyway behind a locked fence with a dead body? Not to mention how you lost your memory of all that, except breaking his neck."

Ruth was about to speak, but Jessica put a hand on her arm, Sam was just going over what he knew once more.

"And for that matter, how come no body and then a burned up body that ought not be burned up? I can't get a handle on this, there's nobody to watch, damnit, I'm going to take the dog for a walk and think about this. You girls stay here, and... Ruth what are you wearing? Jeans and a t-shirt don't seem to be your style, they make you look about eighteen."

"Disguise. And I'm twenty-eight, thank you very much."

“Hmnh, come on Spot, let’s go for a walk.”

Jessica shook her head, the dog was pure black, then she remembered that Sam’s childhood dog was named Spot. As they went out the newly repaired door (the super, going on past experience, had brought in several doors to fit Sam’s office), Jessica turned to Ruth, “Let’s get out of here and have lunch.”

“Won’t I be at risk?”

“Sunglasses and a wig with a big hat. Relax, we’ll go out the back and be gone before anyone watching the place can tell we’re not here. Besides, anyone watching the place will be following Sam.”

Not everyone. As they walked out the back door, two men confronted the women. Jessica stepped in front of Ruth and asked them what they wanted.

“The girl, step aside and you don’t need to get hurt.”

“You’re joking, right? Walk away, the both of you, or do you have more men around.”

“Don’t need more than us to take the girl, step aside.”

Jessica, having the information she needed, didn’t waste any more time talking. She took a step forward and swung her right shin into the man’s leg, collapsing him as she blew out his

knee. While he was going down, she hit him on the side of the head with a hammer fist to make sure he was down. That she had her lipstick in her fist only made him pass out even faster.

The other man had time to get his knife out and he decided she was dangerous so he wasn't attacking right away. Jessica cursed under her breath, figuring she was going to get cut on this one. The man slashed his knife through the air a couple of times to intimidate her and Jessica smiled. She knew his pattern now.

The man stepped in to cut her and she stepped in too, the path of the knife was outside her now, she brought up her arm to block his swing and at the same time caught him under the chin with her other hand. Her fingernails went straight into his eyes, blinding him. She then reached across, took his knife wrist and using wrist and elbow, swung it over her head. She was outside him now and tucked his elbow into her armpit as she stepped back, dislocating his elbow. The knife fell to the ground as he screamed.

'Too loud' she thought and drove her knee into his ribs, cracking a couple and making it too painful for him to yell. With that she kicked him in the side of the head with her heel and he was out as well.

Jessica turned to look at Ruth, who hadn't moved. She was fine, looked a bit shocked. Jessica picked up her lipstick and the knife, then took out her phone and called Don Dodds.

“You OK Ruth?”

“You... those men... you.”

“Me, yes, I took a couple of lessons when I started working for Sam, figured he needed some backup.”

“But...”

“OK more than a couple of lessons, no big deal, are you hurt?”

“Uh, no, not at all.”

“Good, maybe we order some takeout yes? Let’s go back inside while the good Detective gets here.”

Sam Jones and the dog were about a block and a half away when the dog’s head came up on alert, he was half turned back toward the office when he stopped, shook his head and carried on the way they were going.

“Something boy?”

The dog just kept padding on, Okami thought ‘Boy? Oh never mind, I’m going to be busy in another block or two.’

Sure enough, after lifting his leg a couple of times on fire hydrants, Okami growled and turned toward a side street.

‘Damn, should have looked then growled, it’s such a pain trying to be hidden,’ he thought as he lunged.

The first goon didn’t expect any trouble, he just had to knife this guy and be gone before anyone noticed. He got the knife part way up from where he’d hidden it by his leg and that dog had hold of his wrist. The wrist was crushed, just like that, the knife dropped and hit the ground with a clatter. As if that was the signal, the pain hit the man’s brain.

As he was deciding to scream, the dog flew into his partner, knocking him off his feet. This guy knew how to fall and took it on his left side and shoulder. He drew a gun from his belt with his right hand as the dog stood on his chest and growled into his face.

‘The hell with you, mutt,’ the man thought as he brought the gun up to shoot the dog in its chest several times. Each and every slug bounced off that chest somehow and right into the gunman’s guts. He was unconscious half a second later.

In the meantime the first man had begun to scream when Sam got to him and slugged him unconscious too. Glancing down at the two men to make sure they were out, Sam spun in a circle to see if anyone else was coming. There was nobody, and as he looked down again, the dog was looking up at him. “Good dog, you shall have a treat today.”

Sam thought that maybe the dog rolled his eyes and started walking toward the office.

“Office, yes we’d better go see that everything is OK back there.”

The dog did roll his eyes.

## **The Cops Are In**

Back at the office, Sam encountered Detective Dodds sitting in his chair behind his desk, eating a sandwich and chatting with the women.

“Don, glad you’re here, there are a couple of guys down, a couple of blocks from here.”

“They’re just out the back door, Sam.”

“What, no, not unless someone moved them, they’re on Carden Street, just outside the Baker’s.”

“They’re behind this building, Jessica put them both down.”

Sam looked from the Detective to Jessica and back again.

“There’s two more men down on Carden Street.”

“Why the hell didn’t you say so in the first place, Sam!”

Both Jessica and the dog rolled their eyes.

Dodds was on the phone to get another car over to Carden Street and with a glance at Sam, told them to get an ambulance there too.

In the meantime, Jessica was checking over Sam and then the dog. No harm done to either so she returned to eating her sandwich.

"I don't suppose there's one for me? Or is Don eating mine?" said Sam.

Jessica handed him a sandwich and another, minus bread, went down on the floor for the dog.

When they'd finished lunch, Dodds scowled at Sam, "Spill it, Sam, what the hell is happening, and why is the kidnapped Ruth Griffin sitting here having a sandwich with me."

"She hired me, Don, to uh, bodyguard her. There's something going on with her parents, someone is trying to kill her, or me, or the dog, I don't know. Damn it, I don't know what's going on."

Dodds looked down at Okami who was enjoying his treat, "The dog? You don't have a dog."

"Never mind that. Look I asked you about the Griffins, give me



something Don, anything, I can't seem to get a handle on this case. All I can tell so far is that these goons who keep attacking us seem to look alike."

"They do, don't they. Do you suppose they're all related?"

"What, like some sort of Hillbilly assassin ring?"

"Ruth, is what he's saying accurate?"

"Yes sir, I came to him for help and we've been attacked ever since."

"There's a charred body in the morgue, you wouldn't know anything about that would you?"

Ruth put on the big eyes.

"Yeah, I figured so. Look, Sam, we know the Griffins are dealing, but we have nothing at all on them. They seem to be exactly what they seem to be, rich oiks with an inherited business, but there's little doubt that someone in their company is bringing in drugs from out West and selling them here."

"Bank accounts?"

"Not enough to get at them, Sam. Our hands are tied."

Sam nodded, "But mine aren't eh? Thanks a lot Don."

"Listen, either of you recognize the guys who attacked you?"

Jessica shook her head, Sam said, "Vinnie Torrone, but that's it, his buddy I never saw before, and the two who jumped me have to be from out of town."

"The guy who shot at you isn't from here either. And the guys who broke your door down?"

"No clue, somebody is bringing in a lot of out of town talent."

"And you three have no idea who?"

"Gotta be Ruth's parents. I'll see if I can get anything on their business out of the banks."

"Be careful Sam, someone wants you dead and that would be a damned shame, what with you owing me so much money."

Detective Dodds said his goodbyes and headed out to clean up the mess on the streets.

"Jessica, you want to check with our contacts in the banks? See what you can dig up on the Griffins." Sam glanced out the window and saw Ingrid walking by. "I need to get my mind off this case for a while, Ruth you stay here, I'm going out to tail someone."

"Be careful Sam, take Scruffy with you."

Ingrid was just turning the corner when Sam hit the street. He stepped quickly to catch up and saw her walking toward Jim's Lunch Counter. Sam loitered outside the windows while Ingrid went in and sat down at a table with a man Sam recognized from the photos of the Albion. Sam took out his phone to take a photo but somehow all he got was a giant flare of light from the window. Checking the angle of the sun, he moved a bit to the side but got the same flare from his new location.

Sam figured he'd have to go inside to get the shot. As he went through the door, Ray called out to him. Sam went over to sit down and Mike brought him a coffee. While Mike was setting the coffee down, Sam took a shot of Ingrid at the other table. Mike gave a dog treat to Okami and got a dirty look in return.

"How's it going, Sam? Any leads on that Griffin girl?"

"Hi Ray, I might as well tell you, she's with me, she hired me as a bodyguard."

"I see, so you're on the case right now?"

"Actually no, your friend Art asked me to keep an eye out for his wife. You wouldn't know who that fellow is would you?"

"Sure, that's Stan, been around forever. Good friend of Art's."

"Oh, he was in that photo I showed you of the Albion."

"The one that can't exist?"

"Yeah, that one. He was standing by the bar."

"You got me Sam, I still can't explain that photo."

The sound of crunching came from under the table. Sam bent over absent mindedly and ruffled the fur on Okami's head.

"I'm just wondering if Stan or Ingrid have something to do with the guys who are trying to kill Ruth."

"And you too, I hear."

"Oh, that's just because I'm on the case, I'm sure it ain't personal."

"Well that must be a comfort."

Sam looked sharply at Ray, "Not really. Listen, you seem to be up on the weirdness in this town, any idea why the out of town goons going after Ruth all look alike?"

"Hillbilly assassination bureau?"

That earned Ray another sharp look. Ray grinned and said, "I heard that some of these new drugs can make the users look sort of the same."

"Really? All right I'll look into that, thanks Ray. There anything more than friends going on over there?"

"Ingrid and Stan? No, not that I know."

"All right, thanks again."

As they went out the door, the dog winked at Ray. Sam called Don Dodds and suggested they look for drugs in the system of the goons they picked up.

"Can't do that, Sam, they're gone."

"What?"

"Gone, three of them disappeared from the ambulance after the uniforms loaded them up, and the fourth disappeared from the cells."

"You're kidding?"

## **Ray and Stan Sniff Around**

Ray had been listening in on the phone call. He went over to Ingrid's table and sat down. "Somebody has been flicking bodies and people all over the place. There's a pile of those Witiko types disappeared from the ambulance and the police cells. There's some being with a lot of power involved in this. Stan what's Megan think?"

"She wants the whole mess cleaned up, she's got Ken identifying all the dealers and she intends to make sure they aren't dealing any more once Sam nails the Griffins."

"That leaves somebody in the wind. Any ideas on how to flush the power out of this mess?"

"He's probably the mastermind behind this, we find him we cut off the head, the rest will fall. Ingrid, you got any idea what we need to do to find this guy?"

"Oh finally, something more to do than be the unfaithful dame."

"Ingrid you've never spent a faithful day in your life."

"Tuesday, August seventeenth, nineteen sixty three."

The other two stared at her.

"Don't you think this guy will show up once we start to take his operation down?"

"Let's hope so, but up to now he's been a ghost. We know he's there but we haven't seen a sign of him."

"What about finding out where the disappeared goon went after he left the police cells?"

Ray nodded, "Damn, Stan we need to go and sniff around."

"In the meantime, I'll keep running around town with strange men so Sam sticks to me.

Ray and Stan looked at her.

"What, Art told me to play the part."

"Method actor?"

Ingrid suddenly had her full Goddess armour and her sword hovering in the air beside her, waiting for her to grab it. As soon as it appeared, it was gone.

"OK, OK, we're out of here."

And they were, inside the police cells. Stan changed to wolf and Ray to fox form and they both sniffed around.

"I've got the scent, you?"

"Not very nice, but yes, you can catch the drugs underneath the sweat," said Ray.

"We'll split up and circle the station until we catch a sniff of him."

"I wonder just how far this being can flick them?"

"Half a block that we know of, we'll find out."

With that, the two started running in circles.

Ingrid chuckled as she walked down to visit with Ken, "How are you coming with the hunt?"

"Lots of Witiko goons, but not much else, not even middle management types. This seems to be a one-layer organization."

"Damn, that means you have to find them one at a time, that could take a while."

"We're used to it, Kobolds can't organize worth beans. we've got the manpower to track them all down."

"Ken, you're a Kobold and you've got an organization."

"Exception to the rule, Ingrid."

"You need any help?"

"No, I've got it, I'm passing things on to Megan and she's holding back on the clean-up until the humans can get it together."

"Megan? Holding back?"



"She can be patient when she needs to be, and she's got her network scouring the countryside for the regular drug dealers, the humans. They are being prevented from dealing for the moment. Lots of accidental broken arms and sickness to keep them out of trouble until Megan wants them."

"Scary woman."

"She sure is. Listen, Ingrid, I had alarms go off all over the place a few minutes ago, was that you?"

"Sorry, I was threatening Stan and Ray, I manifested my armour and sword."

"Well it's good to know my systems can detect that, but the place was damned near flooded with gas."

"Oops. Wouldn't work on me but the others would be down."

"Can I borrow you for a few minutes so I can calibrate the systems."

"Sure, but you may want to keep the ability to detect magical swords, there's hundreds of them out there."

"Yeah, that's why I want to filter yours out of the system."

"I'm all yours."

Ken didn't comment.

"Here Stan."

Stan popped into the alleyway with Ray, "All of them?"

"Certainly more than four, it looks like our guy flicks them all here."

"I wonder if we should just wait and grab them as they appear."

"Better not, we don't want them to know there's power coming after them, but Ken can set up something to track them after they show up here."

"Good idea, I'll talk to him, in the meantime do you want to wait here just in case?"

Ray was now one of the street people, he settled down out of the wind behind a dumpster, "You got some change for a coffee?"

"You'd just spend it on booze. I'll let you know when Ken has his trackers all set up, I'll help him so there's not so much traffic here."

Stan popped back to the bar where he found Ken and Ingrid in the storeroom playing with Ingrid's sword. She was bringing it into being and Ken was fiddling with his equipment. Stan told

Ken what he and Ray had found and Ken grabbed a few items off a shelf. Stan flicked them into the alleyway and that was that.

Ingrid winked at Ken as Stan went out the door, "He's going to leave Ray there isn't he?"

"Tricksters, they can't help it, you know?"

"Well let's get your equipment tuned and I'll go get Ray."

"Don't give him any money, he'll just spend it on booze... wait what am I saying, I run a bar."

Ingrid laughed and brought her sword into existence again.

Okami was out for a walk with Ruth. She had volunteered to take him for a bathroom break, and so he was cocking his leg and pretending to water the various poles and garbage cans in the area behind the office building. He had, in fact, recently gone into the bathroom and changed to a man to use the facilities, but he was keeping up appearances.

As they walked, Ruth seemed to be muttering to herself, as if she was trying to remember something. Well, Okami figured that was normal enough, she'd had her memory wiped.

What Okami really wondered about was Jessica. She seemed

all too interested in watching Okami. She wasn't friendly, didn't pet him like she would if she liked dogs, she just gave him a watchful look. Okami knew she was a healer, but he wondered if she knew that. While Jessica watched him, he would watch her. She seemed to genuinely care for Sam, but anyone who could flick Ruth from the Albion outside time, and wipe her memory, could surely keep herself hidden from Okami, good as his nose was.

## **A Visit to the Cottage**

When Ruth got back to the office with Okami, she nodded to Jessica and walked into Sam's office. "I really need to go to my apartment to get my meds, Sam."

"No, too risky, there will be someone there for sure."

"Well what about the cottage, I've got meds there, surely nobody knows about that."

"How bad do you need them, there's cops all around the office by now, we're pretty safe here, we go out and we're exposed."

"Well, it's not life threatening, but I'm going to get uncomfortable without my inhalers."

"How far away is this cottage?"

"It's about half an hour drive south of here, the family has a horse farm."

"Somehow I'm not surprised. Alright we'll go, we'll take the dog with us, he seems to be good luck."

They went out the back and got into the car, the dog in the back. As they pulled out of the lot, another sniper on the roof opposite collapsed unconscious before he could fire. The dog snorted in the back seat.

They drove out of town and soon arrived at the 'cottage' which was a thirty room farmhouse with horse stables and barns. They drove the hundred meters up the lane and parked a long way from the front door.

"Stay in the car, Spot and I will go in and get your meds, where are they?"

"Upstairs to the right, third door on your left overlooking the pond."

"Of course it is. Right, stay here, I'm serious, this place isn't a secret, five minutes on the net will find it. Are there people here taking care of the horses?"

"OK Sam, I'll be good. There should be nobody here, none of the help lives in."

Sam and Okami got out and looked around the place carefully, but nothing was out of place. No other cars, no sign of anyone on the grounds.

Using the key Ruth gave him, Sam opened the door and disarmed the security system. Being the suspicious type, Sam had a look around the first floor. Nothing.

The two went up the stairs to the second floor and along the hall. Half way to Ruth's room, Okami felt it. He grew in size and flattened Sam onto the hallway, as he did so he extended the armour to cover the two of them in a bubble.

The explosion demolished the cottage, Okami and Sam ended up on the first floor, rubble falling all around them. Sam had the wind knocked out of him and he passed out for a moment, but soon woke up. By the time he did, Okami was normal sized again and had shaken the debris off of the two of them. When he was sure Sam was awake and unharmed, he got off of him and shook the dust off of his coat.

Sam looked at the dog for a long time, somehow neither of them were hurt, that was nothing short of a miracle.

Catching up on the situation he snapped his attention onto the car, but it was untouched, and Ruth was just jumping out.

As she ran to them she looked relieved, "Are you OK? Oh my God, how did you survive that? What was it? The whole place

blew up, who would do that? How did they know we were here?"

Sam let her run on for a while and then took her by the arm and steered her back to the car. Okami got in the back and Sam turned the car around.

"Somebody wants you dead princess, let's get back to the office. Jessica can go to the pharmacy and get you some meds."

As they drove down the lane, three Witiko stepped out of the woods, Okami just caught a brief sense of them before they were hidden from him again. He would be curious to know where Jessica was right now.

When Sam let Ruth out at the back door to the office, he nodded to the police on the corner and walked downtown where he found Vinnie Torrone in his usual bar.

Sitting down beside him, Sam asked for a beer and as the bartender turned away to pull one, Sam stuck a switchblade into Vinnie's side. "Listen old pal, who hired you this time to beat me up? Someone just dropped a house on me and I'm getting tired of it, give me a name."

Vinnie turned and looked like he was about to give Sam some lip, until he saw his face. "Jeeze Sam, we go back a long way, you don't think I would try to kill you do you?"

"A name, Vinnie, or I shove this knife into your liver and if I

do, all that booze will run out."

"I don't know, Sam, I really don't. The job came in by email and a money transfer, I don't know who it was, I figured it was one of your cheating husbands."

"Who hired an outsider to help you?"

"I dunno, Sam, I really don't, I didn't know he was there."

"Jesus, Vinnie, give me your phone."

As Sam put the phone in his pocket, he got sucker punched in his kidney. He came off the stool and landed an uppercut on the guy who had punched him. Vinnie had a lot of friends, there were three of them coming at Sam. Sam grinned, now here was a situation he could figure out. He grabbed a beer bottle and slammed it into the side of the second guy's head, and then he shoved Vinnie off his stool into the third friend.

Now Sam was clear and he booted Vinnie in the testicles, doubling him over into Sam's knee. The third guy had picked himself up just in time to run into Sam's fist. Unfortunately the first guy had recovered from the uppercut and rabbit punched Sam, who stumbled across the floor, fortunately toward the front door. As he got near the door, one of the other patrons decided four against one was not fair, and he took out the two guys who were still moving with two punches.

"Much obliged," said Sam.



"Better get on out while we can," said Ray Keen as he grabbed Sam's arm and took him out the door.

"Good thing you were there, Ray. They'd have beaten a tattoo on my head."

Ray wondered if the guy had come forward in time from the Albion, he seemed to be a leftover from the sixties. "Yeah, good thing, come on let's get you to your office."

"It's just down the street here."

"Right, right," Ray left Sam at the front door of his office, and turned around while Sam stumbled up the stairs.

Jessica took one look and poured Sam a drink, then did her usual healing thing. Okami took note while she did, thinking 'The guy should be dead, does he think he's invulnerable? Probably does.'

## **Not Romeo and Juliet**

Stan and Okami were sitting in Jim's Lunch Counter. Okami the dog had 'wandered away' from the detective's office. Stan was telling a story about a kid he'd met in Port Stanley a couple of decades before. "The kid had a lot to say, and I

wonder if it means something to you.”

Stan began in the kid’s voice, "You know how you’ll meet someone and they just hit you right in the heart? Well she didn't, not really. This is not Romeo and Juliet, just to make that clear. She was much too high class for me. I mean, she was from money, now that's not usually a problem for me, but she was just too far out of my league.

"She liked changing her style a lot, you know? She'd come down a set of stairs with a delicate Chinese face, and then she'd go back up with a fox face. Later you'd see her as some sort of Saxon Goddess. Now the ordinary people never saw these changes, Humans never do, do they? But I saw them."

I nodded, not knowing where the kid was going with this. I'd met him on the beach and was walking beside him to the restaurant. I told him I'd buy him lunch and I guess he figured I ought to get something in return. Well I like stories as much as the next guy. No, I like them more than the next guy.

We got seated and had a couple of coffees in front of us, the orders were in.

"Thanks for the meal, dude, I appreciate it, I'm between jobs and it's been a while since I've eaten anything but junk food. I beg these days, and I begged a couple dollars off of this girl. She was kind, at least, better than most of her class that's for

sure. They come here and lord it over the locals, figure the whole town is here to serve them. Well we're not. We're just a regular town that happens to have a beach, and OK I have to admit, we like the tourist money, but you know, half the people who run these tourist shops are from somewhere else, you know? They come here in the summer and open up their quaint little shops and then bugger off during the winter. Well at least they leave the place to us locals during the winter. A bit longer, even, I mean tourist season on a beach is July and August when the kids are out of school.

"It used to be nice, when the kids would come to the cottage with Mom, and Dad would only visit on the weekends. During the week that is, it was nice. The Moms were always cool, and they had no other concerns than making sure the kids didn't drown. When the Dads came on the weekend, they were still stressed from work, and all the time they were here they'd be thinking of work. That's when you'd get snapped at if you were a minute too long getting them what they wanted. Like you worked for them, you know?"

"Well I guess you did, sort of, work for them, if you were in a shop, but damn some of them were dicks. Then came the big shakeout and a lot of them lost their jobs. Now they're in the bars at two, drink for twelve hours and stumble home. At least the ones who saved some money. The ones who rely on their wives to work, well they stay home to drink and yell at the kids."

I asked him if he was one of those kids.

"Nah, I been here forever, my folks had me about a hundred years ago, I think, I've never been sure, but I've seen a lot."

I nodded, the food came and he tucked in like it was his first meal in a week. Maybe it was, or maybe he really was the teenager he looked like. Bottomless pit, hollow leg, that sort of thing. I nudged him about this girl.

"Oh yeah, real high class, like I said, and I knew she was one of us, I could see it. Thing is, her friends were human. I'm not sure about her folks, but I'd bet they were human too. She didn't seem to know she was changing heads and bodies and things. I mean one minute she was your normal black girl, and then someone would say something and she was a yapping dog. I started to think she couldn't control it."

You mean she was reflecting her mood?

"Yeah, like that. I mean I could see it, but maybe even she couldn't. One time she was sitting on the beach and this guy came up to her, tried to make a pass and she turned into a huge puma. I thought she was going to bite the guy. He must have been a bit sensitive because he actually got scared and practically ran away.

"I saw her around for a couple of summers before she noticed me on the street and gave me a bit of money. I could never beg for long, the tourist shop owners would chase me away, said I was scaring the customers. Hah, the customers never even saw

me there, they were used to beggars on the street, walked by with their noses in the air. She didn't though, she gave me a couple dollars and said hello. Think of that, a high class girl like that saying hello to me."

I looked at him, he didn't seem so uncouth to me, just an ordinary teenager, really. He dressed sloppily, talked with a bit of slang, but who doesn't? He seemed a decent sort, really, which is why I'd offered to buy him a meal. So what happened, I said, did she stop coming?

"Oh no, it got to where she would stop and chat after about the third year. That's when I found something out."

I waited, but he had gone quiet, eating his burger. I figured he'd tell me or he wouldn't, so I kept quiet.

"This is a good burger, thanks again. Anyway, it turns out her old man was coming into her room at night and feeling her up. She tried to tell her mom but she didn't believe her and so she started to think there was something wrong with her. This girl that is.

"The old man didn't come in every night, maybe once or twice a month. So she was never sure what was happening, maybe she was dreaming, maybe she was imagining it, maybe she really loved her dad and she wanted him to do it. She just wasn't sure, and so she never talked about it, except I guess to some bum on the street who didn't matter.

"I felt bad about that, but I didn't do anything. About twenty years ago I had a girlfriend and the same thing happened to her. I killed her old man. Cut off his dick and made him eat it so that he choked to death."

He said this with no emotion at all. I looked at him for a long time and he finally spoke again.

"Yeah I know, not good was it, but it made me so angry, she was a really sweet girl. She never spoke to me again, and the local council told me that was my one and only time, I was to never take the law into my own hands again."

The local council, you mean the village council?

"No, no, the local spirit council, you know, the spooks, the folks who turn into animals, those guys. They don't have too much worry if you kill someone like that guy, but they have to sanction it and they make it look like an accident, otherwise there can be trouble. So they said I wasn't to do it any more. But then along comes this girl and it gets all up in my nose once more. I went to the council and I even pointed out that she was one of us, but they said that since the guy only felt her up, they weren't going to do anything about it."

I bought us another couple of coffees and the kid nodded thanks.

"So I got to talking with this girl and explained to her what she was, you know, a changer, and I suggested that she should

believe what she saw and felt. I even practised with her so that she saw what she was, and that she could control it a little.

"Well a few weeks later I see her running down the street toward me, blood all over her. She pulls me around the corner behind some buildings and says I have to help her. The old man came in the night before to feel her up and she changed into something nasty, she ripped him to pieces, while holding his throat so he couldn't scream. Then she went to sleep, woke up and found him dead on top of her. That's when she came to me."

I must have had a look on my face.

"I swear it's true, I got her to some friends of mine up in the city, they're hiding her."

I asked when this was.

"Last year, she's doing OK now, not like some of the girls who go out and start ripping men apart, you know. She's learned how to change her shape and now she's just another white woman who's working in an office. My friends say she's OK so I guess it was a happy ending."

What about the father?

"Oh they figured it was coyotes or some such nonsense, and that they dragged the girl off somewhere. Like coyotes are big enough to do that, but let them think whatever they want, as

long as they don't know it was her that did it."

The kid drained his coffee and stood up.

"So thanks for the meal, you're a good guy. Maybe I'll be able to pay it back some time."

I told him the story was payment enough and shook his hand, he walked out the door without even looking back. I had meant to ask him what he was, but then again, he looked a lot like a crow.

"That's nice, Stan, but what's it got to do with me?"

"You were wondering about that secretary that heals Sam Jones all the time. The kid told me this was the city his girl went to, you figure maybe the secretary is this shape shifter?"

"But she's a healer, Stan, I'd know if she was a shifter.

"Maybe. Maybe she's using her healing powers to damp down the shifts, hell maybe she's so traumatized she doesn't know."

"You think maybe she's the one who flicked Ruth from the Albion?"

"I don't know, kid, it's just a story, maybe you can work it out."



## **The Dance Scam**

Okami got back to the office in time to see Jessica pull the code from the phone. ‘There’s no way she doesn’t know she’s a spirit being, I could feel the power she used to grab that password,’ thought Okami

“Just a minute Sam, yes here it is, the email and the money transfer. The sent-by was a company, ‘Winged Lion Enterprises’ sent both.”

Ruth shook her head, “That’s one of the family companies, they distribute novelties. They probably handled that Pez dispenser of yours, Sam.”

Sam nodded, “Well no surprise there I guess, they want me off the case and maybe you dead. So why would your parents want you dead?”

Jessica shook her head, “Could be anyone in the company, Sam, not just her parents. Maybe there’s someone else that is running the drugs.”

“And the owners don’t know about it? Would they be that stupid?”

Ruth nodded, “Yes, they’d be that stupid. I told you, they do a

lot of drugs and not much in the way of taking care of the business.”

Okami was looking hard at Jessica, trying to figure out whether she was trying to distract Sam or not. As he thought that, Jessica looked at Okami, “Still could be them I suppose, we don’t know enough to say for sure.”

‘No we don’t,’ thought Okami, still trying to get some sort of read on Jessica.

Just then there was a knock on the door and Jessica answered it. A rather pretty young girl was there, asking for Sam.

“What is it you want?”

“I want him to get me my contract, the bastard ran out on me.”

“What contract?” Jessica picked up a pad and started writing.

“The deal at the resort, to dance of course.”

“Dear, there’s no ‘of course’ involved here, you’re going to have to explain what’s going on. Now, what’s your name?”

“Lulu Labelle.”

“I’m assuming that’s a stage name?”

“Well sure, all the dancers have stage names.”

“And your real one?”

“Ann Livingston.”

“Right, now tell me the story.”

“Mr. Jones will take my case right?”

“Tell me the story and perhaps he will.”

In the inner office, Okami was listening through the door while Sam was questioning Ruth about the Winged Lion company.

“Can we connect the company to your parents or is it held by some sort of numbered company?”

“Numbered companies aren’t secret, Sam, of course you can connect them.”

“So what does this company sell?”

“Like I said, things like Pez dispensers, plastic cameras, goggle eye glasses, stupid shit like that.”

“And people buy that stuff?”

“You did.”

“Yeah, OK, anybody at this company we can talk to?”

“Sure, a couple of guys in the warehouse, a secretary and a manager run the place.”

“Fine, I’m going to talk with them.”

“Can I go with you, Sam?”

“What for? I can ask questions. You stay here, too many attempts on your life, mine too I guess, but I get paid for it. No you stay here and Jessica will take care of you.”

Okami got up off the floor, ready to go with Sam. “You stay here too, Spot, take care of the girls. Stay”

‘Oh dear,’ thought Okami, and turned his attention to the outer office again.

“I was in a dance contest in the bar when a guy came along and offered me a contract to go dance in this resort.”

“Which resort?”

“I don’t know, he said it was out west somewhere. He said I was perfect for the job and I was all packed, waiting to go and then he ghosted me.”

“You were going the day after you met this guy?”

“Sure, he said it was a limited time offer, the job starts in two

days.”

“Tell me something, Ann. Do you live alone?”

“Yeah.”

“Where do you come from?”

“Blacks Harbour, in New Brunswick.”

“Family?”

“Just my Gran.”

“And did this man know all this?”

“Sure, I had to fill in an application.”

“Would you happen to have a copy of that application?”

“No, it was just the one.”

“Was there a name on the application?”

“Of course there was.”

“And?”

“I don’t remember, I was excited and wanted the job.”

“This man’s name?”

“Joe, or John, something like that.”

Jessica snorted, “I’d put real money on John. OK Ann, we’ll look into it. Go on home, I’ve got your number, we’ll call you when we find something. In the meantime there’s a \$200 retainer against expenses, you’ve got our fee card.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means give me \$200 now, dear and we’ll call you.”

“But I gave my last \$500 to this guy for processing fees.”

“Oh lord, all right go on home and we’ll call you.”

When Jessica filled Sam in on the details he looked thoughtful, “She was perfect for trafficking, why would the guy settle for the half thousand and not sell her on?”

“There must have been something that scared him off. I agree it’s probably the old dance scam. Ruth, isn’t that the same bar you usually drink in?”

“Well I go there sometimes to dance, but I go to other places too.”

“Were you ever approached to go dance at a resort in any of the bars?”

“Nope, sorry. And I’ve never seen anything like that.”

Sam nodded, “Well you wouldn’t, these guys need to keep it quiet, trafficking needs kids who are desperate to get out of where they are, but a town full of University kids would need even more care, a lot of those girls have families with money and lawyers. We do a bit of work for parents looking out for their kids.”

“You mean checking up on them.”

“Sure, same thing.”

“Did my parents hire you to check up on me?”

“Would they have a reason to?”

“No, come to think of it, they’d have to care about me to do that.”

“Sorry about that kid.”

“Yeah, well...”

“I’ll check in at that bar on the way back from checking our Winged Lion place.”

Jessica made a note, “Be careful Sam.”

“You know I always am, doll.”

Okami noticed the grimace on Jessica’s face.

The first thing Sam did was go visit Don Dodds to ask him if he had anything on this Winged Lion company.

“Nothing firm, Sam, but I just got an anonymous tip that the Griffon family drugs are distributed through Pez dispensers, you figure this company sells Pez?”

“I know so, Ruth told me.”

“Well it’s not much to go on, but I’ll put some people on the company, do some digging. You be careful when you go there.”

“You know I always am Don.”

Dodds laughed as he waved Sam out of his office.

Sam hadn’t mentioned the possible trafficking case, he’d check it out and if it was real, he’d deal with it himself. Dodds could pick up the bodies later.



## **The Winged Lion**

“Words are not trustworthy, which is funny, because I go through a lot of words in my job, a lot.”

It was early in the morning and Sam Jones was sitting in Jim’s Lunch Counter with Ray and Art. He had just come in for a coffee, but the two of them had invited him to sit with them. Somehow they’d begun discussing what people said and what they did.

Ray frowned, “I’m not sure I follow, Sam, you mean lies?”

“Sure, but a lot more than that. Like the deal you make with someone but there’s nobody else there, so you maybe do what you say you’re going to do, and he doesn’t. Maybe he’s not lying but maybe he just doesn’t bother to do what he said he would. Not really a lie, but it’s like it was just so many words. That’s why we have contracts and lawyers and law courts. Words are just noise.”

“That’s a little cynical isn’t it? I mean we agree to do something and do it all the time.”

“The important part of that is ‘and do it’, you see? It’s the actions that count, not the words, they’re meaningless until we put actions to them.”

“But we didn’t always have lawyers around.”

“No, and back then, a man’s word meant something, if you said you were going to do something, you did it, or it got around that you couldn’t be trusted, and then you were ruined. These days, a man’s word is ignored, nobody gives a shit about doing what they said they would do, so nobody listens. The only thing we can trust is what people do.”

“You know, that makes a lot of sense, there was a guy in China called Wang Yangming who lived around 1500, a Confucianist and a general. He said that we’re born with an innate sense of good and evil, and he disagreed that we could know without acting. He said that by acting one knows, in other words, if you know some action should be taken, and you don’t take it, you actually don’t know. That sounds a lot like what you’re saying. Only actions have meaning, words are just so much noise unless accompanied by action.”

“Yeah, that’s it, exactly. It sounds like you read a lot of philosophy Ray.”

Ray nodded, he didn’t mention that he knew the fellow, had fought in his army.

“Anyway, I hear so much bullshit all day long, and then I hear it on the news and the internet, and it’s just lies. Priests and politicians saying they’re such holy men, and they’ve got the mistress on the side. The words are meaningless, the actions tell us who they are.”

“It would be nice if people kept their word, but there’s no punishment for that any more.”

“You got it, Ray, none. Although if you still deal with those who lie, who don’t keep their word, you’re failing to act. You’re making the problem worse. Of course, that’s pretty old fashioned isn’t it? Maybe that’s why I work for myself, I’ve quit way too many jobs where the boss didn’t keep his word.”

“So tell us, Sam, how is the case going?”

“That’s kind of what got me on the topic, I’m heading to a company of the Griffin’s to see what they’ve got to do with hiring a guy to rough me up while another guy shived me. I’ll just get a load of lies.”

“They did this?”

“Nah, didn’t happen, that stray dog stopped the guy who had a knife. This company is tied up in this case, I’m sure of it.”

“Anything we can do to help, you just let us know.”

“Thanks, I’m just going to sniff around, but there is something else. I’ve been approached by a girl who sounds like she was being set up by a combination dance scam and prostitution ring. You heard about anything like that in town?”

“Well, there’s a couple of bars that might be involved in something like that, they’re full of kids on party night and there

are dance contests, things like that.”

“You know the dance scam?”

“Sure, it’s centuries old, money for an application form and maybe a ticket to somewhere else for a life of hooking.”

Sam looked hard at Ray, “You don’t look old enough...”

“I read a lot, and I watch old movies about ‘white slavers’, if I can use that term these days. I mean, ‘old movies’ right.”

Sam nodded. “Well I’m going to visit a couple of those bars and I’m going to be looking around a bit. If you two hear anything specific I’d be obliged if you told me.”

“You going to do anything about it, Sam? That sort of business can be rough.”

“Just let me know what you hear, will ya?”

After Sam had gone, Art looked at Ray and said, “He has a death wish, I swear.”

“I think he just figures he can clean up the world. It’s refreshing. I’ve known a few like him, and yeah, they tend to get dead. You figure we should give him a hand?”

“We’re already doing that, but where is Oki? He’s supposed to be guarding him.”

“He’s likely guarding Ruth and the secretary.”

“Looks like we’re going bar hopping.”

“Good, I don’t like that sort of business. Art can you make yourself invisible?”

“Not as far as I know.”

“OK, if I have a hand on you I can make us both disappear, let’s follow the man.”

“But, I was going to say, I got one of the twin’s bracelets, Ingrid insisted, so I can make myself invisible with that.”

“Excellent, let’s go.”

Sam was heading for the Winged Lion building, it was a warehouse on a back street down by the river. As he got to the door he pounded on it with his fist. Hearing no response, he let himself in. The place wasn’t very busy, in fact, it wasn’t busy at all, the lights were out and all was quiet. Sam waited for his eyes to adjust to the gloom and when they did, he saw what had to be the office, off to one side.

As he got to the door, two men came around the side of the shed and they didn’t look friendly, they had short lengths of pipe in their hands.

Sam pulled his baton and snapped it open in time to catch one of the pipes before it hit his head, the other pipe slammed into his thigh, causing his leg to buckle. This didn't have the effect the attackers wanted, it only made Sam more angry than he already was. He turned and stepped out of range of the first man and brought the baton down on the wrist of the second attacker.

Hearing a satisfactory crack he spun quickly to catch the first man's elbow as he tried to hit Sam from behind. As the man pulled his arm back, Sam thrust the baton into the man's throat, and as he stepped back, hit him hard on the side of the neck, dropping him.

Ray and Art were watching with some admiration, leaving Sam to it, but they noticed another man aiming a pistol at Sam from the shadows. Ray was on him, stripping the gun and using it to slug the guy down onto the floor with the butt.

Sam had pulled the door open and gone into the office where he found the company secretary looking scared behind her desk. "Just tell me what I want to know and you're going to be fine."

"Sure mister, sure, what do you want?"

"Who's in charge around here?"

"Mr. Green, but he works for Mr. Griffin."

“This Green around right now?”

“He was out there, I don’t know where he is now.”

“Fine, you know who ordered a hit on me?”

“Who are you, Mister?”

Sam looked at her, but she didn’t seem to be playing games,  
“Sam Jones, I’m a private eye, who ordered me killed?”

“That would be Mr. Green, but I don’t know who told him to do it.”

“Mr. Griffin?”

“No, it was a woman’s voice on the phone, I didn’t recognize who it was.”

“Not Mrs. Griffin?”

“No, I know her voice, she calls here all the time, it was someone else. Mr. Green knows her, he said, ‘sure, right away’ when she told him to do it.”

“All right, I’ll go have a chat with Mr. Green.”

But when Sam left the office, he found nobody. They must have run out the door.

Art looked at Ray and said, “They just vanished.”

“Like the others, I hope they were flicked into the same alleyway, we’ve got trackers there.”

## **More Dead Ends**

Sam shrugged, he guessed he had found out as much as he was going to at the novelty company. Some woman ordered him killed, big clue. This damned case was just not going well. Not even close to going well. He figured the dance scam might be a better bet.

As he walked out of the company building, he spotted Ingrid walking down the street with, of all things, a pet pig. What the hell, the bar would be there later, he started to follow Ingrid.

That left Art and Ray free to go back to talk to Ken. As long as Sam was following Ingrid, she would keep him safe.

“I don’t know what to tell you boys, the trackers hit the bodies, but that’s all they were, bodies. They arrived in the alleyway alive but as soon as the trackers landed on them, they turned into just so much goo.”

“Did you get a sample at least?”



“Didn’t need to, the trackers said it was the same as what you found in the alleyway, I got the composition from the Professor.”

Ray shook his head, “How did anyone know those trackers were there, hell even I can’t tell when you’ve got one on me.”

“I don’t put trackers on you, Ray.”

Ray just gave Ken a sour look, “I find them eventually.”

“Well it’s only if I figure you’re going to be in trouble.”

“Uh huh.”

Art looked worried, “Look, we’re up against some real talent here, and Ingrid is leading Sam around town.”

Ray was sympathetic, but, “Art, she’s got Hildy with her, that boar is immune to magic and has a very nasty temper. She’ll be fine, not to mention she’s the Goddess of War herself. Beside that, the people in this town know her, they’ll back her up if she needs it. Relax.”

“OK, I guess you’re right. So what should we do now?”

“I say we visit the bars while Sam is out of the way, it would be safer for us to do it.”

“You boys get into trouble, just whistle, I’ll be there.”

“What if we’re out of earshot, Ken”

“Not with the trackers you won’t be.”

“Ken....”

Art put his hand on Ray’s arm, “Oh leave it, Ray, help is help.”

“But I’ve got a date later tonight.”

Ken shook his head, “Wrong species, Ray, nobody is going to be watching then.”

Art laughed and tugged Ray’s arm out the door.

“Tell me again why we’re doing Sam’s work for him?”

“Not doing it for him, Art, I’ve seen too much slavery in my life, this is my case now.”

“Got you, let’s go then.”

They were in four bars before they found what they were looking for. The guy was chatting up a pretty blond and he was waving one of the application forms at her.

Art slid up beside the girl and said, “Mindy, your mother is worried about you, you shouldn’t be in here at your age,” and with that he grabbed her by the arm and pulled her away. She

seemed too stunned to resist until she got far enough away that Ray could step in front of the man with the plan.

“You’re a dead man, but you can stay alive for a short time if you are telling me who is above you in the chain.”

“What, are you nuts dude? I’m just doing my job here. I’m calling the police,” and with that his hand went to his pocket, where it started to burn. Ray’s control of illusion was superb, and the man was now paralyzed, he couldn’t take his burning hand out of his pocket.

“I’m going to ask one more time, who are you working for?”

“Are you nuts, she’ll kill me.”

“I’m going to kill you, but it’s going to be slow, I’ll burn you inch by inch and keep you alive for days. Who do you work for.”

“All right, all right, I’ll tell you, just make it stop...”

With that, the man stiffened and fell to the floor. Just as Ray reached for him, he vanished. Ray had a pretty good idea where to, and what sort of goo he had been turned into.

Art let the girl go and she slapped him hard. Fortunately the armour stopped Art from getting a chipped tooth. He was watching the girl storm off when Ray told him what had happened.

“This guy has some serious chops, Ray.”

“Woman, he said ‘she’ll kill me’. It’s a woman, Art, and we know she is into trafficking for prostitution as well as drugs. A regular one being mob it looks like. This is personal now, I’m going after her.”

“Not on your own, and not too fast, Megan wants the whole operation, and I don’t feel like getting on her bad side.”

Megan was happiest in the bush. She was loping across country to the next village. She’d just identified and broken the leg of the dealer in the last settlement, and had got the name of another dealer. She smiled. She liked working like this, alone, moving constantly. Her city senses were fading, names and faces were becoming less important, the smell of the next dealer was in her nose.

And then it was gone. ‘Good,’ she thought, this one has power, this will be fun. She ran on as a white wolf through the trees until she came to a clearing. There, across from her was a creature that was half man, half stag, it looked like it was starving, the skin hung off of its bones.

“Wendigo? You dare take the shape of Wendigo? You are not he, and you are lucky you will be killed by me, for if Wendigo takes you, there will be nothing at all but eternal torment for

you.”

“You talk big, wolf, come try me.”

Megan grew, she was larger and heavier than this creature and she attacked with no more talk.

As she lunged for the creature’s throat, it stepped aside and dropped its antlers to gore her side. Megan changed instantly to Crow, and flew away from the horn. She changed to a woman and, still taller than the creature, grabbed its antler and twisted. The creature screamed and was thrown into the ground hard. Instantly it sprang up again, and lowered its head to strike head on, with the antlers.

Megan caught the antlers and spread her arms. Her back muscles strained and one of the antlers snapped off. Throwing it away, Megan grabbed the creature’s snout. She lifted its head and lunged toward its throat, changing to a wolf’s head as she did so. Megan latched onto that throat and in a tremendous bite, ripped it open.

As the creature fell dying, Megan became human and said, “I release you, monster. May your spirit find peace and may the creatures of this wood feast on your body.”

Having come to the end of this chain of dealers, she changed back to a white wolf and loped off through the bush to the next nearest village. She would find another dealer, she was sure. That she left this one dead would probably not cause any

alarm, she could still hunt freely. Life was good.

Back in the lunch counter, Mike was just dropping a coffee in front of Stan. Mike shuddered, years ago, as he was hitching to Guelph, he had caught a ride with Megan and only later learned that she often killed her lovers. Stan grinned, “She likes you Mike, and she likes Liz, you’ve got no reason to fear Megan.”

“Easy for you to say Stan, she just took another life. When I think that could have been me...”

“Trust me Mike, it’s not the same situation at all. She never killed a lover unless she intended to do so from the start.”

“Gods, Stan, you’re not making me feel any better.”

Stan laughed and tipped his coffee toward Mike as he went back to wiping glasses.

## **Stan has a Thought**

As Stan was drinking his coffee, Art and Ray came into the diner. Waving at Mike for coffee, they sat down with Stan, "What's with Mike? He's white as a sheet."

"He just felt Megan kill a being. It reminded him of when he came to Guelph and got a ride with Megan."

"Oh yeah, I heard about that, it was years ago. He can feel it when she kills?"

"A bit of a link, he slept with her after all, and he's a seer, so he's sensitive."

"He's lucky, that's what he is. Stan, Ray and I just caught one of those Witiko in a bar trying to recruit a girl, just what have you got us into?"

"Nothing, I swear guys, I didn't mean for there to be problems, we just wanted to drink in the Albion."

"So who pulled it out of time?"

"Well, I did."

"And you didn't bother putting a ward on the thing so people who weren't supposed to be there, weren't"

"What would be the fun in that? Part of going to a bar is meeting new people isn't it? There's no way an ordinary human would have found the place."

"That Ruth Griffin girl did."

"Yeah, that kind of bothers me, maybe the guy she killed

brought her along."

"That possible?"

"Sure, why not? If he was one of the people, all he had to do was have his hand on her, like Ray here takes people to the Keen dreamlands."

"Right, right, have you found anything else Stan?"

"Megan is hunting through the villages and breaking arms and legs, having a good time, but me? No, I haven't found anything else around here."

"Well do us a favour and cruise through the bars for a while, make sure there's no more of these Witiko who are recruiting girls, we found one but that doesn't mean there aren't others."

"Always pleased to help, gentlemen, I'll get on that today."

Sam was looking hard at Ruth, while Okami was looking at Jessica.

"Ruth they were expecting me at that warehouse, you got any ideas how they knew I was coming?"

"No Sam, not at all, you think they had cameras outside?"

"Maybe, maybe. I'm going to go back tonight after everyone



goes home, and see what I can find."

"Sam I'm really sorry that I dragged you into all this. All I wanted to know was why I killed that guy. Do you think maybe we should just forget it and I'll pay you what I owe you, plus a bonus for all your trouble?"

"They dropped a house on me. I'm going to keep looking, I want whoever is behind all this."

"Are you sure? Maybe we ought to leave it alone."

"Not in my town, not while I'm on the job."

Jessica was tempted to tell Sam to take the money and leave it alone, this was much more dangerous than photographing unfaithful spouses, and the wear and tear on the office and on Sam for that matter, was chewing into their expenses fees. Still, the man was stubborn, a mule in fact, or maybe a bulldog with his teeth clamped on a bull's testicles. She giggled at that, and the dog looked sharply at her.

"Sam have we adopted this dog?"

"I don't know, I think maybe he's adopted us, why?"

"He's looking at me all the time."

"You're worth looking at, doll. Who's a good boy then hmm?"

Okami stifled a growl. Right about then they heard the fire trucks roar by, sirens blaring. Shortly after that Ruth looked up from her phone, "The Winged Lion company is on fire."

Sam looked again at Ruth and Okami looked at Jessica. Sam had a scowl on his face, "That's a hell of a coincidence. I'm going out for a while, stay here girls, I'll be back soon."

Sam went straight to the lunch counter and found Art and Ray, as he expected. "Listen you two, someone is a step ahead of me, you know anything about that fire at the Winged Lion company?"

"Not a thing, Sam, sit and have a coffee."

"Don't want a coffee, want a drink."

"Well let's go down to the bar."

"What bar?"

Art stood up, "There's one downstairs, come on I'll buy you a beer."

When they had settled on to the Keller bar-stools, Sam looked around and asked, "This place have dance contests?"

"Not a chance, dancing sure, but contests? I don't think the manager would permit that."

In his office, Ken snorted, "No money in it," he muttered.

Once he'd had a beer and was on his second, Sam asked, "You two find anything?"

"We found the guy who was handing out application forms to girls, but he's vanished like the others. We're sure it's connected to this Griffin Affair. We're still checking the bars in case there's more than one of them."

"Griffin Affair, sounds like a TV show. So another missing guy and another dead end." Sam fell silent and sipped his beer.

Ray nudged Art who said, "Anything on Ingrid?"

"I followed her around for a couple of hours, she was walking your pig but all she did was walk."

"Well thanks, Sam, please keep an eye on her, I'm sure she's cheating on me."

Ray turned his head to order more beers, and grinned. Ingrid didn't run around, if anyone ran, it was Art who ran after Ingrid and then ran from the Wild Hunt while Ingrid fought Woden for his life.

Stan was indeed checking out the bars, he had taken twenty years off his usual appearance and had fit into the dance scene

nicely. He was making sure to block any indications that he was a spirit being, Nanabozo to be exact, just in case the being they were after could detect him. Stan was a pretty good investigator himself, but he was lazy on principle, and he was happy to let Megan or Okami or even Art do the work. He was beginning to regret opening up the Albion, looking back on it, there was a lot more fuss happening than he'd thought there would be.

Looking around at all the kids trying to pick each other up, Stan realized that he was missing Megan. For all her nit-picking at him, there was a lot of affection too. He'd be happy when she finished her running around in the North.

In the meantime, he didn't spot any 'talent scouts' in this bar, time to move along to the next one. He made his excuses to the girl trying to pick him up and left the bar. Half way to the next, he toned down the handsome, turning down girls wasn't his favourite thing to do. 'Wait,' he thought to himself, 'when did I start turning down a new girl?'

Now he was really unhappy that he'd fiddled with time to open the Alb'.

## **The Trash Monster**

Ingrid was laughing, "So instead of just leading Sam Jones

around the town while you boys have fun, why don't I give him something to report on?"

"You mean have an affair?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Because you're living with me, maybe?"

"Oh Art, you're such a tyrant. and no fun at all."

"Yeah, well I can't believe we haven't solved this thing yet. All we seem to do is get deeper and deeper into the muck in this town. Whoever is behind this is a real psycho, who doesn't mind killing her own men."

"Her, you're sure it's a her?"

"We had that from one of her men at a dance bar just before he vanished and was turned into a puddle of goo."

"Art you be careful, you're immortal but not impervious."

"Yeah, I'm still wearing the wrist band you got the twins to make for me."

"Good. You keep wearing it, I want you around for a while."

"Aw, you say the sweetest things."

"Sweet, nothing. I fought the Hunt for you, I've got an investment."

"I love you too Ingie."

They were strolling down the street where Ruth Griffin woke up, the street where Sam Jones' office was, when something came crashing out of the alleyway, blasting the fencing half way across the street.

"Oh goodie, a trash monster. Is it my birthday Artie?"

Art gave her a dirty look and held out his hand. Ingrid's sword appeared in it while Ingrid suddenly had her spear and shield in hers. Hildy, their pig sat down on a warm grate and a passerby would have sworn he smiled. He could have joined them in the fight, nobody ever remembered seeing things like this, but two to one was odds enough he figured. He'd help if they needed him and in the meantime they could have their fun.

Ingrid shone with an inner light that was hard to look at, and she grew to about ten feet tall, about the same size as this metallic monster in front of them. The thing looked like it was a pretty good fighter, judging by the stance it took, and the fact that it didn't attack right away. Ingrid grinned, there was nothing she liked more than a good fight. Well, not many things.

Art had a grim look on his face, he wasn't naturally a fighter by inclination, but he had trained for years and had been in his

share of scraps.

The monster decided to get rid of the little one first and took a swipe at Art, who slipped aside and lopped a good chunk of its arm off. Ingrid's sword wasn't something that would stop at junk metal. To Art's surprise, it didn't seem to notice the missing arm and shoved the stump at him. The armour kicked in but Art was blown across the street. There was a small matter of a difference in mass.

Ingrid glanced at Art who was already stamping back across the street, and she stepped in front of the monster. She gave him a free shot, the thing's punch stopped at her breastplate, she didn't budge an inch. "My turn" she said and brought the edge of her shield down on what she assumed was its head.

It crumpled a bit, but didn't slow down. It slipped around Ingrid and aimed another blow at Art who had made it back to the sidewalk. This time, Art sunk a spike of his armour into the street and he performed the same trick as Ingrid had. The metal punch was stopped dead and Art moved back, maybe a few inches, as the spike was driven further into the street.

Ingrid clapped her hands, "Excellent sweetheart, you're getting really good at this stuff." As she said that the monster spun and aimed a strike at the side of Ingrid's head. "Uh uh, not fast enough," she said as she lifted her shield.

"OK fun is fun but we're done here." Ingrid drove her spear deep into the guts of the metal beast and dragged it back and

forth. At the same time, Art took off its head, dents and all, and a great clatter of metal trash rained down on the street.

Ingrid waved her hand and it was all back in the alleyway, the fence restored. She was normal sized once more, which for her was well over six feet. The weapons were gone.

"I like that bracelet on you Art, and you're learning how to use it. So nice!"

"Ingrid, was that thing coming for us?"

"I hope not sweetie, I suspect it was going to go after Sam and his girls. Too bad Oki missed the fun, he loves this sort of thing."

"Well he can have it. Hey, I was shield bearer to Jim, were you my shield maiden today?"

"Oh absolutely love, ever the maiden."

Art laughed. Ingrid hadn't been a maiden for thousands of years.

Sam had been looking out his office window at the fight, but as soon as he turned away to call Jessica over, and he looked back there was nothing to see. The street was quiet. Art and Ingrid and that pig of theirs were walking past. Sam shook his head, 'seeing things' he thought.



Okami had felt the fight and immediately looked at Jessica, who seemed to be reading some report or other. Ruth was in the bathroom. Okami spread his awareness further, but he found nothing, no beings who could have created a trash monster. He sort of wished he could have fought it, after all those years as a kid fighting the Trashasaurus down by the river, he was practically an expert.

As he thought that, he caught a snippet of a thought, 'I remember that' and looked up to see Jessica smiling. Okami walked over to Jessica and more or less forced her to pet him. As she did so Oki realized she was a lot older than she seemed.

Just then, Ruth came out of the bathroom looking a bit confused. Well who could blame her, they'd been on the case for days and were no further toward solving it than they had been when she walked in to the office.

Ingrid took Art's hand as they walked. Art was muttering, "Drugs, prostitution, pez dispensers, what the hell is going on."

At the same time, Megan was thinking, 'all these dealers can't be run by one being, there must be some middle men in here somewhere, but I'm damned if I can find them.'

One can hardly imagine what Sam Jones was thinking.

## Things Heat Up

What Sam Jones was thinking was not suitable for public consumption. What he said was, "We need to go talk to your parents, Ruth. We aren't getting anywhere the way we're going."

"Are you sure that's a good idea, Sam? They aren't nice people, as I told you, they're likely to shoot you."

"With you along? You think so?"

"I don't know, they aren't very predictable, especially if they've been using."

"We need to do something to wedge open this case, all we've hit are snags, let's go."

They walked out the back to Sam's car and drove up the hill to Grange. Ruth seemed upset, she was muttering to herself and Sam left her alone to her thoughts.

As they turned the corner and started up the steep part of the hill at Grange street, a massive ice patch seemed to suddenly appear on the road. Sam swore and wrenched the wheel around, trying to get the car under control. He got it to the curb and climbed up onto the sidewalk which had some traction. Breathing hard, he crawled up the rest of the hill and dropped back down onto the road. "What the hell was that?"

Ruth looked shocked, as she might. Ice on this road wasn't something you would expect, the city salted and sanded it before any other roads, and besides that, it wasn't the right season for ice anyway.

Sam stopped the car, got out and looked all around. He saw nobody with a hose, he saw nobody at all. He wasn't sure what he was looking for, the bad guy maybe? He swore again, got back into the car and slammed the door. Half way down the block was Ruth's house and he was in no mood to take any more shit from anyone.

Sam and Ruth walked up the sidewalk to the front door. Sam half expected to have the sidewalk tip them into a pit or something but they made it to the entrance. Sam had his baton in his hand and used it to pound on the door.

There was no answer. Sam was about to pound again but before he could, he heard a gunshot. Shoving Ruth behind him, he stepped back, lifted his foot and kicked in the door. Running fast through the hall he got to the main room just as Ruth's mother looked around. She had a confused look on her face and a smoking gun in her hand. A man was on the floor, the back of his head was missing.

Ruth screamed "Daddy!" Identifying the body. Ruth's mother seemed to focus on Ruth.

"You bitch, he wasn't much but he was my husband! We should never have picked you up out of the gutter and adopted you,

you evil little witch, look what you..."

At that point, the gun began to rise toward Ruth, who screamed. Sam snapped the baton open and brought it down on the woman's wrist, breaking it. He returned the baton in a strike to the side of her head and she went down.

Sam knelt and felt for a pulse but there was none. He hadn't hit her that hard, maybe she had a weak heart. He looked up at Ruth and shook his head while the girl burst into tears.

In the wilds of Northern Manitoba, Megan was in trouble. There were a hundred of those look-alike Witiko piled on top of her. The armour kept them away as a dome of it covered her, but she had to seal it, the things were using some sort of spray, Megan had identified it as a nerve agent just before she sealed herself in. She was losing oxygen and if she passed out the armour would open up to let in the air, along with the poison.

'Stupid, stupid woman,' she thought, 'too independent, too proud by half, too sure of your power, too sure you knew what was going on, and now it's caught up to you.'

The attackers must have had nose filters or a counter-agent, they were piled on top of the armour, preventing Megan from moving away.

Megan saw flashes of light and her vision began to narrow. She

was passing out.

Wait, those flashes were outside the armour. The attackers were exploding and falling off the armour. Dozens of them lay dead around the edges of the dome, and Megan opened it enough to let some air in. Breathing deep, she felt herself reviving and she looked to the edge of the woods where the help seemed to be coming from. More of the Witiko dropped in a flash that blew huge holes in their bodies. Megan figured whoever was helping her was doing a fine job, and she didn't really want to get in the way of one of those flashes. She sat down on a rock and watched, safe under her dome.

The fight took several minutes, the attackers realized what was happening and scattered, heading for the woods and trying to figure out who was killing them. Whoever it was, they were good, one shot, one kill.

Megan had her suspicions, and when the final Witiko went down to dissolve into goo, she watched the Twins come into view.

Megan dropped her armour as they approached. "Hello Mother Nanabozo," "we came along," "to give you a hand," "if you needed it."

"Ken sent you?"

"Oh yes," "he said you might like some backup," "and here we are."

"And here you are. How did you know where I was?"

"That's not hard," "for us," "the bracelet has a tracker."

"Of course, well thank you boys, I really do appreciate the help, although I'm not so happy that you did all that killing."

"Okami had a talk with us," "we promised," "only to kill if we had to," "and we figured this was that time." "We don't feel good about it," "it's quite upsetting," "and we feel a bit sick."

"We'll talk when we get back in Guelph, boys, for now please remember that if you hadn't helped, I'd be dead right now."

"Yes," "the bracelet let us monitor you," "and you were going to pass out," "so we stepped in to help." "We could tell," "it was a nerve agent," "designed for you." "Whoever made it," "is really good," "with chemistry."

"Boys, I'm more or less done here, the drugs supply is crippled, so let's go back to Guelph, I want to talk to your father. Take my hand." With that, the three of them vanished.

Back in the trees, one of the Witiko blinked.

## **Pez Dispensers**

Before calling Dodds, Sam took a look around the house. Nothing there that seemed out of place, no drugs, no secret room with weapons, nothing to indicate that the Griffins were masterminds of a major crime organization. Not that he would have expected that.

He was looking hard for something, anything to incriminate them, when Ruth said, “What about all those Pez dispensers?”

“What Pez dispensers?”

“Right over there on the shelf.”

Sam saw with a start, a shelf full of them, as if it were a collection. He kept his reaction cool, but he knew damned well they weren't there a moment ago.

“Ah, strange thing to collect, but they sold them didn't they? From the novelty company.”

“Yes, there's probably fresh candy in them, go ahead and take one if you'd like.”

Sam opened the head of one and looked hard at the pellet. Something was off, the powdered sugar didn't look quite right. He closed the head, dropped it into his pocket and said, “I'll have one later when I need it. All right, I'm calling Dodds.”

When the detective came, he got the story from both Sam and Ruth, and they agreed with each other. This time the bodies made it to the morgue and the autopsy.

Later, in Dodds' office, Sam was asking, "What did the old lady die of?"

"Not your head shot, Sam, that's why you're not in jail right now, she died of a massive heart attack. Funny thing though, there was no indication of underlying heart problems. It's just that her heart stopped."

"What about the Pez dispensers? What did you find there?"

"What Pez dispensers? I didn't see any there, none showed up on the search."

Sam nodded, reached into his pocket and handed the one he'd picked up, to Detective Dodds, "I wouldn't eat one if I were you, have the pellets analyzed for drugs."

Dodds held out an evidence bag for Sam to drop it in, "We'll do that."

Sam was careful not to touch the pellet he'd clicked into his pocket. He went through the interview with the Detective and then walked the block or so to Jim's Lunch Counter. When he got there, Ray was having a coffee at the counter and talking with Mike. Sam slipped onto the next stool and ordered a coffee too.



“Hey Sam, how are you?”

“Not bad for what, going on seven or eight attempts on my life now? Ray, I don’t know what you and Art are, but you’re more than just a couple of wealthy layabouts. You seem to have connections, do you have access to a chemical lab?”

“Not sure what you mean, Sam.”

Sam took a serviette and grabbed the Pez pellet from his pocket, “Yeah, OK fine, but should you know of such a place, see if you can get them to look at this.”

Ray opened the napkin, “A sugar candy?”

“Don’t eat it or touch it, look again, the powder’s not right. I think it’s some of the drugs the Griffin family are selling.”

Ray nodded and carefully folded the paper over the pellet before putting it into his own pocket, “I’ll see what I can do, Sam.”

“Much obliged, have you found out anything more?”

“Stan found your recruiter in one of the bars, the thing is, the guy pulled the vanishing act like the others you talked about. And yes, he looked like the guy in the picture you sent me. He’s still checking out the bars to see if there are others around but there’s a chance they’ve pulled out.”

“Stan the guy who was talking with Ingrid the other day?”

“The same, he’s an old friend. Are you any further along, Sam?”

“Maybe. Maybe I’ve got an idea of the facts, hell we know it’s about drugs and prostitution, but I’m damned if I can think of a motive.”

“Money?”

“No it’s more than that. There’s a disturbed mind in here somewhere, things are just too sloppy, too many goons for one thing, way too many for an operation of this size. And Pez dispensers.”

Ray frowned, he was beginning to wonder about Sam’s mind, he was a bit too focused on Pez dispensers.

Sam finished his coffee and paid for both, “Thanks Ray, you’ve been a great help.”

“Not sure about that, Sam, but you’re welcome.”

When Sam had gone, Ray walked downstairs to the bar and found Ken in the office, “Got something for you to check out, Ken, but I suspect you’ll find that it’s the drug that the Griffins used on the zombies.”

Ken took the pellet and put it into a machine in the back room. After a while he whistled, “Not the zombie drug, Ray, that’s programmed in now. No this is cyanide, pure and simple. You didn’t touch it did you?”

“Nope, but Sam handed it to me. Says he got it at the Griffin house.”

“Interesting, he seems to be smarter than we gave him credit for. There's something else that’s a bit different than what we expected. Those disappearing goo guys are not look-alikes because they took drugs, they look alike because they’re all the same.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means they seem to have the same chemical makeup. That goo is all the same.”

“You’re sure about that?”

“Yep, checked it several times, got the Twins to sample some of those guys in Manitoba who hadn’t turned to goo yet, and they’re all the same.”

“Have you seen anything like this before?”

“Sure, bees and ants, hive insects. Nothing human though.”

“Does Megan know?”

“Yeah, she and the Twins popped back here an hour ago, that’s when I got the samples. The Twins are back in their garage, and Megan is prowling around town, she’s pissed, more than usual. She’s still waiting for Sam to come up with something, but with the Griffins dead, she’s thinking we’ve just got the spirit being left to deal with. She won’t wait for the human side if she finds the one in charge. Apparently there was a lot of damage done in the villages up north by the drugs.”

“Maybe we just sit back and relax, Megan on the trail means someone is going to die.”

“She’s been known to get it wrong, Ray.”

“Stan says that everyone is guilty of something.”

“Ray...”

“Yeah, don’t punish and then look for guilt, I get you.”

## **Marital Troubles**

Okami was having another argument with Kuroneko, they had become more frequent lately, and Oki didn’t know why. Kuri wouldn’t tell him what was wrong, but oh boy, was Oki wrong all the time.

“You spend way too much time with that Detective, why aren’t you here more often?”

“You know I’m on a case, Kuri.”

“What? With that Griffin bitch?”

“Yes, I’ve been guarding the lot of them down at the office.”

“Oh, it’s ‘the office’ now is it? You going to move in as the pet dog are you?”

“OK what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, why would there be anything wrong, I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Look, there’s been a lot of attacks that I’ve been preventing.”

“Protecting that Griffin girl.”

“Yes, her parents are in some sort of drug dealing business, she left home years ago because of it.”

“Bullshit, Oki, she never grew up here in Guelph, she showed up a couple years ago.”

“But she told us about her childhood here.”

“And you believed her.”

“Well yeah, why would she lie?”

“Oh my lord, you grew up with Kitsune and me, and you figure girls don’t lie?”

"Kuri..."

"Look at the newspapers, Oki, she doesn't get a mention until two years ago. If you did your research you'd have seen that."

"She's the client, why would I do background checks on her."

"You're kidding me right?"

"Look what is it? You've been in my face and jumping down my throat for months now, it's not PMS is it?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Kuri, I'm getting tired of this, whatever happened to talking together?"

"Maybe we would if you were here more often."

“OK. I’ve got to go keep an eye on the office now, I’ve been watching the secretary, I don't trust her.”

"You don't trust me either, do you?"

Oki looked at Kuri and tried to figure out what he could say, he decided there was nothing, he was in the doghouse and would be for the foreseeable future. Nothing to do about it. "I'll see you later."

"Maybe."

Oki left the apartment in a foul mood, maybe he and Kuri had been together for too long, they'd grown up together, gone to school together, moved back to Guelph where she owned the St. George apartments. That was a long time, only to be frozen out and stomped on.

He trudged downtown by way of the newspaper. In the archives he searched for Ruth's name and damn, Kuri was right, she seemed to have been in Guelph for only the last two years. Yet he seemed to remember that she had been a big party girl for at least the last ten.

Well, he'd keep an eye on both of those women. His job was to keep Sam Jones alive and he had no problem with watching everyone.

He almost wished the trash monster would show up again, he could use a good fight right about now. What in the world was going on with Kuri these days. She said it wasn't her period, but Oki was wondering about some other sort of chemical imbalance. He'd run through dozens of possible causes for her to be so unhappy, but she'd refused to say anything about any

of them. She kept collecting animal shapes she could turn into, had she finally collected one too many? Just what was the last shape she'd acquired, a Tasmanian Devil? Maybe that was it, something with a foul temper.

Thinking as he walked, Oki almost missed it, a flash in the doorway of a building. Just as he saw it, his armour kicked in and he was bowled over into the street where he was then bounced down the road by a speeding Tesla. 'Damn, that had to be a pretty high calibre,' he thought as he moved to the side of the street. The driver of the car was cursing him and worrying about damage to his car. 'Good, let him keep the attention of whoever shot me.'

Oki ran back up the street, hugging the side of the buildings. When he got to the doorway, the door was just swinging shut. Oki dove through the space and looked around. Nothing to see but a shell casing. It was huge, it looked like about fifteen millimetres across. No wonder he'd been knocked over, from that range he would have been nothing but the bullet hole.

He listened, opened his senses, but got nothing. The guy was gone, flicked somewhere else probably. 'Shit. I was looking forward to hurting someone.'

Vowing to thank the Twins, Oki carried on to the Detective's building. He scratched on the door until some passer-by let him in and he trotted up to the office. Jessica let him in and he checked her over. Nothing he could detect, but she was looking at him too. He went into the inner office where Ruth and Sam



were sitting. He felt nothing from Ruth. Wait, he'd felt nothing from her for the whole time he'd been on the case. It's hard to notice an absence, but now he finally saw it. Nothing at all, like she was shielding herself from him.

'Damn. Who is this girl and what is she playing at?'

Sam was on the phone to Detective Dodds, "No, nothing at all. Jessica found nothing in the bank records to indicate the Griffins were involved in anything but a legitimate business... Well yeah, they must have laundered the money, but how? They don't seem to have any other business except the mining and the novelty company. There's no bars or restaurants, no high cash flow places at all... Nothing at all?... Alright, Jessica will keep looking, there's got to be something."

Ruth spoke up when Sam put down the phone, "so the police found nothing? Does that mean my parents weren't the dealers? So who is?"

Sam sighed, "I don't know. You'd think there would be something, a big wad of cash in the basement, something."

"Well maybe we ought to look at the house again?"

"The police are all over it. I wonder..."

"What?"

"Well we didn't look over the horse farm, we weren't looking

for a big wad of cash. It wasn't in the house or we'd have seen money blowing all over the place. Maybe the barn."

"So let's go look."

"Jessica, can you keep looking through the financial records, see if you can find some way the Griffins are laundering the drug cash? We're going to have a look at their cottage again."

"But..."

Sam interrupted quickly, "I know, but someone has to go over the records again, be a doll and do that will you please."

Oki caught something, some sort of undertone, maybe Sam and Jessica were having marital troubles too.

## **The Private Resort**

Ray Keen had his own agenda. He was in Ken's office, had been there for a while.

"How long is this going to take, Ken?"

"For lord's sake, Ray, it will take as long as it takes. We've got some good leads on a couple of the girls, my people are tracking right now."

"Damn it, I just want to get at the bastards."

"Yeah, I got that vibe, Ray. You going alone?"

"Sure. Why, you figure I need backup?"

"Maybe a bit of a second thought, why don't you take Kitsune along with you?"

"Kitsune, I don't want her tangled up in this garbage."

"Ray, she's not exactly an innocent, from what I hear she dealt with more than a few pimps in Paris while she was in school."

"Yeah, well. You figure I need a cooler head with me?"

Ken looked at Ray until Ray nodded. "Go have a beer, this shouldn't take too much longer Ray, you know, I've never seen you quite this worked up."

"Too many years in the wars, Ken. I've seen too many young girls used, abused and thrown away. Mostly because they were thrown into brothels for the soldiers. They were always called "comfort women" but the only comfort the girls ever had was when they were killed."

"All right, I hear you Ray, go have a beer and call Kitsune."

Ray did just that and sat at the bar. About his third beer,

Kitsune showed up, "You cooled down a bit Pops?"

"Hello Kit, Pops eh?"

"What's it about, Ray, you don't usually get so worked up about things."

"In ten thousand years I've never got used to the cruelty humans can inflict on each other, Kit, and I can't seem to get my head around it."

"Someone you cared about?"

"Yeah, she was a sweet young girl, I more or less adopted her, but then I was called away to fight and when I got back my own side had grabbed her and thrown her into a brothel. She was used up in a month and died while she was being raped by a squad. The officer in charge just shrugged. Last shrug he ever gave, and the squad didn't last the day."

"Oh Ray, I'm sorry."

"I've never been able to stomach that crap. I'm going to find this 'resort' and I'm going to shut it down hard."

"I'm with you Ray. Do we know where it is?"

"Ken's looking now."

"Right, I'll have a beer with you while we wait."

Two hours and three beers later, Ken had the place. "Look you two, don't just burn it to the ground OK? That's hard to cover up, just be surgical will you."

Kit nodded, took the address from Ken and took Ray's hand. They were in the Rockies, somewhat outside Banff, in a resort that looked pretty exclusive.

"Would have to be, to be built in a National Park where you're not allowed to build. Must have paid some hefty bribes."

"Ray, remember what Ken told us, we're looking for people, not cleaning up rich people's playgrounds."

"Yeah, let's have a look."

The place soon turned out to be catering to overseas businessmen. Mostly Japanese, so the two of them became Japanese. Not a hard change for Ray, who had spent decades living in Japan before the 'Great Pacific War' as they called it. They walked into the main reception office and soon were talking to the manager.

"We are an exclusive club here Keenu-sama, you will find all the comforts of home in the beautiful Rocky Mountains. Here are our rates and a brochure outlining our services."

Kit was playing a young man to Ray's older businessman, "Bar girls?" she asked.

"Oh yes indeed, we have a wide range of hostesses in our bars, very friendly. Many of our employees rotate through Tokyo and Osaka in our partner businesses there."

Kit lightly touched Ray's arm as she felt him start to get angry. She bowed low to him and muttered, "later."

Ray bowed back and signed them into the resort. As they walked to their cabin, Ray spotted a few of the goons they'd seen in Guelph. So this wasn't just a place where the girls were sold. A vertical operation, from recruitment to use. Someone was being very clever.

The two of them hit the bar and soon found the bar girls, they were in their laps the minute the two sat down in a booth. Kitsune spoke with a few of them and found they were thoroughly addicted to drugs, ones that gave them no high, but numbed their will and their feelings of pain, should the customers wish a bit of rough stuff. They also gave them terrible withdrawal pains.

After an evening of bar hopping, the two wandered out onto one of the walking trails, where they were sure there were no listening devices. "I'm going in as one of the girls, Ray. Do not lose it, we'll get all these girls out and then we'll go after the managers. I'm going to get Megan and Liz out here to detox them."

"We can use Ken's base in Banff for that. Do we let Megan

loose on them?"

"That's a nuclear bomb on a kidnapper, Ray. No we'll clean things up ourselves."

Ray grinned, he was looking forward to this.

Kit spoke again, "Ken are you listening? You agree with this plan?"

From somewhere in Kit's clothing came, "It sounds good, Kit, but be careful, these guys seem to be very well connected, once you start going after one, the rest will know."

Ray was startled, "Ken, you're bugging us?"

Kit smiled, "Of course he is Pop, you don't think he's going to let us go into this without backup do you? Ken you'll tell Megan and Liz to get ready in Banff? We'll be flicking the girls across quickly."

"You'll have a beacon to aim at in just a few minutes, Kit. Good luck."

Ray shook his head and was muttering something about life being no fun any more. Kit hugged him as his young man protege and let him go as a cute young woman. She set off at a brisk walk toward the employee's quarters.

Ray started identifying managers, he wanted to be surgical

about this since Kit was with him. Normally he'd have assumed everybody was involved, and just eliminate all of them. As he was doing that, Ken smiled, they were probably all involved, but it was good Ray was checking anyway.

Kit started with the off-duty girls and cleaned out the dormitories. She then went through the bars, and the girls who were with customers were soon gone, the customers asleep in their booth. That left the girls in the rooms with customers. Being able to pick up thoughts came in handy, Kitsune went quickly through the resort and with the final girl being flicked to Banff, she appeared beside Ray as a young man again.

"Customers?"

"They're going to wake up with horrible hangovers that aren't going to go away for days. Their flights back to Japan are going to be hell with big jams at the toilets."

"Good, I've got the managers identified, turns out there are no innocents. What do you want to do with them?"

"Ray?"

"No really, your choice."

"Fine, we knock them out, lock them up and call the RCMP. They'll find lots of evidence that this place was a brothel, and the customer records are all intact."



"That leaves the goons, Ken warned they'd all know once we started to take them, you want to sit it out?"

"Ray, do you know me so little?"

"Sorry Kit, let's get at it."

The two of them began with the lower ranks and worked their way quickly up to the main manager. The employees were sealed into a store-room and knocked out. Ray quickly got the details on the partners in Japan and then let the manager touch the silent alarm before putting him into the storeroom.

"Here they come, damn there's a lot of them Kit."

"Good, I'm pissed."

Kit tossed a wrist band to Ray, "From the Twins."

It didn't take long to go through the goons, even though they had some serious firepower. Kit and Ray both became large fox and simply chomped through all of them. The armour adapted and protected them. The goons had no chance.

As the last one went down in two halves, the explosions started, each and every building in the resort, starting with the administration building went up, and then the fire started.

All the customers, all the employees were killed, and if it wasn't for the fire break between the woods and the resort, half

the mountain would have gone up in flames.

Kit and Ray walked out of the destruction, protected by the Twin's armour.

Kitsune turned to Ray, "Who is it, who just did this, I want them."

"We don't know pet, we're working on it, whoever it is, they have earned no mercy today."

"I'm going to Japan."

Ray gathered Kit in to hug her, "No Kit, they're scattered around the country, but we have relatives there that can do the job. Let Susume and the rest of the family clean up in Japan. They can send the girls to Banff, I suspect Susume's been watching us here."

A clap of thunder out of a clear sky seemed to be answer enough.

## **The Truth from Ruth**

Sam and Ruth pulled up by the barn on the Griffin cottage estate. It seemed the logical place to start looking for a pile of dirty cash that would be laundered later.

Sam wandered into the huge barn and looked here and there, taking his time, poking at horse tack, peering into waste bins. Ruth was tapping her foot after an hour, arms crossed, watching Sam search half-heartedly and badly.

Finally, she had enough, she started tearing the barn apart and five minutes later she yelled, “Sam, come here, look in the back of this stall, there’s a loose board and money behind it!”

Sam nodded and came to look. “Don’t touch it, leave it for the police, I’ll call Dodds right now.”

As he did that, Ruth looked smug, like finding the money while Sam couldn’t was a great victory.

When Dodds came, his men bagged the cash and carted it away. He promised Sam he would call him later that day.

Sam and Ruth went back to the office and Jessica pulled Sam aside to hiss, “Sam the police went over every inch of that place, how did you waltz in and find a bunch of cash so easily?”

“Makes you wonder, doesn’t it doll?”

Jessica’s eyes narrowed.

Dodds called shortly afterwards, “Jones, what are you playing at? We went over that place, that board wasn’t loose and that

cash wasn't there."

"What did you find on the money?"

"Nothing, and I mean nothing, not a single trace of a drug, and money usually has something. It was like these bills were freshly minted."

"As I thought, Don you'd better get over here now."

While this phone call was going on, Ruth had been half listening. She also looked a bit shaken, like she had just been given some bad news. She was staring at her phone which seemed to be filled with Japanese characters.

Sam sat on the corner of his desk, "OK Ruth, I think I've got the answer to your question. The reason you killed that man in the Albion was that you weren't happy with something he did or said. He worked for you, as did all the other goons around town here. You're the one behind the drugs and prostitution ring, not your parents, who aren't your parents at all, are they? You set them up just like you've been setting me up. The cops are on their way over here right now and I'll turn you over to them."

"The great detective, you think you're so smart. I've enjoyed watching you bumble and fumble around, you clod. If you were any more stupid you'd be a dog, like this mutt here. Honestly, you people, you're helpless."

Oki growled deep in his throat.

“Oh don’t threaten me, dog, you have no idea just who I am. I built up an international business here, and you idiots have forced me to shut down parts of it. Well that’s no problem, you can’t touch me and I’ll just build it up again.”

Jessica was watching Ruth carefully, saying nothing but she shifted her weight to a more balanced stance.

Ruth noticed, “And you, you pathetic woman, I’m glad I’m not going to have to sleep in your hovel any more, I’m done with you lot.”

Without warning, Ruth spun and backhanded Sam off the desk and into the wall where he slid down unconscious. As she turned back she turned into something out of a nightmare, a sort of spider shape with massive claws and a backside that was spitting out blobs of goo that were becoming Witiko.

Okami grew into a large wolf and used his armour to squash the half formed men into nothing at all. When he had finished that, he turned on Ruth, only to find that Jessica had done some sort of Jessica and Hyde thing. She was monstrous, at least ten feet tall with massive, curled fingers ending in claws. Ruth moved a couple of her limbs toward Jessica, who slapped one away and grabbed the other to snap it, leaving it a dangling mess. Ruth screamed and started to spit some sort of venom at Jessica.

Okami extended his armour so that the poison hit an invisible wall and fell to smoke and smoulder on the floor. Jessica reached out and cuffed Ruth's head, rocking her sideways toward Okami and raking marks down her face. Okami took his chance and bit down hard on Ruth's monstrous head, raking cuts into that side of her face.

Ruth screamed again and vanished. So she could flick herself from place to place.

Okami and Jessica looked at each other for a moment, both surprised, and then returned to their usual shapes. Oki as a dog and Jessica as a secretary who was running toward her boss. She took Sam's head onto her lap and Okami could feel her healing him. She was no longer shielding herself from Oki.

The office was a mess, and that was a good thing because at that moment, Don Dodds came into the office.

"She's the mastermind, Ruth is, she just hit Sam and wrecked the place fighting with the dog before she took off. We couldn't hold her Don, sorry.

Okami grinned to himself, she could think on her feet, that's for sure.

Sam had come around, and Jessica helped him into his office chair. "Can you find her? Can you charge her Don?"

"It's tricky, Sam. I believe you that she was the mastermind,

and a sick one at that, to come to you and taunt both of us, pretending to be a victim while she was trying to kill you, and killing her gang. The problem is, she's too good. All we have is your story, and I believe it, but there's no proof. There's just no proof."

"So she's going to get away with it?"

"Well you've shut down her organization in Guelph, you've got that for comfort, and I doubt she'll be back here again. As for her warehouse out west, and whatever other business she's got, all we can do is warn the locals about her. She's been hurt, no doubt about it, but yeah, she seems to have got away with it."

Sam looked like he was about to throw something, but he took a deep breath and said, "Well I was hired for a job and I guess I finished it. I told her why she killed that guy. I don't suppose it matters whether she knew it all along or not. I did my job."

Dan stood and shook Sam's hand, "Keep that in mind, Sam. She'll be long gone out of town by tomorrow, we'll look for her and if anything else comes up, if the other forces find anything of her business, we'll let you know. You want a drink after work?"

"Yeah, I'll see you at your brother's place at 8 tonight, that good?"

"See you then, Jessica, take care of him will you?"

Jessica nodded, Dan patted the dog's head and left the office. Jessica looked back at Sam and put her hand on his cheek. He fell asleep instantly. Jess looked at Oki and raised her eyebrows.

Oki became a man and sat in one of the spare chairs, "Who are you, Jessica?"

"I'm Sam's secretary."

Oki nodded, "Fair enough. How come I've never seen you around town?"

"Oh you have, you just never paid any attention. You know I really did watch you fighting the Trashasaurus when you were a kid."

"You've been around for a while then. My father told me a story about a girl from Port Stanley who killed her father and went to the city, this city, to live."

"That sounds like a sad story."

"I thought so too, but maybe some stories have happy endings once the sad bit is over."

"That would be nice, wouldn't it, I'm going to assume that's true for the sad stories that I read."

"This isn't over, you know. There are people in town, people



who sent me to guard you two, that will hunt Ruth down.”

“A story that goes on past the end of the story?”

“Perhaps you could think of it like that.”

“Well, if there’s any more of it to be told, you could come tell me.”

“What will you do with him?”

“Heal him, keep working for him, help him.”

“You love him.”

“There’s no accounting for taste, is there? I’ll stick by him as long as I can, and when I can’t, well I’ll leave that for another story I think. You’ve got someone?”

“I do, it’s a bit rough right now, but we’ll work it out. Been together too long not to.”

“I hope you do, Okami, I hope you do.”

Okami smiled, unsurprised she knew who he was, after all, he used to be in the habit of challenging the Trashasaurus by declaring his name before starting the fight. “Leave a message at Jim’s Lunch Counter with the couple who run the place if you ever need my help.”

Jessica smiled, stepped up to Okami and kissed him on the cheek, “Go talk to your girl.”

## **The Posse**

Okami went home first thing, and talked to Kuroneko, “Why are you so angry with me these days?”

“I’m not angry.”

“Please, Kuri, why.”

Kuri sighed, “Look, Oki, you’re out there on missions, having fun, having adventures, and I’m here managing the George.”

“I thought you liked doing that?”

“I do, but when was the last time you and I went out fighting the bad guys.”

“Uh.”

“Yeah, uh.”

“OK love, I tell you what, I’ve got to go talk to Megan and Stan, you want to come along? We may be heading out at some

point to go after some giant spider woman who shits out bad guys.”

“Really?”

“I just watched her do it.”

“Aw, you’re so good to me.”

Megan was in Ken’s office when Okami and Kuroneko found her. "It was Ruth, she's some sort of spider creature. She created the Witiko from her abdomen, they were blobs before they were men and then blobs again."

Kuri was looking a bit queasy as she listened.

"Ruth knocked out Sam but I went wolf and Jessica went some sort of big monster. We fought her off but she vanished."

Ken nodded, "Ruth. Makes sense, that's how they knew what Sam Jones was doing before he did it."

"Well Sam figured Ruth before I did. The police aren't going to find Ruth and they figure they don't have anything on her anyway, she was pretty careful to cover her tracks."

Kuri frowned, "So what was all that stuff about hiring Sam to help her? She didn't need to do that, and she'd still be in

business."

Megan nodded, "It happens with spirit beings more often than you might think, they start to figure they are ever so much more powerful than humans, then they start to think about humans as playthings. She wouldn't have considered that he could out-think her. When she saw him as a threat, she started trying to kill him. She probably would have, if you weren't there to help, Oki."

"I don't know about that, you didn't see what Jessica was. I figured her for a healer, but she's also a sort of Hyde as well, big and strong. She does a pretty good job of protecting Sam all on her own. Megan, did you know about her?"

"Stan and I helped her when she first came to town. She just wanted a quiet life so we don't introduce her around."

"She says she used to watch me fight the Trashasaurus."

Megan smiled, "A lot of us did, Oki."

Ken had been checking his instruments, "You say she flicked out of Sam's office? Well we can track her, she must have been flustered, she went to her go-to alleyway and some of my trackers were still there. We've got her."

"She was beat up pretty good, Jessica broke one of her legs and we both carved up her face."

Megan nodded and then called quietly, "Stan, get your butt over here."

Stan appeared, "You called, sweetie?"

"Sweetie? Who was it, oh never mind, wipe that face off your face will you, we've got work."

Stan looked sheepish as he changed from a young man to his usual, as he called it, ruggedly handsome face.

"We're going after Ruth Griffin, she's behind the shit that's been going on. The guy she killed in the Albion..."

Stan's eyes had got wide at the mention of the Albion.

"Oh for the goodness' sake Stan. You figure I don't know what you're doing before you do it? The guy she killed was some creature she created herself. She hired Sam just to play with him, but he figured her out. She's in the wind and we've got a tracker on her."

"Let's go then, the four of us? The pack?"

Kuri grinned, "Hey, cat remember?"

Ken cleared his throat, "Uh, she must have found the tracker, it's gone offline."

Megan grinned herself, "Good, not boring then, give us the last

location and we're off to have a sniff around. I want this creature."

Detective Don Dodds walked into Jim's Lunch Counter and sat down with Art and Ray. "Hello gents, mind if I have a talk with you?"

"Sure, Detective, what can we do for you?"

"I know you've been helping Sam Jones with this Griffin case, it turned out to be Ruth Griffin, but she has disappeared. I've alerted some of my buddies in Manitoba to keep an eye out, but I thought I'd come see what your bunch are doing."

"Our bunch?"

"Gentlemen, I've been around this town for a very long time, I knew Jim Childress for years. Yes, your bunch."

Art looked at Don for a long time. "I remember you, quiet kid in the corner, watched everything."

"Saw a lot, still do, although I'd be obliged if you kept that to yourself."

"OK, Don, we can do that. As to what our bunch is doing, Megan and a couple others are off tracking Ruth. You know Megan?"

Dodds nodded, "We chat a bit."

"She wants this creature, she's got a little posse with her that ought to be enough to take down a small country."

"One of them Okami? I saw him in Sam's office."

"Yeah, and Kuri and Stan."

"That should be enough. Our guys out west have heard nothing. You figure this creature has gone to ground in the bush?"

"That would suit Megan nicely, she's happiest there."

"Thank you gentlemen, if you hear any more I'd appreciate it if you let me know. I don't want any of our guys getting in the way. Let me get your coffees."

"We'll let you know, Detective."

"Don, please."

Ingrid walked in with a serious look on her face. She glanced at Don but Art nodded, "What is it Ingie?"

"I was walking past the Albion with Hildy and he yanked me inside, it's Lechmu, he must have finally recognized Ruth for what she is. She killed him Art."

"Damn, we couldn't protect him."

"Well it looks like he put up a good fight, there's puddles of goo all over the place. I also found this under his body." Ingrid pulled a complicated little structure out of her pocket. It looked vaguely like a spider, and bits and pieces seemed to go in and out of sight.

"Ray? You ever see anything like this?"

"Not me, he must have had it for a reason. Maybe send it to Megan if Don doesn't need it for an investigation."

"It doesn't look like anything useful to me, and it sounds like this murder is going unsolved, my chief doesn't like reading 'puddles of goo' in a report."

Ingrid made a pass with her hand and the artifact was gone.

## **Ingrid's Case**

Art was in Sam's office. "Art I have to say that I've followed Ingrid for a few weeks now and I can find no indication that she's unfaithful to you."

"You're still following her?"



"Sure, you hired me. She seems to be doing nothing but walking the pig when she's not with you."

"Oh, that's good to know Sam. Thank you, how much do I owe you?"

"You can take that up with Jessica on the way out. I'm just sorry we couldn't do more with the Griffin case."

"About that, I did get that Pez candy analyzed, it was cyanide, Sam. You were right to doubt it."

"Now I'm even more upset I didn't nail her."

"Well as to that, there was a massive explosion and fire at the warehouse in Manitoba, and troubles in the mines as well. It seems like the Griffin companies are no more. As to Ruth Griffin, nobody has heard anything about her for a long time. People are starting to think that maybe she was down one of the mines when it collapsed."

"Well, we can only hope, Art, we can hope."

"She really got to you, didn't she."

"Well she did send goons after me and try to poison me, but hey, it goes with the job. Maybe I didn't get her but maybe something else did."

"That's the ticket. All right, thanks again for tailing Ingrid, that's good news there. Don't be a stranger at the lunch counter."

"Now that I've noticed it, I'll be in."

"Good, and don't hesitate to ask if you need our help, Ray and I enjoyed a bit of excitement."

"Maybe I will."

As Art went out to see Jessica, she looked up and smiled. Art lowered his voice, "He's OK?"

"He's tough, he doesn't like losing is all. Thank you for helping, and thank Oki for me will you?"

"You got it. Listen, do you want the details on what happened out west?"

"Is that creature destroyed?"

"Absolutely."

"Then no, I can be a little bit less watchful now."

Art smiled, he had Ingrid to look after him, and Sam had Jessica.

## The Chase

And Okami had Kuroneko. She had him by the scruff of his neck and threw him back behind herself while she grew even larger and leapt toward the Witiko who had ambushed them. She took the form of a waving lucky cat like you'd find in a Chinese restaurant, but each time her hand came forward, a fireball flew out of it, hitting one of the opponents. She slowly turned as she threw them and after the last one was set afire, she waved her arm once more and they all vanished.

“You sent them away?”

“Yes, back to wherever they came from.”

“Still on fire?”

“Sure, why not?”

“You're sure not the gentle, sweet young thing you were when you were a kid.”

“I never was gentle or sweet, your memory is foggy.”

Okami smiled to himself and looked around for more opponents. “I don't see any more, where did Megan and Stan get to?”

“They sprinted ahead when we stopped for these, let’s catch up.”

When they got to the other two, Megan shook her head, “This is useless, we’re just chasing around in the bush, and Ruth can make infinite numbers of Witiko, since she’s shitting them out.”

Okami frowned, “Well technically, spiders have a separate ovipositor for...”

Megan was giving him ‘the look’ and Oki shut up. Kuri took his hand and gave it a bit of a squeeze.

Stan looked around and said, “So we pull her in rather than chase her. What’s she want that we can burn to the ground?”

“Her warehouse. Good idea Stan, let’s go.”

Oki and Kuri grabbed Megan’s hand and while Kuri looked a bit uncomfortable, Oki shrugged. He had been out with Megan often enough to know she wouldn’t stop very long to let the workers out, before setting the warehouse on fire.

When they appeared outside the building, Oki put his hand on Megan’s arm, “Give us a couple minutes to clear the place.”

Megan nodded and pointedly looked at her wrist where a watch might have been.

Oki and Kuri were soon inside the warehouse and Oki tripped the fire alarm. Kuri did a quick search of the place after the workers had filed out and she nodded to Oki. With that the two went back to stand with Megan, and moments later the warehouse was engulfed in flames.

The smoke was... interesting to say the least. The addicts in the town were soon there, inhaling deeply. There was a mix of drugs wafting across the parking lot and then the grass before it hit the bush and was mixed among the trees.

The posse settled down to wait. They didn't have to wait long, Ruth in her spider-woman shape was there and furious. "You meddling nothings, I had plans for that merchandise!" With that she spit venom at the four. Oki shifted his armour to cover Kuri, and Megan did the same for Stan. The grass at the edge of the armour smoked and sizzled.

Out of the bush came more Witiko. Megan sighed, "She's only got one tune." With that, Megan took the lot and flicked them to half a mile above Hudson's Bay. Those that didn't perish from the impact, soon drowned in the freezing water.

Unfortunately Ruth had time to escape. "She's running out of places to go."

"Where next then Stan?"

"I'd say her mines. We start to collapse them."

With that, they were in the first. Again Oki and Kuri cleared the humans out of the place, and killed the overseers, who dissolved on cue. Once the place was empty, Stan took over, he walked deep into the mine and howled. Soon he was running for the surface, howling all the way as the mine collapsed on the machinery that had been left behind.

Kuri looked a bit concerned. “What about the investors?”

Oki took her hand, “Jessica looked it over, these mines were wholly owned by the Griffins. They made good profits because they paid the miners peanuts and forced them to live here so they couldn’t escape.”

“Slavery?”

“Not technically, but if you’re flown in and out by the company, where do you go if you quit. That’s a lot of bush out there.”

Kuri’s face was thunderous, “Where’s the next one?”

There were four mines, they destroyed three before they found Ruth again. She was cornered, her empire crushed, and she was raving. She attacked by herself, fighting with all her legs, spitting poison, and unexpectedly, stinging. That section of the mine was too narrow to fight more than one on one, and Ruth was blocking anyone’s attempts to get her out into the open. Megan was blocking Ruth’s attempts to escape.

It was a stalemate, and it went on for hours. Ruth would heal as fast as the four, taking turns, would break a leg or rip a hole in her side. The Twin's armour prevented most of the damage to the posse, but the damage was starting to accumulate.

Stan was forward, he was darting in and out, breaking legs, trying to get at her throat and failing. He stepped back and had time to say "Lechmu" before Ruth was on him again.

Megan dug into her bag, she had received that strange metal thing from Ingrid, looked at it and shrugged before putting it away.

She found it and, not thinking what else to do, she threw it at Ruth. The spider, without thinking, snapped it out of the air. The moment it touched her, it started to smoke. No, it wasn't the artifact, it was Ruth. The artifact was burning into her, and she couldn't seem to get rid of it.

Megan wondered just what people Lechmu had come from, she'd never seen such a thing. It kept chewing into Ruth until not a single piece was left. The spider-monster was no more.

Not quite believing it was over, Stan looked carefully, but there was nothing on the ground. He looked around the shaft, then they all looked. Nothing. The humans had long ago fled to the surface, so the place was empty.

"Do we collapse it?" asked Kuri.

Stan snarled, “Damned right, let’s not take any chances.”

“OK, can you teach me that howl?”

Stan grinned as he walked deeper into the mine, “Come with me.”

Oki shouted, “Kuri, take this,” and threw her his wristband.

After that, he and Megan headed up and out of the mine. “You think they’ll need the armour?”

“You know Kuri and a new toy, she’s likely to collapse it all, all at once.”

Megan grinned, she knew Kuri.

## **Sam Jones, Detective**

Sam was trying to get a word in edgewise and failing.

“You were going to get me my contract, where is it, I hired you to get me a shot at the big time, don’t you tell me the guy disappeared, don’t you tell me it was a prostitution trafficking scam, I want my contract damn you.”

Sam was fingering the knife taped under his desk, but



eventually he settled for his expandable baton. 'Don won't blame me,' Sam thought as he tapped the girl on the noggin.

In the waiting room were three wives and two husbands.  
Business was picking up.



You will find more free books from Kim Taylor at:

Martial arts

[https://sdksupplies.com/cat\\_manual-free-ebooks.html](https://sdksupplies.com/cat_manual-free-ebooks.html)

Poetry, Photographs and Prose

<https://180degreeimaging.com/TaylorBooks.html>