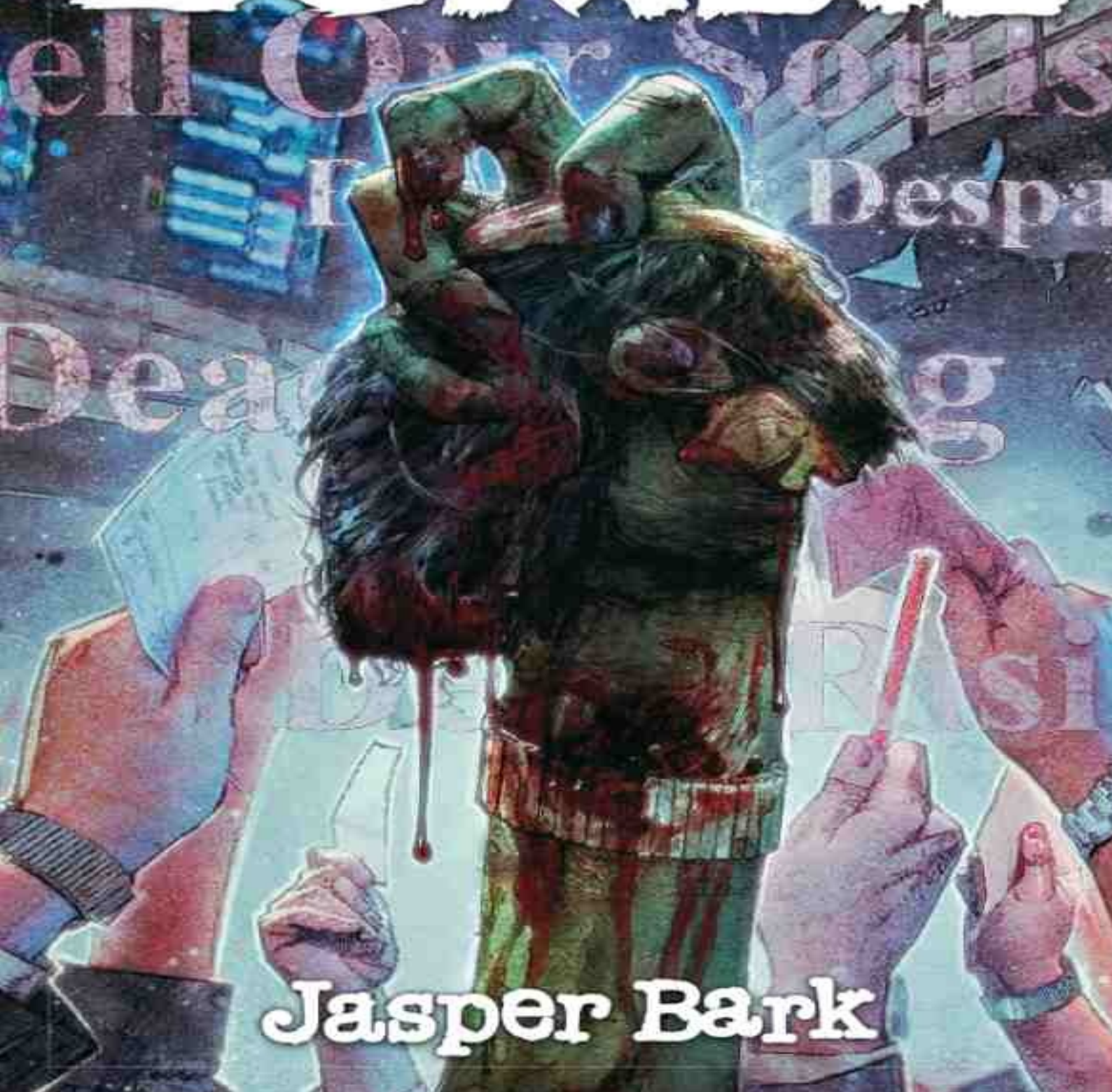


TOMES *of the* **DEAD**

Way of The Barefoot

ZOMBIE

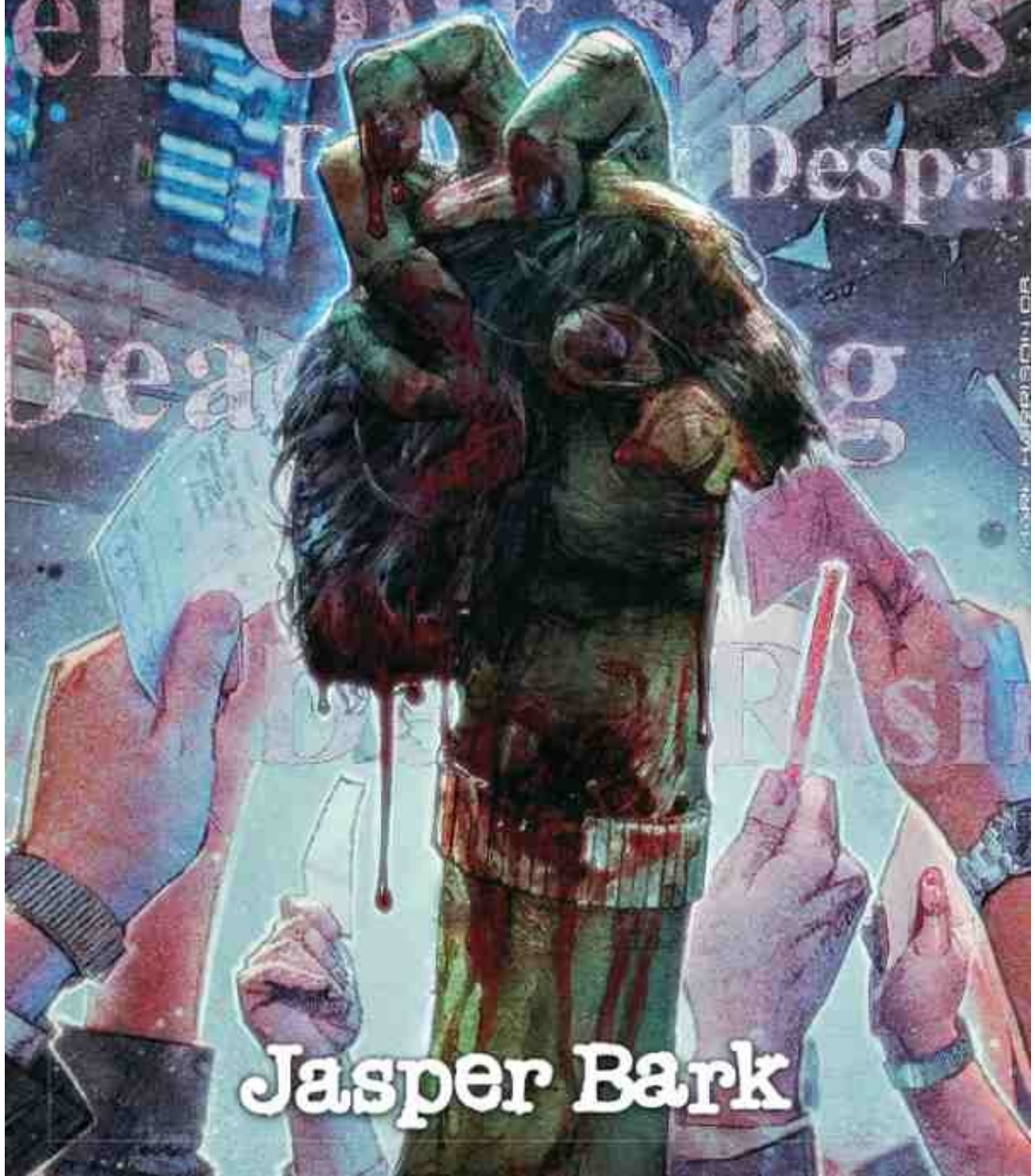


Jasper Bark

TOMES *of the* **DEAD**

Way of The Barefoot

ZOMBIE



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WAY OF THE BAREFOOT ZOMBIE

The automatic locks on the security doors clicked open and they slid apart. The group moved out onto the sandy ground and into the blazing heat.

Benjamin's whole life had been leading up to this moment. There were real Zombies all around them. He stole sideways glances as they shuffled into the centre of the space with the rest of the party.

They were as magnificent as he'd imagined they would be. Shambling about in the noonday sun just as he'd pictured them a thousand times in his mind.

Noble Monsters, Death Defiers, Graveyard Rebels, none of the names he and his fellow Deathwalkers used to describe them did the awesome creatures justice. They were the ultimate passive-aggressive subversives.

They'd given death the middle finger and refused to lie down just because they weren't alive anymore. It was defiance that kept them up and running. Not hunger, like the idiots all around him thought. The pure defiance of anyone who tells them how to act or what to do. Defiance of the ridiculous hypocrisy of Western consumer culture and everyone who tries to uphold it.

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TOMES OF THE DEAD

WAY OF THE BAREFOOT ZOMBIE

Jasper Bark

*"Some can gaze and not be sick,
But I could never learn the trick.
There's this to say for blood and breath,
They give a man a taste for death."*

A. E. Housma

*"Nothing is more important than learning to think crudely. Crude thinking is the thinking of great
men."*

Bertolt Brecht

Is this where the adventure begins? thought Benjamin. *In the john on a private jet?*

His Uncle Brian once said there were no beginnings or endings in real life. Just a sequence of events from which we draw our own significance.

Brian, who was actually his step uncle, had been killed by a frozen turd. Benjamin wondered what significance Brian would have drawn from that. Personally, Benjamin couldn't take a dump on a long haul flight without thinking about it.

The homicidal turd had fallen off some bargain airline with a cracked sewage tank. The plane was so high up that the turd had frozen solid. It remained intact and rock hard as it plummeted the whole 35,000 feet.

It fell vertically and the wind resistance honed the end to a fine point. It had picked up quite a bit of speed by the time it hit Brian. It bored right through his skull and embedded itself in his brain. He died instantly.

This probably came as quite a relief to the Peruvian tour guides with Brian. He was lecturing them on why sanitation was so important to modern society and how this made New York far superior to anything the ancient Incas built.

He was on vacation in Peru at the time. Or rather he was indulging in a 'unique recreation experience' that his 'lifestyle-management expert' had organised for him. Brian indulged in these several times a year, just like all his super-rich buddies.

For seventy thousand bucks they'd do things like fly to South Africa and take pot shots at some endangered species the natives had tied down for them. Then over dinner, in a Michelin starred restaurant, some local celeb like Nelson Mandela would pretend their coked up rant about the importance of an unregulated market was full of profound insight.

This time around it was a guided tour of the ruined city of Gran Saposoa in the middle of the jungle. Brian's body had to be airlifted out and shipped home. The turd had thawed by the time the astonished medical examiner dug it out of his brain. There was a lawsuit of course, but it didn't go anywhere.

The most ironic thing for Benjamin was not how Brian died, but where the turd had come from. Brian was an insufferable snob. If there was one thing he hated worse than taxes and Democrats, it was the poor.

For Brian they were another species. They shared certain physical similarities with real humans but they were quite mentally inferior. That's why he crapped on them every opportunity he got. Waiters, parking attendants, hotel porters, all of them had to be put in their place.

It amused Benjamin no end to think that some immigrant flying coach had dropped his pants and done to Brian what Brian had been doing to the poor his whole life. That the frozen aftermath of one cheap airline meal had totalled the one thing Brian was most proud of - his cultivated brain.

That's where Brian's adventure ended. Benjamin's began here as he took the Zombie stud out of his ear. He'd kept it in as a final act of defiance, but that was stupid. He was trying to blend in. To look a though he was born to this and the earring didn't help that a bit. As he took it out he shed the last trapping of his old self, the transformation was complete.

Benjamin checked his reflection in the mirror to see how well he looked the part. His chestnut hair was cut short. The jet black dye had grown out. As had the ragged and uneven clumps into which his hair had previously been cut.

His blue eyes had quite an intensity. Especially as he no longer wore opalescent contacts and red eyeliner that made his eyes look like a dead man's.

He even noticed, with amusement, that he was getting a tan. It was strange how healthy his skin looked when it wasn't made up to look like a corpse. He wasn't used to seeing himself in an Oswald

Boateng suit either, but it fitted his tall, thin frame alarmingly well.

~~One of the other passengers shot him a supercilious look as he headed back to his seat. A platinum blond in an Armani suit. She probably wasn't used to flying on a jet she didn't own.~~

Most of the passengers had arrived at the offshore meeting point in their own private jets. Others docked their 250 foot yachts in the adjacent marina and some landed in their helicopters so as not to appear too ostentatious.

The meeting point was a remote spot on the south coast of Texas. When Benjamin arrived some of the other guests were kicking up a fuss. There was a lot of discontent about the travel arrangements. People were incensed that after staking \$5 million worth of assets on the course they were expected to fly together on a single luxury jet.

"Why not bump us down to coach with a bunch of peasants and be done with it?" said one man with a red neck and an English accent.

The staff handled the outrage professionally. They were courteous but insisted that the guests were contractually bound to abide by all the course rules. No privately owned jets could enter or leave the island's airspace. Failure to abide by any of the rules would result in a total loss of the attendants' stake.

The stake was what got the attendants a place on the course. It guaranteed that only the right kind of people would attend. If they didn't have access to \$5 million worth of assets then they weren't rich enough to be considered. And if they weren't prepared to stake that much then they didn't have enough conviction to study the Way of the Barefoot Zombie.

Richard's lawyer explained all this to Benjamin when his family agreed to make the stake in lieu of his inheritance. Upon completing the course the assets could be bought back at less than cost over a period of years, providing the attendant didn't break any conditions in the contract. This was all part of the 'incentive to succeed' that the course offered.

It was also an effective way of maintaining control over people who were not used to being controlled. Within only an hour or so of meeting, the guests were already jockeying for position. Some applied their charm and charisma, others flaunted their wealth and influence. All of them were trying to establish their supremacy.

These displays sickened Benjamin, but this time his disgust was tinged with panic. He was used to setting himself apart from such behaviour, but now he had to blend in with it.

He was gripped with self doubt. Would he really be able to pull this off? There was so much more stake than \$5 million.

They were already singling him out as someone who didn't belong. The platinum blond wasn't the only one to look down at him. How long before they found out why he was really here? What would they do to him when they did?

Benjamin could sense the undercurrent of animosity towards him. Beneath the civilised veneer of their thousand dollar hair cuts and their designer suits he was aware of the guests' true nature and the vicious intolerance of outsiders.

It's okay, he told himself, taking deep breaths. You can do this. They're not on to you. You know these people. You were born for this.

His breathing slowed and his heart stopped beating so fast. He glanced around him to make certain no-one had seen his moment of weakness, then he joined Tatyana and slid back into his seat.

Tatyana had transformed herself too. Her long blonde hair fell off her shoulders like she'd just stepped out of a salon. All the plastic bugs and stuffed rodents she'd once sewn into it had gone.

While her dark brown eyes and Slavic good looks stopped her looking like a typical WASP, when her face wasn't made up to resemble a decaying cadaver, she glowed with good health and affluence. Benjamin put his arm around her slender shoulders.

No-one would have picked them out as Deathwalkers now. There was nothing about their appearance that suggested they belonged to a cult that idolised the living dead.

"You okay?" said Tatyana, sensing he was on edge.

"Yeah," he lied. "What you doing?"

"Trying to find St Ignatius on Google Earth," she said, playing with her iPhone. "It just goes all blurry every time I go north of Haiti though."

"That's because they'll have blocked it. That's the kind of power they have. It's a totally private island. It's not on any maps or in any guidebooks."

"So how do we know that's where the plane's going?"

Benjamin pointed out the window at the small island below. "See for yourself. We're coming in to land."

Tatyana leaned into him "Nervous?"

"Nah. I'm pumped. Just think, in a few days we're going to see our first real live Zombie."

"Shouldn't that be real *dead* Zombie?"

"You know what I mean smart ass," he said and kissed her to hide his nerves.

"Are sir and madam travelling together?" the guy with the parasol asked them. All the passengers were met by a member of staff as soon as they stepped off the plane. "There is another vehicle allocated if you want to ride separately," he said, adjusting the parasol to make certain they were both sheltered.

"That's okay," said Tatyana. "We're fine together."

"This way then ma'am," the man indicated a fleet of Mercedes Maybachs. He escorted them to the car where a chauffeur stood ready with the door open. Benjamin followed Tatyana onto the huge leather backseat. More than twenty feet long and looking like something out of *The Great Gatsby* the Maybach was Mercedes' answer to Rolls Royce's Silver Phantom and a seriously impressive vehicle.

Benjamin's step cousin Brad had been showing his Maybach off at the Town and Country club a few months back. Brad had flaunted the fact that he'd paid way over the \$385,000 price mark in order to jump the two year queue to buy one.

Benjamin was astonished that they had a fleet of them here on St Ignatius. Just another sign of how powerful they were. Of why he had to be so cautious.

"Is the temperature okay sir, ma'am?" the chauffeur asked. "I could cool the seats if you like, or even heat 'em. If you want to let go of any tension from the flight you can put the leg rests out and I can put the massage setting on."

"Everything's fine thanks," Tatyana said.

"There's Champagne, water and other refreshments in the refrigerator," said the chauffeur. "And there's glasses on the Champagne holder."

"Water's great," Tatyana said grabbing two bottles from the refrigerator and handing one to Benjamin.

"So," said the chauffeur as he pulled away. "Which way would you folks like to go? There's the main highway, the scenic route through the jungle or I can take this baby up to 155 along the coast road."

"Just take us where the least number of people are going to be," said Benjamin.

The chauffeur smiled "Scenic route it is then."

Benjamin stared at the back of the chauffeur's head and tried to make out whether he was smiling to himself. Benjamin had been waited on his whole life. He knew that the people who worked in service industries were often more judgemental than the people they served. Their deference was simply a way of hiding this.

This unspoken judgement, implied in a glance or a tone of voice, always stung Benjamin more than his peers' outspoken judgement. He didn't want to be held to their standards. He hated it when people who weren't a part of that world tried to put him in it, then secretly looked down on him because he didn't fit.

He should probably cut the guy some slack. He was only trying to do his job the best he could. Benjamin had to watch he didn't get paranoid. Even still, he knew that if he was going to pass for one of these people, convincing the service staff he belonged was a crucial part.

"Have you worked on the island long?" Tatyana said to the chauffeur. It was one of her endearing little habits. She always spoke to cab drivers, receptionists and store clerks. Benjamin worried for a moment that the chauffeur would think it unusual or inappropriate behaviour. That Tatyana was about to blow their cover. But the guy seemed quite cool about it.

"About a year," he said. "I started on short term contracts and spent the rainy seasons driving limos in Florida."

"They have rainy seasons here?" said Tatyana.

"Sure. There's two, just like in Haiti. It's what keeps the weather so humid. Seeing as it's the end of October though, you got nothing to worry about."

"Is that why you've got so much jungle here?" Tatyana asked, looking out the window at the dense foliage that surrounded the road. True to his word the Chauffeur was taking them on the scenic route. The fierce afternoon sun struggled to break through a criss-crossing canopy of palm leaves and only just dappled the narrow road they drove along.

"I don't know if it's cos of the weather," said the chauffeur. "Course this was all sugar cane fields a hundred years ago, before they let it grow wild."

"Really?"

"Yeah, that was back when Mary Papamal owned it."

"Who?"

"Are you guys serious? You never heard of the Scarlet Witch of Mangrove Hall?"

"No," said Benjamin. "Should we have?"

"Well no, I'm not saying you should have heard of her. I was just surprised. She's the most famous person to have lived on St Ignatius, being a serial killer and all."

"A serial killer, for real?" said Tatyana. "And she came from St Ignatius?"

"Well she was born in France. Her parents moved to Haiti when she was four years old. They both died of typhoid when she was fourteen. She was raised by her Haitian maid who took her to Voodoo ceremonies and taught her magic. When she was eighteen she found her trust fund had been spent by the relatives put in charge of it. Her only hope was to marry some rich dude. So she seduced Jean Papamal, the guy who owned Mangrove Hall. He was forty at the time and she was nineteen."

"Aw man that's gross," said Benjamin. "Imagine doing someone twice your age."

"Maybe he was cute," said Tatyana. "Besides, it wasn't like she had much choice. She'd lost both her parents and all her inheritance was stolen. I feel kind of sorry for her."

"Don't feel sorry for her," said the chauffeur. "She more than made up for the bad start she got in life. She murdered her first husband within a year of coming here and had his body bricked up in the wall of their bedroom. Then, when she discovered he was so in debt he was going to lose the whole plantation, she married a rich Admiral to save it."

"Did he last any longer than her first husband?" said Benjamin.

"Nope. By this point Mary had started to take lovers from the plantation slaves. So, one night she sneaks three of them into their bedroom and waits till the Admiral comes to bed. Then she has two of them hold him down and strangle the Admiral while she does the third slave and makes him watch. The last thing the guy sees before he dies is one of his slaves humping his wife. Then apparently she had a foursome with all three slaves while her husband's corpse was lying in the bed next to them."

"Whoa," said Benjamin. "She sounds like quite a chick."

"Oh yeah," said Tatyana. "Now you like her, soon as you find out she's into kinky stuff."

"She did a lot worse than that," said the chauffeur. He enjoyed titillating them with this lurid local history. "Afterwards she had the three slaves stripped naked and tied them to the back of her carriage. Then she rode all over the island till the slaves were just bloody lumps of meat."

"Eew," said Tatyana. "And she got away with all this?"

"She ruled the whole plantation like a tyrant. Who was going to stop her? She used to take male and female slaves to her bed then have them killed the next morning. She would have other slaves whipped to death just for looking at her the wrong way. Everyone was terrified of her. Eventually she overstepped herself though."

"What happened?"

"There was a small colony of natives on the north side of the island who all practised Voodoo like she did. Mary took up with their Houngan, that's what they call a Voodoo high priest. They all have

these rattles that hang round their necks that are called assons. No-one else is allowed to wear one, coz they're like a badge of office or something. This priest was a guy by the name of Toussaint. This was all fine until Mary gets the hots for the guy who was betrothed to Toussaint's daughter. When the guy turned her down she kidnapped Toussaint's daughter and planned to sacrifice her in some evil ceremony. So Toussaint led a revolt of the slaves. They stormed Mangrove Hall, murdered Mary and set light to the building. The whole plantation was in ruins for nearly a century until Doc Papa, the guy who runs this place, restored it two years ago."

"So what happened to all the slaves and their descendants?" said Tatyana. "Did they stay on the island?"

"Erm, I dunno. I guess they all went to Haiti or something."

The Chauffeur lapsed into silence. He looked uncomfortable. Probably because he didn't know as much as he made out. Tatyana felt bad about this and changed the subject.

"So are you still on short term contracts, or do you work here full time?"

"Full time now. Pay's phenomenal and so are the incentives."

"Incentives?"

"Let's just say I found a way to put all of my soul into my work."

"Ooh, sounds intriguing."

"Hey do you guys want to listen to some music?" said the chauffeur after another uncomfortable pause. "I got digital. You can get almost any station."

"That's okay man," said Benjamin. "Silence is good."

"Okay," said the chauffeur and put the visor up between them.

Tatyana looked at Benjamin as if to say 'what the fuck?' Benjamin shrugged. They guy seemed to clam up pretty quickly. Had he rumbled them? Did he think Tatyana was coming on to him? She was pretty friendly. Some guys misread that.

Benjamin didn't think so. The chauffeur looked tense, a little nervous even. Like he'd let something slip. Said something he shouldn't have. But what? Was it all that stuff about Mary Papamal? If she was so well known why wouldn't he be allowed to tell them?

They were the last to arrive at Mangrove Hall. A beautiful three story stone and timber framed mansion from the eighteenth century. It sat at the top of a hill and was surrounded by beautifully kept terrace lawns with lush tropical plants in the borders.

To the left of the mansion was a complex of what looked like five-star apartments, which Benjamin gathered was the guests' accommodation. To the right was a building that looked like something out of Silicon Valley. God knows what went on in there.

From the moment they stepped through the doors of the restored mansion, a hundred sets of eyes were on Benjamin and Tatyana. All of them silently assessing how much they were worth.

Clothes, hair and jewellery, shoes, watches and handbags, all of it was given the once over by the staff and guests alike. The price of every item was being mentally calculated. Brand labels spotted and judgements made. The scrutiny was that much more intense for how casually and thoroughly everyone indulged in it.

Benjamin acted as though he was slumming it just to be seen in the place. Tatyana tried her best to follow suit. Inwardly he recoiled from identifying with these people, Secretly he suspected this had a lot to do with wanting their acceptance as it did with despising them.

They checked in at the main desk and were shown through to a hospitality suite where a light buffet and drinks were laid on. The suite was in what would have been the mansion's old ballroom. It looked like something straight out of *Gone With the Wind*. Benjamin wondered what sort of infernal gatherings Mary Papamal had presided over here.

Waiting staff circulated with bottles of vintage wine as the other guests picked over the exotic buffet like carrion birds. Pecking orders were already being established as they sized each other up.

A grey haired man with rattlesnake skin boots and a Texas drawl was holding court.

"So I get into the lift with this lawyer and she says to me: 'Mr McKane, can I give you a blow job?' And I say: 'Okay, but what's in it for me?'"

"Oh Sam McKane, you're too much," said the platinum blonde from the plane.

"Yeah. Too much for *your* price bracket."

Benjamin and Tatyana helped themselves to braised Guinea Hen with truffles and sipped glasses of Dom Perignon. They acted as though no-one dared talk to them to hide the fact that no-one could be bothered to talk to them. Most likely because no-one knew who they were.

Benjamin was just wondering if this could be used to their advantage when the room fell silent. The staff had placed a small podium in the centre of the room. Samuel Palmer, the CEO of St Ignatius, stepped up to it. He was a tall man in his early forties with a long face and a completely bald head. He had penetrating brown eyes and a predatory smile. You couldn't miss his natural presence and the commanding aura of power he gave off.

"Esteemed guests," he said. "I am delighted to welcome you to St Ignatius. I can promise you this, the next few days will be the single most important time of your lives. You are on your way to joining the world's one true elite. Sure you're rich. Some of you even have a little influence. You wouldn't be here otherwise. But you're looking for something more, something bigger and something better. And why not? You deserve it. You've all proven that.

"You've come here to find that extra something. And you won't be disappointed. You know there's more to be had, and you're people with a lot of initiative. If there was another way to get hold of it, you would have found out about it. But there isn't. Only we hold the key to success beyond success. Only we can point you down the path to wealth beyond reason and power beyond excess.

"What we're offering is more than any human can take. So we're going to make you more than human. Then you can take more than anyone's fair share. You will walk where most others fear to go. Your feet will tread the Way of the Barefoot Zombie."

There was huge applause and whoops of excitement from the guests. They devoured his words like cash starved banks in a government bail out.

"Tomorrow we begin the work in earnest. Tonight I suggest you take advantage of our hospitality and unwind a little." Palmer raised his wine glass to the guests and they returned the gesture.

A palpable thrill ran round the room. There was intense expectation. A sense that everyone was about to be let in on one of the most powerful secrets in existence. That there was no other place in the world to be at that moment. That all the right people, and only the right people, were there.

A waitress moved past Benjamin, swerved to avoid another guest and bumped into Tatyana. She dropped the tray of half empty glasses she was carrying and they soaked Tatyana's shoes.

"I'm terribly sorry ma'am," the waitress said, kneeling to clear up the broken glass.

"That's quite alright. Here let me help you."

The room went quiet. Everyone turned to look at Benjamin and Tatyana. She'd broken a fundamental rule of conduct. You don't offer to help people who are paid to wait on you. Suddenly they began to suspect that it wasn't *only* the right people who were here.

Benjamin felt them circling. As though a room full of wolves had just discovered two sheep with the temerity to dress in their clothing.

He went cold. Sweat broke out on the back of his neck. Panic threatened to overwhelm him. They were going to be revealed. They'd only just got here and everything was falling apart. He had to do something. He had to do something right now.

Uncle Brian came to his rescue.

Benjamin emptied his glass over the waitress's head. "Yeah, let me help you bitch," he said and ~~threw the glass on the floor next to her. The waitress gasped. "Let me help you clean this up properly~~

He put his foot on the back of the waitress's neck and forced her face down into the broken glass and spilled alcohol. "You lick this shit up. Lick it up, because you're dumb and worthless and mopping the floor is the only thing your ugly face is good for."

He was channelling Brian now. Spitting out all the rage and disgust he'd seen his uncle heap on those beneath him. Had Brian been this frightened when he did it? Had he enjoyed it this much? Benjamin was disgusted with himself. Disgusted that it felt so good.

He looked up to see the other guests smiling with approval. A couple of them even applauded. He relaxed. Their cover wasn't blown. He'd passed the first test and they'd accepted him.

He belonged. They knew that now. But worst of all, so did he.

Tatyana was fixing her make up in the bathroom mirror. Applying another mask, creating another identity to hide behind.

Ironically it took her a lot longer to apply a little foundation, some mascara and lipstick than it did to apply all the make up she'd used as a Deathwalker. Then she'd been trying to make herself look like a walking corpse. Now she was trying to pass herself off as something even more hideous.

Benjamin came up behind her as she reached for some lip gloss. He put his hands on her hips and pulled her to him. She could feel his hard-on in the small of her back. He slid his hands around front and cupped her breasts.

"How about a little make up sex?"

She shrugged him off. "We don't have much time. We've got to be there at eight and I'm trying to fix my make up."

"That's what I'm trying to do. Fix us and make up. Shit, you're not still pissed about last night are you?"

"I'm not pissed, I'm just... I hated seeing you like that. I feel weird. Being around you right now brings up all kinds of memories."

"I'm not your father Tatyana."

"I know you're not."

She turned to face him. He was slumped against the polished marble wall. She thought about reaching out to him. Of maybe even dragging him onto the huge bed next door to make up. Then before she could stop herself she said: "But you did a pretty good impression of him last night."

Benjamin lost it. "Well I had to do something. They were on to us. You saw them. If I hadn't acted as quickly as I did we might have blown the whole thing. It's not my fault that you..."

"That I what?"

"Nothing."

"Go on say it. It's not your fault that I fucked up. That's what you think isn't it?"

Benjamin looked away. He stared at the floor and shrugged.

"Well, you did go to help that waitress. I mean what were you thinking? You know what these people are like. How they think and the way they treat staff. We're trying to blend in. To act and think like them, so they accept us as one of their own. I did what I did to look like one of them. To fit in. We've come too far to blow it all now."

Tatyana turned back to the mirror. She didn't want to look at herself so she gazed at the sink. "You're right," she said after a long pause. "It's just, well that wasn't *you* last night. And it scared me. It's a side of you I would never have guessed existed. And it did... well, it did bring back memories."

"I'm not your father."

"I know you're not, okay? You don't have to keep saying that. But that is just the sort of thing he would have done. And even now..."

"Even now what?"

"Look, I'm not accusing you, I'm not blaming you, but you sound just like him."

"Oh come on Tatyana!"

He was about to blow up again. She reached out and took hold of his hands. "Please, I'm trying to reach out here. I'm trying to explain how I feel."

"But saying that I sound just like him..."

"I'm not trying to pick a fight, but you *do*. That's exactly the sort of thing he used to say. 'You don't know the sort of people I have to mix with. I only do what I do to fit in with them'." Her light Russian accent became thicker as she impersonated her father. "That was always his excuse."

Benjamin let go of her hands and went to leave. She caught hold of his arm. "Wait. Look, we're both on edge. It's this place. It's doing things to us. ~~But you're right we have come too far to blow it all now~~ There's too much at stake. We need each other. Please, let's not fight. You did what you had to do and I can't help feeling the way I do about it. But I love you and I need you now more than ever."

Benjamin stood with his shoulders slumped, staring at the floor. He sighed. "Okay"

"Love me?"

"Always."

Tatyana smiled and kissed him on the cheek. "We've only got a few minutes before we're due in the lecture theatre. Can we take a rain-check on that make up sex?"

"You bet."

The lecture theatre was in the hi-tech annex on the other side of the mansion. Like everything else on St Ignatius it reeked of quality and taste. From the plush leather seating to the fully articulated screens around the stage, the attention to detail was flawless.

Tatyana wasn't the only one to be impressed. For all their sophistication, many of the other guests shot admiring glances at the facilities. Some caught each other's gaze and exchanged guilty smiles, although caught out for not being jaded enough.

One guest stood out from the others the minute she walked into the room. She was a tall, elegant African American wearing a traditional African dress. She appeared to glide rather than walk and there was something very noble in the way she carried herself.

Two course officials pursued her into the theatre.

"Excuse me Ms Chevalier," said one, he was out of breath.

"Call me Miriam,"

"I'm terribly sorry. But there's a strict dress code for these lectures."

"There's nothing wrong with what I'm wearing."

"You have to wear a suit," said the other official. "Or some type of formal business wear. It is course policy I'm afraid."

Miriam straightened her back and pushed her shoulders back. Her voice took on a strange, hollow quality. Like it came from somewhere far away. "I said there's nothing wrong with what I'm wearing, it's perfectly suitable for the occasion."

The body language of the two officials completely changed. Their faces relaxed and they seemed to be looking far into the distance, paying no attention to what was going on around them.

"There's nothing wrong with what you're wearing," said the first official, in a deadpan tone.

"It's perfectly fitting," said the other.

"Thank you," said Miriam and the two officials drifted away in a trance.

Miriam became aware that Tatyana was watching her and looked her right in the eye. Miriam seemed quite shocked that anyone had seen what had just taken place.

Tatyana smiled in a nervous but friendly way. Miriam did not return the smile. She appeared cross. Tatyana's head started to spin. Her vision blurred and she slumped against Benjamin, who helped her sit down.

"You okay?" he said. "What happened?"

"I'm not sure. I... I can't seem to remember."

"Look," said Benjamin, helping her back to her feet. "We'll go sit at the back okay? So we don't draw any attention."

"Okay,"

He guided her into a seat. For a moment or two she couldn't remember where she was, or what she was doing here. Then it all came back in a sudden jolt that made her gasp.

Several guests turned to look at her.

"She's okay," said Benjamin, with his best winning smile. "Too much celebrating last night."

The lights dimmed then, taking attention away from her.

Tatyana knew where she was now and why she was here. But for the life of her she couldn't remember getting to the lecture theatre. The last thing she remembered was the fight she had with Benjamin that morning. Everything after that was a blank.

A single spotlight picked out a glass podium that rose out of the stage floor. Samuel Palmer stepped up to it.

"Good morning," Palmer said. "I trust you enjoyed our hospitality last night? I know some of you

made very good use of it." Palmer smiled at this. A frightening smile that was more of a leer. The low chuckle that came from the audience was even more unsettling. Tatyana was thankful she'd gone to bed early.

"But that isn't what we're here to talk about. You're eager to meet the man behind this whole operation. How do I introduce a man like Doc Papa? I should probably turn to Shakespeare, because only the greatest writer in our language could do him justice. Shakespeare said: 'Some are born great some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them'. There aren't many people for whom all three of those are true. But Doc Papa is that rare exception. A man who has gained power and knowledge beyond human reckoning."

A low rumble of drums started in the background, pounding out Voodoo rhythms that built to a crescendo as Palmer said: "Ladies and Gentlemen I give you Doc Papa."

The sound of the drums filled the hall. Tatyana felt them reverberate deep within her. Her body's natural rhythms synchronised themselves to the beat.

As they did she felt something ancient and primal awaken inside her. Like a distant memory from time beyond recollection. It was as though there was another presence in her mind, whispering to her in a language she could neither hear nor understand. It felt alien from anything she'd encountered, but at the same time friendly and pure.

And then it was gone. It left like a lover withdrawing on the point of orgasm. She hadn't realised how intimate the presence was until it was gone. The lost memories of the last half hour flowed back into her mind in its place.

Before she had a chance to process the memories, two Haitian dancers entered the stage. A man and a woman, both dressed in traditional garb. The man carried a large boa constrictor on his shoulders. The woman had a long necklace of beads with seven rows in the colours of the rainbow. In one hand they both held a lit torch, in the other a bottle of rum. The six screens came together and began to show intricate symbols drawn on bare ground in white dust.

The drums got faster and the dancers became wilder and more frenetic. As the drums reached a rhythmic peak the dancers took a deep swig from the rum and then blew it in a fine spray at the torches.

The stage was shrouded by a curtain of flames. When they cleared, there stood Doc Papa. And as quickly and mysteriously as he seemed to have appeared, the dancers were gone.

Tatyana started when she saw him. As did everyone else. His mere presence seemed to have a physical impact on all of them. As though he had reached out and slapped or shaken them.

Tatyana could not take her eyes off him. She had never seen anyone with so much charisma. It emanated from him with all the force of an ocean breaking against the shore.

"Honneur la maison!" said Doc Papa in a rich deep voice that filled the hall. "Messieurs et Dames, bonsoir." He held his arms open and smiled so broadly that everyone felt honoured to be greeted by him. He was a tall, imposing man with the light brown complexion of a Creole. Though he carried a lot of weight he moved with such an assured grace that you hardly noticed it.

He wore a dark blue suit and a white silk shirt that fitted him so perfectly they probably cost more than an average person made in a year. Around his neck, on a golden chain, hung a rattle covered with a network of what looked snake vertebrae. That must be the asson that the chauffeur had told them about, Tatyana realised.

"Congratulations on becoming one of the true elite," Doc Papa said. "As a breed apart you are used to making good decisions. This is your best one yet. To walk with me along the Way of the Barefoot Zombie is to transcend your humanity. To become one of the masters, not one of the prey.

"Under my tutelage you will learn to use great powers. You may not realise it but you have already learned to use one of the prime magical systems of our age. I am talking about money.

"We in the Western world are not conditioned to think of money as magic. But that is what it is. I amassed a fortune in hedge funds before I realised this. Before I saw money for what it is. A spirit that mediates in the affairs of men. One that assures people reach agreement when buying and selling. One that decides who profits and who loses. A spirit that establishes the natural order of society, raising up some to great heights of power and laying others low.

"'Ah yes,' you might say to me. 'But that is not the way that money works. Money is not an immaterial spirit. It sits here in my wallet, it lies in my bank account and it pays for my homes.'" He took a hundred dollar bill from his pocket. "What is this note though? It is not the things you can buy with it. It is a promise to pay the bearer on demand an agreed sum. But what is the bearer being paid on demand? Where does this sum come from?"

"Anyone with even a pedestrian knowledge of banking will tell you that money is created with a push of a button every time some poor slob takes out a loan. That loan itself becomes an asset to be sold on by the bank.

"The price of the asset is based on the amount of interest the moron will be paying for the rest of his life. Yet any economist will tell you that this system of monetary creation is incapable of generating enough capital to repay any of this interest.

"Yet if the pathetic slob fails to repay the same interest that our economy is incapable of generating we come and take his car, his house and all of his dignity while we're at it. Because he failed to give back to us something that never existed in the first place. By taking the guy's house in lieu of the loan which as I've established never existed in the first place, the bank literally gets something for nothing.

"Smoke and mirrors, it's the ultimate conjuring trick, creating something out of nothing. Magic my friends. Magic pure and simple.

"Still don't believe me? Then let us look at what magic is. Consider Voodoo and the service of the Loa. What is the magical system that a Houngan uses? It is simply a means to impose his will upon the world using a series of symbols imbued with power through ritual and ceremony. A Houngan draws symbols called Vévés on the ground to conjure up the Loa, the spirits that will do his bidding.

"He then bargains with the Loa to impart power to the symbols he makes or draws on paper. How does he bargain? Through ritual and ceremony. A group of believers come together at a preordained place to act in a preordained manner in order to bring power to their symbols so that they can invisibly affect the world to their benefit.

"Now let us look at the stock market. Consider what happens when some klepto-communist gets elected leader of some third world country then starts to threaten land reform and nationalisation. The first thing we do on the stock market is speculate against their currency to drive down its value. Then when the country is on its knees with hyper inflation and spiralling unemployment, where does it turn but the IMF, desperate for a loan.

"The IMF agrees the loan on the condition that the country implements stringent economic measures. These of course will include abolishing minimum wage and mass privatisations, allowing Western companies to move in and snap up local resources at bargain prices.

"This has been accomplished many times from Latin America to South Africa without any show of force. How is this done? Quite simply, a group of people known as traders come together at a preordained place known as the stock market and act in a preordained manner. They do this to bring power to a group of symbols known as the currency index so that they can invisibly affect another nation's economy to their benefit.

"A hand is raised on a stock market floor. A series of symbols appear on a screen and a whole nation is placed in complete thrall to another. Magic plain and simple."

Doc Papa spread his arms wide and smiled. The audience were transfixed by his words.

"Like all magic however, money is purely a means to an ends and not, as many peasants believe, a

end in itself. Like all magic it also takes a little while to master, but with the right teacher you can use it to accomplish anything. To change the world in any way you want"

Tatyana felt a thrill run through the audience at the prospect of attaining such knowledge. They were sitting up in their seats, rapt with attention.

"Before you can change the world," said Doc Papa. "You have to change yourself. You have to shed the last vestiges of that enfeebling impediment we like to call our humanity. You must be reborn as something more than human. Something shorn of all the frailties and defects that confine the others to the common herd. Something a little like this..."

Doc Papa bent down and picked up a large metal ring that was attached to two heavy chains. The chains ran into two trapdoors that had opened in the stage. They were attached to two metal collars around the necks of two figures that rose up from inside the trapdoors.

Tatyana's felt a jolt of anticipation when she realised what they were. She turned to Benjamin. He grinned back with excitement and grabbed her hand. This was the reason they came to St Ignatius. For the first time they got to see the noble monsters they had travelled so far to save.

The figures were motionless. Their bodies were limp and their eyes lifeless. Their skin had the pallid texture of a corpse. Doc Papa clicked his fingers. With a shudder that ran the length of their bodies, the figures started to move.

Their nostrils started working first. They flared them like animals scenting the breeze. They bared their teeth and started to gnash them. Mouths that didn't look capable of eating showed a grim parody of hunger.

Their muscles began to twitch and twist their bodies into clumsy postures of menace. Both figures crouched low, then, with an unexpected burst of speed, they sprang at the audience.

Doc Papa yanked on the chains and they stopped just short of the front row. Their heads jerked about as they caught the scent of flesh. Like wild animals they snapped at the prey that was just out of reach.

Their decaying bodies could not accommodate the ferocity of their appetites. The violence of their actions strained the tendons and ligatures of their arms as they flailed and clawed at the living.

The skin across the cheek of one began to tear as the jaws worked ferociously. A loose tooth flew out of the ragged hole as its jaws clamped down on empty air.

The people in the front row scrambled out of their seats. While those in the back rows craned forward to get a better look. There was an intense excitement in the room. A grim fascination that came from witnessing a very real threat to their lives.

"Magnificent aren't they?" Doc Papa said as he tugged the chains they were straining at. "Look at how they thirst for your blood. How can you not admire that single minded sense of purpose? That hunger so great they would destroy their bodies just to feed it. Is there anyone here who thinks they would survive an encounter with them? Anyone care to brave it if I let one off the leash? No? I thought as much.

"What it is that makes them dangerous? Unlike them, your bodies work and your brains function? So why could they physically overcome any of you?

"Because they want it more. They are not confused by the things that inhibit you, like a conscience or social custom. Their hunger is raw and real and quite, quite perfect."

"Rete!," Doc Papa commanded. "Dans le nom des Gédés, Rete!" The figures dropped their arms to their sides and became perfectly still. "Isit." The figures turned their backs on the audience and walked towards him. At his signal they turned to face the audience once more, placid and still.

"If there are any among you who still doubt the existence of magic, look now upon the proof. I instilled that terrifying drive in them and I alone control it. You can instil it in yourselves without having to give up your lives as they have. That is what you came here to learn.

"It is this drive that I am referring to when I speak of your 'Inner Zombie'. It is the first of many powerful secrets you will discover when you walk in the footsteps of the Barefoot Zombie.——

"This is how you dominate the market and impose your will upon it. This is how you become its master, not one of the timid quislings who are prey to its fluctuations.

"Any decent economist will tell you that the market works best when it's free of government intervention or regulation. This is the nature of the beast you must tame. To take hold of it and make submit to your bidding, you must let go of anything that confines you. Any cloying weakness with which society has tied your hands. Once you have released your Inner Zombie you have the power to enslave the wildest of free markets.

"Before you can release your Inner Zombie and instil your own terrifying drive you have to encounter it. You have to meet it head on and find out what it is. You must discover what you are truly capable of being.

"These will be the first steps you take along the Way of the Barefoot Zombie. They will be the most terrifying and the most empowering thing you have ever done with your lives. You have spoken many times about 'making a killing on the markets' without once getting blood on your hands. It is time to learn what killing is really about.

"These two Zombies are far from the only two specimens here on the island. Any cheap necromancer can raise a couple of corpses and command them. I have created the world's first and only captive colony of Zombies.

"There has never been a better opportunity for studying the Zombie. For living with them, acting like them and learning to become one of them. That is what you are going to do over the coming weeks."

Once Doc Papa's lecture was over, the head Group Encounter leader came on and told them what to expect over the next few days. Tatyana's mind drifted off. She was far more interested in the half hour of memory she had suddenly lost and then regained.

That woman Miriam Chevalier was responsible. She'd done something to her mind. Tatyana was sure of it.

Tatyana looked over to where Miriam was seated. There was a strange, hazy field all around her. It was hard to look at Miriam and Tatyana's eyes kept wanting to slide away and look else where. This only intrigued Tatyana more, and she concentrated harder on looking at Miriam, fighting the impulse to look away and forget all about her.

Why had this woman reached into Tatyana's mind and taken away her memory? More importantly how had she done that?

Tatyana watched as Miriam stood and left her seat. Partly because of the field around her, and partly because everyone was paying attention to the stage, Miriam was able to slip away without anyone noticing.

Tatyana knew she had to follow. She slipped out of her seat and headed to the back of the theatre.

Unlike Miriam, she didn't have any field around her to deflect scrutiny. Several heads turned as she sneaked away. Tatyana tried her best not to catch anyone's eye.

Benjamin had gone on for ages about how important it was not to draw attention to themselves. She knew he was right. But she also knew this was more important.

Miriam turned her head, aware she was being followed. Tatyana bent down behind a row of chairs and pretended to adjust the Jimmy Choo shoes Benjamin had insisted she buy.

When she looked back up Miriam didn't seem to have spotted her. Tatyana had spotted something of interest though. Miriam's field left a ghost trail behind her. If she looked carefully, Tatyana could just catch sight of it out of the corner of her eye.

She slipped off the shoes so her heels didn't clatter on the floor. Then, acting on an instinct that surprised her, she chased after Miriam, stepping inside the ghost trail.

She had no idea why, but the trail lent her the same ability to deflect attention as Miriam's field. Not even Miriam noticed her so long as she stayed within it. This wasn't always easy though. The trail had a tendency to waft in and out of Miriam's footsteps as if an invisible breeze was blowing it. Tatyana had to side step quite a bit to stay inside it.

She followed Miriam out of the lecture theatre and around a corner into a corridor she hadn't seen before. Miriam raced along at a pace Tatyana found hard to match. Even at such speed she moved with a grace that was effortless.

Miriam opened a service door at the end of the long corridor and snuck through it. Tatyana ran to catch the door before it swung shut. The narrow passageway beyond wasn't as opulent as the rest of the annex. Bare pipes and electric wires ran along the unpainted concrete walls.

At the end of the passageway a metal staircase descended into a large service bay. Food goods and domestic products were stacked against concrete pillars in large polythene wrapped palettes.

Miriam moved through the bay onto a large walkway. At the end of this was a hi-tech security door with long corridors running off to the left and right. Miriam stopped at the door and took out a piece of red chalk. She drew several symbols on the wall around a card-swipe mechanism that looked like an electronic lock. The symbols looked similar to those she'd seen on the screens drawn in white powder.

Tatyana stood in the shadows and watched as Miriam prayed under her breath. She seemed to be in a trance. Miriam took out a card and ran it through the swipe on the wall.

The lights went out. Tatyana couldn't see a thing. She wedged herself into a corner as the sound of

running feet hurtled towards them.

"~~This is a restricted area Ma'am,~~" said a man's voice. "~~You just tripped the alarm. I'm going to have~~ to ask you to stand still with your hands on your head."

Two torch beams clicked on. Both beams were directed at Miriam and Tatyana could see the torches were mounted on the automatic weapons of two guards.

Tatyana was very nervous. She'd seen the guards all over the island. They tried to maintain a discreet presence in front of the guests but now they were pointing guns at a guest Tatyana had followed into a restricted area.

Way to go not calling attention to yourself, she thought.

The guards clicked off their night-vision goggles.

"You're not supposed to be down here Ma'am. Your life is in danger. Not just from us. There's an army of the undead on the other side of that door. I'm going to have to ask you to lie face down with your hands behind your back."

Instead of doing what the guards told her, Miriam looked up at the ceiling and began to mutter something in a whispered voice.

"Ma'am get on the floor please," said the guard, his tone more urgent now.

"On the floor Bitch! Now!" shouted the other guard, taking a step closer to her.

Tatyana's heart was pounding in her chest. She hardly dared breathe and one of her legs shook so hard she couldn't stop it. They were going to shoot her. Tatyana knew they were and Miriam wasn't doing a thing about it.

Tatyana closed her eyes and waited for the shot. She wished she wasn't an atheist. That she believed in anything enough to pray to it right now. She pictured a stained glass window of the Virgin Mary she'd once seen that had changed the way she felt about religion. It was the closest she'd ever come to having faith in something. She held the image in her mind like an invisible guardian and begged it to stop the guards finding her.

Instead of hearing a shot Tatyana felt a calm and loving presence all around her. Was this the Virgin Mary?

Don't worry, I won't let any harm befall those who love me.

Tatyana was confused. *But I'm an atheist,* she thought. The tone of the presence changed at this. It was still warm and loving but she could swear it was laughing. The same way her mother would laugh when, as a little girl, Tatyana had said something cute without realising it. Then the presence faded.

Tatyana looked around the corner and saw something even weirder. The guards weren't moving. They stood staring straight ahead without any expression.

Miriam was reaching her fingers out to the air either side of the guards' temples and coaxing what looked like a fine black mist out of their heads. Tatyana blinked and looked again, sure that she hadn't seen what she thought she was seeing.

But there it was. The black mist and Miriam's fingers. What was she doing to them? Why weren't they moving? Was that their memories Miriam was taking? Was that what Miriam had done to her earlier?

Before Tatyana could come to any conclusions, Miriam shook her hands and seemed to banish the memory mist. The guards didn't move as she walked past Tatyana and back down the walkway.

Tatyana watched her disappear into the darkness and then glanced back at the guards. They weren't even blinking.

She had no idea what had just happened, but she knew she had to get out of there quick.

It was already beginning to seem like a dream as she stumbled back down the walkway. She kept hoping she was going to wake up as she felt her way along the wall and tried to remember the way back in the pitch dark.

She couldn't repress the feeling that she'd just had an entirely different sort of awakening though.

"So, where did you go?"

"Oh you know, just around." She was deliberately being evasive. This set off all his old paranoia.

Benjamin had been trying to get Tatyana to talk about where she went since he found her up in the room hours later. He was curious what she saw when she skipped out. She seemed shaken and said she was tired, so he'd let her get some sleep without bothering her.

Now she'd had a good night's sleep he tried again, rolling over to hold her beneath the sheets of the king size bed.

"No I don't know," he said. "That's why I'm asking."

"Why is it so important to you?"

"Well for one thing you might have seen something that could be vital to our mission. Even the tiniest detail might have a significance you haven't realised yet. I can't understand why you don't want to tell me all about it."

"Look, I'm still processing it all okay. I'm not even sure what happened myself. I just need a bit of time."

"Won't it help to talk about it?"

"Can we just drop it please?" She reached under the covers and took him in her hand. "Maybe we could have that make up sex you've been promising me?"

He grew hard the minute she touched him but he couldn't keep the nagging suspicions out of his mind. "Is it because you were with someone you don't want me to know about? Did you sneak off with someone?"

"One of the guests you mean? Come on give me some credit."

"I did give you credit before remember, and look what happened then."

"Do you have to keep bringing that up? Can't you cut me a little slack and maybe just trust me for once?"

"How can I trust you when you won't talk to me?" He pushed her hand away and slid out of bed. "I'm going for a shower."

Tatyana rolled over and stared up at the ceiling with an angry sigh.

Benjamin punched the shower control and hurt his hand. The hot water relaxed him as he rubbed his sore fingers. He was more angry at himself than Tatyana. Partly because he'd just turned down the opportunity to have sex and partly because he hadn't gotten over that business with her old boyfriend.

It was stupid really. It had happened six months ago. They'd been going steady for a while when Tatyana told him she was going to see an old boyfriend who happened to be in town. He'd been perfectly cool with it at first. But there was something about the way she'd said the guy's name that kept eating away at him.

On the day in question he took Richard's Bentley and followed her. He knew it was stupid but he couldn't stop himself. He pulled up next to the park where she met the guy and kept tabs on them through field binoculars. He felt kind of creepy doing it and he had no idea what he'd say if some cop saw him.

Nothing happened for ages. They wandered about, chatted and ate ice cream. Then, just when Benjamin was feeling like a total putz and was about to slope off, they kissed. He nearly dropped his binoculars.

The guy moved in on her. They were laughing and she gave him a look that Benjamin knew all too well. The guy leaned in and she turned her head. He took her face in his hands, turned it to him and kissed her. They really went for it, tongues and everything.

Benjamin couldn't believe it. He was so mad he was shaking. He threw the binoculars on the floor

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