

## Night Patrol

Picking a place near the cemetery to make the payoff was the other guy's idea, not Jimmy's. Jimmy clung to that, after it was all over. He hadn't been the one to be unprofessional. It was that fool who thought being quiet about business meant being out on the streets at night near a place that the cops kept an eye on. Fool was probably sampling his own merchandise. Always a risk, in this business.

What made it so stupid was that Fool -- having picked the spot himself -- was now all scared of it. Jimmy wasn't afraid of the night, or the cemetery. Zombies were just for movies, just like ninja and cops who could move quietly in the dark. What Jimmy was afraid of, at least inside where nobody could see, was time. The longer he spent out here watching Fool be stupid, the better the chance there was something that could go wrong. All he wanted to do was to hand over the damn money so he could get the damn drugs. Jimmy was up too late, and he didn't like to sleep in when he could be out there earning.

But this was the business he was in. And Fool too, dammit. The knucklehead was now staring out down the

street, all pop-eyed. Fool looked back at Jimmy and said -- he actually **said** -- “Shh! You hear something?”

Jimmy prided himself on never losing his cool on the job. But he was tempted, right now. “Yeah. I hear the city. Can we get on with this? I have places to be.” Mostly his bed, at this point.

“Wait! There it goes again!”

“Then open the trunk and give me my shit, then we can both go somewhere safer.” Jimmy carefully did not add that he’d made a snap decision to never work with Fool again. Let somebody else on that side of business make the next trade with him. This guy was too much a pain in the ass.

It was at this moment that, with no real warning, the flickering street light bulb above them both suddenly flared and broke. Jimmy admitted to himself that, yeah, that was freaky. Freaky enough that he checked for his gun -- and, yeah, of course Fool had already pulled out a fucking Mac-10 and was waving it around. Because that was going to help with the meet. Hell, the meet just got canceled; something came whistling through the air and

took out the next streetlight down. So Fool went ahead and fired wildly back.

Jimmy paused, almost open-mouthed, for a moment as he processed the way that a perfectly normal bulk purchase of narcotics had gone bad, so quickly. Then he ran to his own car, which had the keys in the ignition and the door slightly open. This was not his problem, and whatever was happening to Fool (whatever it was, Fool got off two more bursts, and then Jimmy heard the unmistakable sound of a body being slammed into the car) was definitely not worth looking backwards for. Time to run, time to drive, time to get away -- and that's when Jimmy felt somebody grab him, swing him around by the arm, and throw him against the fence to the the cemetery.

Things got a little vague after that.

When Jimmy came to, well, everything hurt but nothing was probably broken. That was good. But he was zip-tied to the cemetery fence, which was bad; and Fool was hanging, upside down, from a street lamp. That was worse, because Fool was still obviously alive and yelling his head off. In the distance Jimmy could hear faint police sirens, which was the worst of all -- no, wait, Fool still had the drugs. That was something, considering that both of

them were still tied up by some crazy guy. Which was, all right, bad, but things weren't really bad yet.

A voice from the shadows interrupted Jimmy's tightly controlled inner monologue. "You're harder than the other one. Tougher to scare."

"Let me go and you'll see who's scared." The voice actually *laughed* at that. Jimmy didn't like that laugh. It was the kind of laugh that had muscles backing it up.

"You're lucky. If up to me, I'd break both your arms as a warning. But someone important to us" -- *Us?*, thought Jimmy confusedly -- "was buried over there today. He was a good man. A decent man. He wouldn't like it if I hurt you. He'd want me to tell you, give up your life of crime. Become a responsible citizen." The voice now had a shadow associated with it. The shape of that did not make Jimmy any happier. "So, **Citizen**: don't commit crimes here. We watch over this place now."

The shadow moved inexorably to Jimmy. "If I see you here again, or your friends, you will know real pain." Was the shadow really just a man, Jimmy thought? Or was it some sort of thing that only walked like a man? "Not believing in us won't help you. Nothing will help you. Here, we are the

Darkness and the Night.” The shadow was almost looming over Jimmy, now.

Jimmy’s voice trembled for the first time that night. “Who... who are you?”

“You know who I am, *Jimmy*.” The shadow leaned forward, its face finally visible. Or perhaps ‘their’ face; they flickered in and out of focus. The only constant was the mask and the absolutely white, absolutely merciless eyes. Something grimy, deep inside Jimmy’s head yet not really part of it, recoiled, then started shrieking at the sight of a Presence that it had been *promised* did not exist in this world.

“I’m Batman.”

*In Memoriam*, Adam West (1928-2017)

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