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Dark Justice

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1

Manhattan on a dark November evening around eight o'clock was bleak and uninviting, an east wind driving heavy rain before it, as Henry Morgan turned the corner of a side street into Park Avenue.

He was a small man wearing a dark blue uniform and cap with the legend 'Icon Security' emblazoned on each shoulder; in one hand was a black leather bag and the other held an umbrella over his head.

Park Avenue was hardly deserted at that hour, cars swishing by, although there were few pedestrians because of the rain. He turned into a convenient doorway for a moment and looked each way. It was a mixture of offices and residences, mostly impressive townhouses, lights at the

windows. He'd always loved cities by night and felt a sudden nostalgia, emotional of course, and he took a deep breath. After all, he'd come a long way for this, a long way, and here he was at the final end of things. Time to get on with it. He picked up the bag and stepped out.

A hundred yards further on he came to an office building no more than four storeys high, a building of some distinction to it, older than the adjacent buildings. There was discreet lighting on the ground floor, obviously for security. A sign in gold leaf on one of the windows said 'Gould & Company, Bank Depository' and indicated business hours from nine until four in the afternoon. He stepped into the arched entrance, peering through the armoured plate-glass door into the lighted foyer and pressed the buzzer for Chesney, only Chesney didn't come. Instead, a large black man wearing the same dark-blue uniform appeared and opened the door.

'Hey, you're late. Morgan, isn't it? The English guy? Chesney told me about you.'

Morgan stepped inside. The door closed noiselessly behind him. A bad start, but he'd have to make the best of it.

'I'm sorry. I always get Chesney coffee and sandwiches from a place round the corner.' He followed the other man through to the reception area. 'Where is he?'

'The way I heard it, his gall bladder's playing up again, so they rushed me over from South Street.'

'What do I call you?'

'Smith will do.' He sat behind the desk, took out a pack of Marlboros and lit one. 'A busy night out there, but at

least there are a couple of good movies on TV. So you're from London, they tell me?'

'That's right.'

'So what are you doing over here?'

'Oh, pastures new, you know how it is.'

'Lucky you got a green card.'

'Well, I'd been doing this kind of thing over there. It helped.'

Smith nodded. 'Anyway, let's see what you've got in that bag.' Morgan's stomach turned hollow and he hesitated. Smith reached for the bag. 'I'm starving, and what with them rushing me over here last minute, I had no chance to get anything.'

Morgan hurriedly pulled the bag up, put it on the desk, opened it, produced coffee and sandwiches and passed them over.

'What about you?' Smith asked.

'I'll have mine later. I'll do the rounds first.'

'Suit yourself.' Smith started to unwrap a sandwich.

'I'll get started then. I'll just drop my bag in the restroom.'

He moved to the other end of the foyer and did just that, then called to Smith, 'See you later.'

'Take your time.' Smith switched on the television and Morgan entered the lift and pressed the buttons that took him down to the vault.

He checked it thoroughly, giving what he'd put in the coffee time to work, although the effect was almost instantaneous and good for five hours, or so they'd told him. He trawled

the vault, hundreds of steel boxes behind bars, went back to the lift and ascended to the third floor.

It was all office accommodation, everything in good order, and it was the same when he went down to the second and then the first floor. Boring, really, to have to spend your working life doing this. But it would soon be over. He returned to the lift and went down.

Smith was slumped across the desk, out completely, the partly drunk coffee cup beside him. The sandwich had a couple of bites out of it, but that was all. Morgan shook him to make sure, then turned to the general security box and switched it off for the entire building. He went along to the washroom, retrieved his bag, got into the lift and went to the first floor.

When he went out he dimmed the lights and walked across to the window looking out over Park Avenue to the splendid townhouse on the other side, its many windows ablaze with lights. Parking had been banned for the whole block, and not just because it was owned by Senator Harvey Black.

Having switched off the entire alarm system, Morgan was able to open the control panel by the window without any unseemly fuss. He started to whistle softly, put the bag on the table, opened it and produced an AK-47, unfolded the stock, cocked it and laid it across the windowsill, checking his watch.

It was twenty to nine and the fundraiser at the Pierre would just be finishing. Senator Black would be bringing his honoured guest back to the house for dinner at nine o'clock.

Morgan took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, lit one

and sat there at the open window, cradling the AK-47 with every intention of shooting the President of the United States dead the moment he stepped out on the pavement.

Suddenly he heard the sound of the lift in operation below. For a moment he froze in a kind of panic, then jumped to his feet and turned to face the lift. It stopped and Smith stepped out, followed by a tall, handsome man of fifty or so, black hair greying.

'Why, Henry,' Smith said. 'What's all this? I didn't see anything about it in the job description.'

Morgan backed away, thinking hard.

There was a pause and the other man said, 'Mr Morgan, my name is Blake Johnson. I work for the President of the United States. This gentleman is Clancy Smith of the Secret Service. I regret to tell you that the President isn't coming tonight. Seems he cancelled the dinner at the last moment and flew back to Washington. So sorry.'

He stepped forward, and in a single motion Morgan raised the AK and fired at point-blank range – but only the rattle of the bolt sounded.

Smith said, 'Forgot to mention. I emptied it when you went down to the vault. And by the way – I never accept coffee from strangers.'

Morgan dropped the AK to the floor with a look of despair on his face. Johnson almost felt sorry for him.

'Hell, man, we got Saddam Hussein. Did you really think *you* could pull this off? Anything to say?'

'Yes,' Morgan said. 'Beware the wrath of Allah.'

He seemed to bite hard, his jaw tightening, then he staggered back, tripped and fell to the floor, moaning terribly, his face contorted. There was a strange, pungent smell as Smith dropped to one knee and peered closely at him. He glanced up. 'I don't know what in the hell that smell is, but this guy is dead.'

By special arrangement, Blake had the body removed by Army paramedics and conveyed to an exclusive private hospital used mainly for rehab patients. It did, however, offer state-of-the-art morgue facilities and he'd called in one of New York's finest chief medical examiners, Dr George Romano, to do the necessary.

He and Clancy had stopped off at their hotel so that Clancy could change out of the security uniform, and arrived at their destination a good hour after the corpse and found Romano in the Superintendent's office already garbed for action. He and Blake were old friends. Romano had done a lot of work for the Basement, the White House security organization that Johnson ran. Romano was drinking coffee and smoking.

'I thought that was against the law these days, especially for doctors.'

'Around here I make my own rules, Blake. Who's your friend?'

'Clancy Smith, Secret Service. He's taken a bullet for the President in the past. Fortunately nothing like that was needed tonight.'

'I've started on our friend, Mr Morgan. Just taking a break.'

'John Doe, if you don't mind,' Blake said.

'And what if I do?'

Blake turned to Clancy, who opened the briefcase he carried, took out a document and passed it across to the doctor.

'You'll notice that's addressed to one George Romano and signed by President Jake Cazalet. It's what's called a "Presidential warrant". It says you belong to the President, it transcends all our laws, and you can't even say no. You also never discuss what happened tonight, because it never happened.'

For once Romano wasn't smiling. 'That bad?' He shook his head. 'I should have known when I realized you'd given me a Heinrich Himmler.'

'What in the hell is that supposed to mean?' Clancy demanded.

'I'll go back in and show you if you can stand to watch.'

'I was in Vietnam and Clancy was in the Gulf. I think we can stand it,' Blake said.

'Excuse me, I was in 'Nam, too,' said Romano, 'and with all due respect, the Gulf War was pussy.'

'Yeah, well, Clancy here has got two Navy Crosses to prove otherwise,' Blake said. 'But let's get on with it.'

In the post-mortem room two technicians waited while Romano scrubbed up again. He was helped into surgical gloves and moved to the naked body of Henry Morgan, who lay on the slanting steel table, his head raised high on a

wooden block, the mouth gaping. Close at hand were a video recorder and an instrument cart.

Romano said, 'Wednesday, November 3rd, resuming post-mortem, Henry Morgan, address unknown.' He turned to Blake and Clancy. 'Come closer. Because of the unusual circumstances I decided to investigate the mouth first, and if you look closely you'll find a molar missing at the left side.'

He pulled the mouth open with a finger and disclosed the bloodied gap.

'And here it is, gents.' He picked up a small stainless steel pan and rattled the crushed remains of a tooth in it that was part gold. 'Heinrich Himmler, for the benefit of those too young to remember, was Reichsführer of the SS during the immortal days of the Third Reich. However, he was smart enough to know that all good things come to an end and didn't fancy the hangman's noose. So he had a false tooth fitted that contained a cyanide capsule. A number of Nazis did. Faced with capture, you crunch down as hard as you can. Death is virtually instantaneous.'

'So our friend here had no intention of being taken alive?'

'I'd say so. Now in spite of the fact that I suspect it will prove useless, I intend to complete my usual thorough examination. What, by the way, do you know about the guy?'

'The only thing I can tell you is that he's thirty years old. When can I have the body?'

'I'd say an hour should do it.'

'Good. I'll arrange transportation while we're waiting in the office, and George. . .' He pulled him away and murmured

softly, 'I don't mind the technicians having heard the Himmler bit, but nothing more. No comment. And bring the videotape when you're finished.'

'Yes, Oh Great One.'

Romano turned back to the task at hand and Blake and Clancy went out.

They sat in the Superintendent's office and Blake made a call on his codex mobile. It was answered almost instantly.

'Highgrove.'

'It's Blake Johnson. I phoned earlier about a disposal.'

'Of course, sir. We're ready and waiting.'

'You know where we are. The package will be ready in one hour.'

'We'll be there.'

'And I'll expect the disposal to be immediate.'

'Naturally.'

Blake switched off. 'Let's have some coffee.'

There was a pot standing ready in the machine. Clancy went and poured two cups. 'Not a thing on him. Swept clean. No ID, no passport, and yet he had to have one to get into the country.'

'Probably stashed it before he came here tonight. Everything else was likely forged. Came into the country posing as a tourist. A forged green card was supplied, a room booked for him in some modest hotel.'

'And the AK?'

'Could have been left for him in a locker anywhere. The job at the security agency could have been arranged for him

in advance. I'll bet he didn't even meet anyone from his organization here in New York.'

'But some outfit sent him from London.'

'Of course, otherwise why would he be here? They've probably got friends in New York who kept an anonymous eye on him, but preferred not to get involved.'

'I wouldn't blame them. It was a suicide mission,' Clancy said. 'Even if we hadn't gotten him now, he'd have been run down like a dog if the worst had happened.'

'Very probably. Now I must speak to the President.'

He found Cazalet at his desk in the Oval Office.

'Mr President, we got him. The whole thing was for real. He's dead, unfortunately.'

'That is unfortunate. Gunshot wound?'

'Cyanide.'

'Dear me. Where are you now?'

'The mortuary, waiting for the disposal team.'

'Fine. Take care of it, Blake. This never happened. I don't want it on the front page of the *New York Times*. I'll order a plane to pick up you and Clancy. I want you back here as soon as possible so we can sort things out.'

'Yes, Mr President.'

'And since it was our British cousins who alerted us to the existence of Morgan, you'd better telephone General Ferguson and let him know.'

In London it was four o'clock in the morning when the security phone rang at General Charles Ferguson's flat in

Cavendish Place. He switched on the bedside light and answered.

'At such an appalling hour, I can only assume this is of supreme importance.'

'It always is when it concerns the Empire, Charles.'

It was the codeword used to indicate the President in danger.

Ferguson was fully alert now and sat up. 'Blake, my good friend. What happened?'

'Your information on Henry Morgan was dead on. He tried to hit the President tonight, but Clancy and I stopped him. Unfortunately he had a cyanide tooth, so he's no longer with us.'

'Is the President all right?'

'Absolutely. As for Morgan, what's left of him will soon be six pounds of gray ash. I'll probably flush it down the toilet.'

'You're a hard man, Blake, harder than I believed possible.'

'It's the nature of the job, Charles, and the bastard did intend to assassinate the President. Anyway, thanks to you and the rest of the Prime Minister's private army, it's all come out fine. Thank them all for me: Hannah Bernstein, Sean Dillon and Major Roper.'

'Especially Roper on this one. The man's a genius on the computer.'

'Got to run, Charles. I'll be in touch.'

Blake put the phone down, and Romano entered carrying a videotape and several documents.

'Good man,' Blake said.

'Not really.' Romano lit a cigarette. 'I'm smart enough to know my place, that's all.'

Clancy had gone out to check the corridor and found two men in black coats pushing a gurney with a body bag on it.

One of them, a quietly cadaverous man, said, 'Mr Johnson?'

Blake leaned out of the office door. 'He's all ready and waiting for you. Load him on and we'll see you at Highgrove. Tell Mr Coffin to wait until we arrive.'

'As you say, sir.'

They moved away. Clancy said, 'Coffin? Is that for real?'

'If it's the man I know, it certainly is.' Romano smiled bleakly. 'Fergus Coffin. I believe it's called life imitating art.' At that moment the gurney returned with what was obviously Henry Morgan in the body bag. 'On your way now, gentlemen. I think I've had enough for one night.'

In the mortuary at Highgrove, Blake and Clancy waited by the ovens. Fergus Coffin and an attendant pushed the gurney forward, the body still enclosed in the black body bag.

Blake said, 'Open it.'

Coffin nodded and his associate unzipped it, exposing the head. Henry Morgan it was.

'He looks at peace,' Blake said.

'He would be, Mr Johnson,' Coffin told him. 'Death is a serious business. I've devoted my life to it.'

'No questions?'

'None. I've seen the Presidential warrant, but it's more

than that. You're a good man, Mr Johnson. Every instinct tells me that. You've known great sorrow.'

Blake, remembering a murdered wife, stiffened for a moment and then said, 'How long?'

'With the new technology, thirty minutes.'

'Then get on with it. Put him in, but I need to see.' He held out the documents and video. 'And these.'

The other man opened one of the oven doors, Coffin pushed the gurney forward, Henry Morgan slid inside. Coffin pulled the gurney away, the glass door closed, a button was pressed. The oven flared at once, the gas jets peaked and the body bag flared on the instant, along with the video and documents.

Blake turned to Clancy. 'We'll wait,' and led the way outside.

In the office they smoked cigarettes. Clancy said, 'You want coffee?'

'Not in a million years. A good stiff drink is what I need, but we'll have to wait until we're on the plane.'

Rain hammered against the window. Clancy said, 'Does it ever bother you, this kind of thing?'

'Clancy, I went to war for my country in Vietnam when I was very young and full of ideals. I never really regretted it. Someone had to do it. Now, all these years later, we're at war with the world – a world where global terrorism is the name of the game.' He stubbed out his cigarette in an ashtray. 'And Clancy, I'll do anything it takes. I took an oath to my President and I take that to be an oath to my country.' He smiled slightly. 'Does that give you a problem?'

And Clancy Smith, once the youngest sergeant major in the Marine Corps, smiled. 'Not in the slightest.'

At that moment the door opened and Coffin entered, holding a plastic urn. 'Henry Morgan, six pounds of grey ash.'

'Excellent,' Blake said, and Clancy took the urn.

'Many thanks,' Blake told Coffin. 'Believe me, you've never done anything more important.'

'I accept your word for that, Mr Johnson,' and Coffin went out.

'Let's go,' Blake said, and added, 'Bring the urn with you.'

He led the way out to the car park, where the rain poured down relentlessly. They walked to their limousine, which was parked by what, in season, would obviously be a flowerbed.

Blake said, 'I was going to put those ashes down the toilet, but let's be more civilized and do something for next year's flowers.'

'Good idea.'

Clancy unscrewed the top of the urn and poured the ashes over the flowerbed.

'I believe it's called strewing.'

'I don't care what it's called. Washington next, so let's catch that plane.'