

DEBT PAID, IN BLOOD

Did you change your face again?
Those of us who loved you when can't even find you.
Are your lips still lily white?
Do they still bloom just at night and die at sunrise?
—"Wysteria"—

Steed pushed the files across the table. "Five murders in a two week period. Notice anything unusual?"

Purdey finished touching up her makeup and put her pocket mirror back on the table. She picked up the file, opened it, and closed it again just as quickly. "What wonderful color photos." She looked up at Steed. "Were all the bodies mutilated?"

Steed nodded. "That's one of the two reasons why we've connected them."

"And the other reason?"

The man sitting across from her smirked and leaned back in his chair. He had dark hair, dark eyes, and an air of superiority. "No blood," said Gambit.

"What?" Her blue eyes opened wide.

"Look at the pictures again." Gambit tossed her the file.

Purdey flipped through the photos. "You're right, there's no blood to be seen."

Steed dropped another file on the table.

"Number six?" asked Gambit.

"And this one's our problem," explained Steed. "Carl Williams was assigned to this case a week ago. His body was found this afternoon, the same as the others."

Purdey pulled a piece of paper from the file. "And this?"

"The only clue found on him."

She handed the torn piece of notebook paper to Gambit. "Crosswell," he read. "Who's that?"

Steed leaned on the table. "We don't know. But we're going to find out."

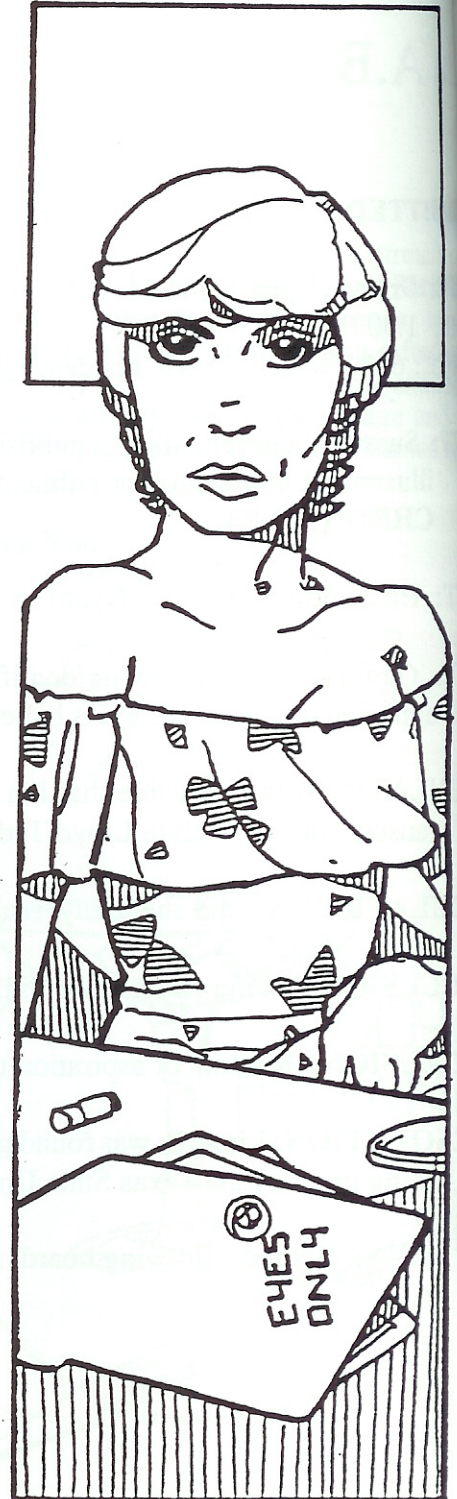
"And this is a code one priority?" asked Purdey in dismay. She patted her short blond hair. "I was planning a night out."

"I'm sorry to have to interrupt your social life," said Steed pleasantly. "But I received a call from someone about the case. She'll be here any minute." He pulled a watch from his pocket and opened it.

"I'm here now, Mr. Steed."

Gambit caught himself and tilted his chair upright, while Purdey merely jumped. But Steed seemed more surprised than the others. He took an involuntary step forward, then stopped and resumed his composure.

The woman at the door was dressed in a long, green sequined evening gown, more appropriate for formal wear than a murder briefing. She seemed contrite as she breezed into the sitting room, her waist length black hair framing her face and making her seem almost pale. "I hope you don't mind. You did tell me to come right in when we spoke on the



phone...."

"No, it's all right. Purdey, Gambit, this is Miss Karen Glass. Miss Glass, this is Purdey and Mike Gambit, my associates."

She shook their hands and motioned Gambit back to his seat. "Please, call me Karen. I'm pleased to meet you, though I wish it were under better circumstances."

Gambit smiled at her, immediately sizing her up. "We were hoping you could shed some light on the problem."

Karen took the chair Steed offered her, then leaned on the table, steepling her fingers. "Yes, a most horrible series of events."

"I'm surprised that you know of them," noted Purdey. "There was nothing in the papers."

"True." Karen nodded slightly. "I expect such things from these people. I merely called your Ministry and told them that I had some information on some recent mutilation murders. They connected me to Mr. Steed. As for your murderers, I've been following them for some time. If you knew the number of bodies they leave behind them...." She shook her head sadly. "They will remove any obstacle to reach their goal."

"Which is?" asked Steed.

"They're a reactionary group." Karen smiled slightly, as though she found her explanation amusing. "They believe that they and their kind are destined to rule the world and they'll do anything to further that end."

"Racists?" asked Purdey. "Or nationalists? A religious cult?"

"They have no geographic ties, no national similarities, no common religious background...it is their way of life that draws them together." She shrugged. "I'm afraid that's the best I can do."

Gambit frowned and picked up the files again. "Then why were these people murdered? Different occupations, nothing in common...."

"I-I don't know." Karen's eyes darkened. "That's why I came to you. I thought we might pool our resources. Because of...other duties I cannot work during the day. It limits my options, especially since these people are most vulnerable during that time. I'm free after dark, though, if you should need me."

Steed smiled at her. "We'll be glad to have your help. Perhaps we could each follow a different lead."

"If someone would check the local shipping offices, they often travel with large boxes. I followed them here through the last shipment, but lost track of the destination."

"I'll check that first thing tomorrow," offered Gambit.

"I'll see if there's anything we missed in here." Purdey started stacking the files. Karen moved to help her, but knocked her pocket mirror on the floor, where it shattered.

"I am sorry. Please, allow me to replace it."

"Don't bother." Purdey sighed. "I'll clean it up later."

"Miss Glass, Karen...do you have any idea what this might mean?" Gambit handed her the slip of paper.

"Crosswell...." She paused. "I've heard the name, but a long time ago. Steed?" She stopped, horrified. "I'm sorry...Mister Steed."



"Quite all right."

Karen nodded and rose. "If you will excuse me."

Steed watched her cross the room. "Karenina?" he asked quietly.

Karen froze at the door. She didn't turn, but her back stiffened. "My name is Karen."

"Yes, I'm sorry," apologized Steed. "It's just that I knew someone named Karenina, Karenina Bosov." He walked across to her and she turned to face him. "The resemblance is striking. She was a very beautiful woman."

She smiled. "I thank you for the compliment. I'm sorry that I can't say I know of her." She cleared her throat, then nodded toward the others. "I will return tomorrow evening. Good night."

"And what was that about?" asked Purdey, after Karen had left.

"I'm not certain." Steed walked back across the room and sat down in a wing chair. "Karenina Bosov was an agent. She worked for us almost twenty five years ago."

Gambit stretched. "So?"

"She and another agent disappeared while on a mission in Rumania."

"A double agent?" asked Purdey.

Steed shook his head. "No, I don't think so. She wasn't capable of it." He stood up, then headed for the window. "Neither of them was. It just so happens that Karen could be her twin."

"Or...her daughter."

Steed turned and looked at Purdey, then smiled. "True."

Purdey gathered up the pieces of her mirror. "What case was she working on when she disappeared?"

"Oh, a series of disappearances." He stared at the files on the table. "Mutilation murders."

Gambit walked carefully around the maps that blanketed the room and perched himself upon the arm of a chair. "Planning a reconnaissance mission or a bank job?"

Purdey looked up from the floor and smiled. "Neither. Maybe a plan of attack, though. Did you know that every victim except Williams was related to a government bigwig?"

"No. Has that got anything to do with it?"

"I'm not sure...yet."

Gambit stood up and pulled a dart from a map on the wall, then tossed it back into position. Purdey rose angrily. "Don't touch that! I've spent all morning setting those up."

"Sorry," answered Gambit, none too contritely. "Just what are you doing?"

Purdey waved her hand at the dart-covered area. "I'm trying to pinpoint the next victim. If I can find some sort of pattern on that map, I can check on possible victims."

"That's too much effort." He started out of the room and called back. "I know who the next victim will be...."

"Who?" called Purdey anxiously.

Gambit leaned back around the doorsill. "You."

"Me?"

"You, if you don't get this place cleaned up by the time Steed gets back."

Purdey answered by tossing a dart, which embedded itself in the doorsill, just beneath Gambit's hand. Gambit pulled out the dart and dropped it on the floor. "You shouldn't play with sharp things. You might hurt yourself."

"Or someone else," said Purdey sweetly.

"Exactly." He smiled. "Oh, and tell Steed I'm checking out a warehouse. It's owned by a fellow named Lang, I believe."

"Right." Purdey stared down at the mess in dismay. "Would you help me clean this up? Gambit? Mike Gambit...you come back here!" She raced for the door, but he was already gone.

The warehouse was large, dark, and decrepit. It took twenty minutes of hefting around boxes before Gambit found the large oblong ones he wanted, and then they were filled with nothing but dirt.

He sat down on an empty box in disgust. Still, he had known drugs and chemicals to be smuggled in that way before. If the boxes weren't picked up, they'd be shipped back the next morning for non-payment. He had a feeling the owner, or owners, would collect them that night.

He intended to make it a difficult collection.

Karen swept into the room just as Purdey pulled the last dart from the wall. Her maps were neatly stacked and noted.

"Any luck?" asked Karen.

Purdey ran her hand through her short blond hair. "Some. I think I might have a pretty good idea of who the next target might be. And you?"

"Nothing. I can't connect the name with a face or a place. It's haunting me." She frowned and dropped into a chair.

"Well, Steed should be back any minute now."

"And...Gambit?"

Purdey frowned at the note of interest in Karen's voice. "Gambit's checking out a warehouse."

Karen sat up. "Which one?"

"I don't know the address. He mentioned the name Lang, though. Why?"

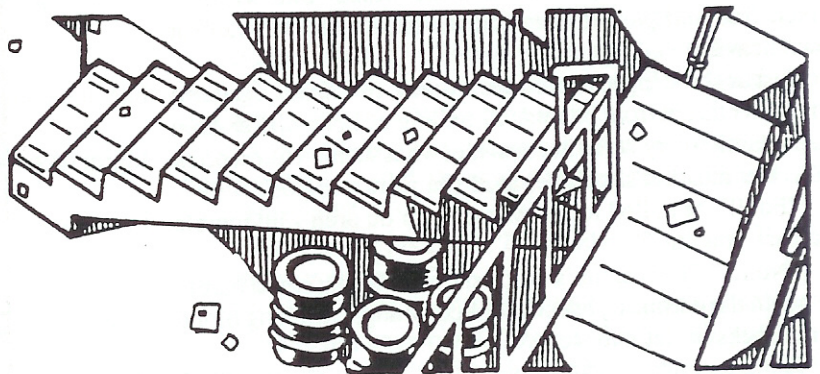
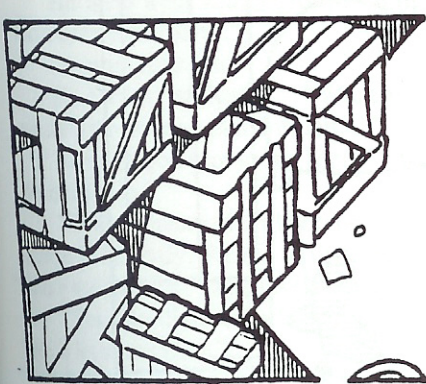
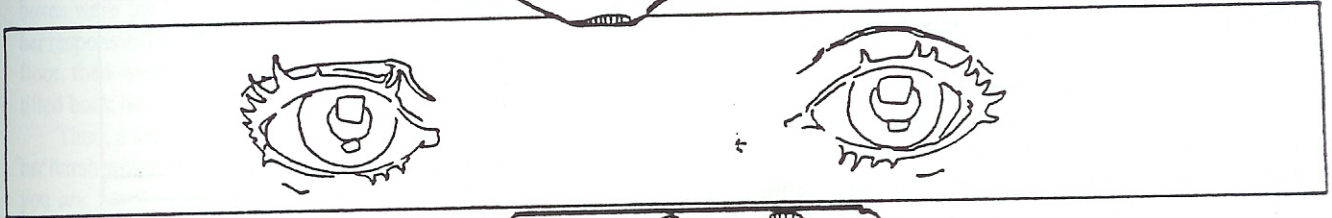
"He'll need help," called Karen, racing to the door.

"I don't think he'll appreciate it. You don't know Gambit."

Karen paused. "And you don't know what you're up against!" She ran from the room.

Gambit yawned. For two hours there had been no sign of trouble. He was beginning to think his guess had been wrong. Then, he heard the door creak.

Silently, he stood up, gun in hand, and flicked on the lights. "Surprise! Hold still and we'll have no trouble. Drop



it!"

The gun that had appeared in the man's hand fell to the floor. Gambit shifted his own gun and watched the man flinch. The other intruder, a woman, was a cool one. She simply smiled and muttered something under her breath.

Gambit shook his head to clear it. Her eyes seemed to bore right through him. He felt isolated, separate from the scene around him.

The pair moved closer. He tried to raise the gun, but his muscles wouldn't respond.

"Drop it," said the woman. Her hair was dark and curly, her eyes were green and very large.

Gambit fought it, but found that he had to obey her. The gun fell from his hand.

She smiled. "Do you see, Edwin, how easy it is?"

Edwin laughed and picked up the gun. His finger on the trigger, he pointed it at Gambit's chest.

The woman slapped him across the face, sending him spinning across the room. "No, he's mine! I'm feeling...weak again."

"First we pick up the boxes, Adela."

She spun to face him. "We can do that later. I'm in charge, don't order me about!"

Edwin shrugged and got to his feet. "Jackson said...."

"I know what Jackson said!"

Raising the gun, Edwin struck Gambit on the side of the head before Adela could move. Adela stepped back, snarling, as the body hit the floor. "All right," she said softly. "First we move the boxes...."

Purdey paced beneath the window. Steed had called. He'd arrive at any second. And he agreed that Mr. Huxford was a likely target; he lived alone within the target area and had a brother in the Home Office.

The bushes rustled. Purdey made her way over to them, but there was nothing there. Then, a scream came from the upstairs window. She sprinted for the trellis and was halfway up it when a huge dog jumped through the window. Purdey brushed off the glass and dropped to the ground, only to be faced by the vicious animal.

Someone grabbed her around the waist. She wrestled herself free and pushed her attacker back. The woman sat down heavily.

Just as she stepped toward the woman, two hands tightened around her throat from behind. She elbowed her attacker, then was instantly sorry when her arm met what seemed like a brick wall. Her attacker shook her as if she were a rag doll.

"Fool!" he called to the woman. "You aren't invincible yet. Are you hurt?"

"No...." The woman's voice shook. Purdey could barely see her in the darkness, but she looked young, with long blond hair. "Jackson, let's leave...."

Jackson paused. "There is someone nearby. Go, quickly."

The next thing she knew, Purdey was hurtling toward the brick wall, unable to stop herself. Instinctively, she curled up,



but it didn't help. She hit the wall and fell into darkness.

Steed heard no more than the scream and a crash. He started to run after the woman and the large dog running from the scene, then he caught sight of Purdey. Stunned, he stopped, then hurried toward her.

With a sigh of relief, he turned her over. She was unconscious, but she was alive.

Adela stood in the open doorway of the warehouse. The boxes were loaded, Jackson couldn't accuse her of shirking her responsibility. She glanced down at Gambit's body on the floor, then walked over to it. Carefully, she knelt down and tilted back his neck.

Then, a shadow fell across her. She looked up, readying her harsh words for Edwin, then choked in surprise. "You! So you *are* here! Jackson thought that we'd destroyed you in Vienna."

"I'm alive," said Karen softly. It had taken her most of the night to track down the warehouse, she hoped that she had not taken too long. She motioned with her hand. "Leave that man alone, if you value your life!"

Edwin stepped out of the shadows. "We can take her," he said eagerly, gun in hand.

"No!" Adela rose and put her hand out to stop him. "She's playing with words. She lives only as I do."

Edwin's smile faded and the gun shook in his hand. "Bargain with her. Ask her to let us go."

"Are all of your followers cowards," laughed Karen. She stepped forward.

Adela paused near Gambit. "Don't come closer or he'll be mine." She smiled, displaying sharply pointed canines.

"Leave now!" Karen waved her arm toward the door. "I'll trade him for your escape. But if you've touched him...."

"He hasn't been marked." Adela ignored Edwin's sigh of relief and licked her lips.

"Then go!" She stood aside as Edwin and Adela ran past, then knelt to check Gambit. She touched his neck gently, nodding when she saw no marks. "Wake up, Mr. Gambit." Karen muttered something under her breath and watched him sit up dizzily.

His hand went straight to the bump on his head. "Must have been some party."

"Almost your last."

He blinked at Karen. "What're you doing here and where's the others...that woman...."

Karen helped him to his feet. "I thought that you might need the help."

The door slammed shut behind them and bolts were drawn across it. Instantly, she ran to the door and pounded on it. "Is there another exit?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes...No. Sorry, that's it. Lang should be here by eight. He'll let us out then."

Seating herself on a box, Karen dropped her head in her hands. It was almost dawn. And her 'friends' had obviously

taken their 'boxes' with them. "Ah, Mr. Gambit, that will be too late for me, I think."

He leaned down and put his arm around her shoulder. "Call me Mike. And don't think so loud."

"Sorry, mild hysteria." Karen smiled up at him. "You remind me of someone...a long time ago, a very long time ago...." Her smile faded. "I'm sorry, back to the business at hand."

Gambit picked up a crowbar, then moved to the door. She went to help him and together they tried to bend back the bolt, but failed. The door did open slightly, allowing a thin shaft of light to enter the room.

Karen shivered and moved back. He looked up. "Are you all right?"

"No, I'm not. Please, open the door!" She shivered again, her voice rose in pitch. "It's almost time."

"Time? Time for what?"

She grabbed his arm. "What do you remember of Adela and her friend?"

"Not much," he admitted. "It was almost like a dream...."

"Believe it or not, I saved your life. As you know it, anyway. If you can open that door in ten minutes, you'll save mine." She stared up into his dark eyes. "If not, I'm dust, and you don't know how literally."

He paused, studying her face, then silently picked up the crowbar and attacked the door again. The door began to splinter, but the bolt still held. Dropping the crowbar, he decided upon a less subtle approach and ran full tilt at the door. The battered wood gave way and he fell out into the dirt. Almost immediately, Karen was beside him.

"Keys?"

He reached into his pocket and tossed her the key. She ran straight to the car and started the engine. Before he could get up, she had pulled away. "Tonight, at Steed's....," she called.

"Wait! That's my...car...." He stood and watched the car drive off, then turned to survey the damage to the door. Doggedly, he started off in search of a phone.

Purdey felt like she'd been hit by a truck. She groaned, tried to turn over, and fell off the couch.

"Oh, so you're back," said Steed pleasantly. He set down the tray he was carrying. "How do you feel?"

Purdey winced. "Would you really like to know?" She shot up suddenly, but her muscles forced her to sink back against the couch. "What time is it?"

"Almost four. The doctor said that you'd have a slight bump and that's all." He sipped his tea, but still watched her.

"Huxford?"

He put down his cup. "Dead, like the others. I've been looking at your maps."

"A lot of good they'll do us now," moaned Purdey.

"We're not beaten yet. Look at this...." He pulled out a map, then indicated the lines he had drawn though each of the spots she had marked previously. They all converged at one point.

"And what's that?" asked Purdey.

"There was no listing in any of the directories. I checked that area last night. It's an old cemetery that hasn't been used for years. Crosswell Cemetery."

"Then it's a place, not a person?"

Steed rose. "Exactly. I'd like to check it out now, if you're up to it. And I'd like to get there before sundown."

She tried to stand, then accepted his hand gratefully. "Why sundown?"

"There's a hunch I want to check on. Mike may be late. He said he'll be back here tonight, any minute in fact. We could wait for him...."

"No, I'm up to it."

"Good girl. I'll leave him a note." He picked up a piece of paper, then hunted around in his pocket for a pen.

"I just wish you weren't being so mysterious," sighed Purdey. She walked into the hall, then returned a minute later. "Mike's car is out front."

Steed finished his note with a flourish. "Yes, it was dropped off today. They found it downtown." He smiled. "I'd say he had a rough night of it as well."

She paused to pick up the map, but he passed her and went into the hallway. "Better hurry," Steed called. "The sun sets in a half hour."

Purdey dropped the map beside the note, then headed for the door.

Gambit threw a few bills at the cabbie, then ran into the house. The note and the map on the table caught his attention and he picked them up. Scanning the note, he headed straight for the door and nearly collided with Karen.

"Nice move you made, taking my car." He threw the papers at her, then headed out the door.

She followed. "I'm sorry, Mike, but it was a life or death situation." Karen glanced down at the note in her hand. "Crosswell! How stupid can I be?" She paused on the front steps, frowning.

"Come on, they'll be waiting for us."

"I hope not." Karen started down the steps, toward the car. "The sun's down. They're in danger now." She bit her lip. "Steed, you're a foolish man. You always were...."

"What?" asked Gambit.

"Nothing." Karen opened the car door and slid into the seat. Just as Gambit started the car, she flung her door open and threw herself to the ground.

Gambit vaulted over the hood of the car to reach her. He leaned down. "What happened?"

"That smell," she said weakly. "Why did you put it there?" She looked up at him with wounded eyes. "Don't you trust me?"

Reaching in, Gambit pulled a wreath of garlic from the dashboard, then looked at the note attached. "Steed. He says it's for my protection. Protection?"

Karen stood and backed away. "Throw it away! No, better yet, keep it. You may need it tonight."

"What are you talking about?" asked Gambit, heading toward her.

"Keep the garlic in the car." She waved him back. "You have the map, hurry! I'll meet you there."

"But...?"

"GO! Steed and Purdey may already be dead." She met his eyes. "Or...worse."

Gambit grumbled as he walked around the car and slid behind the wheel. Shaking his head, he looked into his rearview and noticed that Karen was gone. Quickly, he glanced over his shoulder, but she was still standing in the driveway. He decided not to think about it.

They walked cautiously through the silent graveyard. Purdey pulled out her gun, but Steed caught her arm. "Put it away," he whispered. "It won't do much good."

"Quite right," said a tall man, standing some distance away. Instantly, Purdey recognized him as the man called Jackson. "Those toys won't harm us," he continued. Two women and a man moved out of the shadows and stood near him.

"Get rid of them," said Adela disdainfully. "We have work to do."

Jackson shot her a glance, then started toward Steed and Purdey. Suddenly, he stopped, staring beyond them. "No, it can't be!"

Steed whirled, only to find Karen standing behind him. She shook her head at him. "John, it was foolish to come here. And then denying my help...."

"I couldn't be certain," said Steed, calmly.

Edwin lunged for Purdey's gun, which went off and struck the woman who had been standing next to him. She fell, but Edwin was too busy grappling with Purdey for the gun to notice.

Moving past Steed, Karen readied herself to meet Adela and Jackson. She became a hellcat, knocking Adela to the ground with a kick, then exchanging blows with Jackson. Trying to help, Steed stepped forward, but Karen pushed him back. Jackson saw his opportunity and knocked Karen to the ground. He held her there while Adela raised a wooden stake over her.

Steed scrambled to his feet. The woman who had been shot lunged at him with a knife, but he deftly avoided her and dropped her to the ground with a strike at the back of her neck.

Without warning, Gambit appeared. Passing Steed, he tried to wrest the stake from Adela. She lifted him into the air and tossed him, dropping the stake to the ground. Then, she started after Gambit.

Jackson looked up and screamed for Adela, as Karen twisted away from him. She grabbed the stake and plunged it upward, into his heart. An unearthly howl broke the air, then he crumbled into dust around her.

Dropping his hand to his pocket, Steed caught Adela before she reached Gambit and hit her with his clenched fist. Surprised, she staggered backward, then began to run. Karen

caught his arm. "John, get them out of here, now! I've got a core to settle with her."

"You're certain?"

"Very," hissed Karen. Adela turned back at the hiss, then began to run faster. Karen sprinted after her.

Gambit rose unsteadily and moved to join Karen, but Steed stopped him. "She'll be killed," whispered Gambit, watching the fleeing pair over his shoulder.

"No." Steed shook his head slightly. "We left Purdey on her own, remember?"

Purdey, however, stood alone on the battlefield. Edwin and the other woman were sprawled on the ground at her feet. "Where's Karen?"

Another howl broke the night, but this one was more like a scream than the last. They waited but there was no further sound.

Steed stared out over the graveyard. "Gone, perhaps."

"What were they?" asked Gambit.

Purdey shivered. "They were horrible. Reminded me of an old horror movie.

"They were old horrors," said Steed. "Undead creatures, osferatu, vampires...so many names for that evil."

"Vampires?" laughed Gambit. "Come on now, you're saying those things really exist?"

There was an animal howl in the distance, a wild and victorious howl.

Steed smiled. "No, of course not. This is a rational world. Such things couldn't exist, could they?"

Gambit looked at Purdey. She merely shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

Gambit opened the door to his apartment, not entirely surprised. "Hello, Karen."

"Hello, Mike." She smiled and pushed back her hair. "I just came to say goodbye."

"Come in." He moved aside. "Would you like a drink?"

She walked in tentatively, as if passing through a veil. He closed the door behind her as she shook her head. "I don't drink."

"Why *did* you come?" he said softly.

"Like I said, to say.... No, I suppose not." She looked into his eyes, as if searching for something. "You won't buy that, will you?"

"No, I won't."

"I didn't think so." She looked away. "You remind me of someone. I wanted to see if.... No, I suppose not." She smiled faintly, then reached for the door. "I-I'm sorry to have bothered you."

He grabbed her wrist, pulling her closer. "To see if that...?"

"Mike, no! You don't know what I am!"

He smiled. "And you don't know what I am. We're even."

She laughed, showing flawlessly sharpened canines. "Yes, I think I do. I like you too much to love you, Mike. Don't ask

me to."

He shrugged, then leaned toward her. "For friendship's sake?" he whispered.

"Why not?" She kissed him.

She took the stairs down and headed for the front door. Oblivious to everything but her own thoughts, she nearly collided with Steed.

"John!"

"Hello, Karenina." He pulled a picture from his pocket and studied it. "You've changed hair styles, but that's all. I took this picture three days before you and Matthew disappeared. You walked out of my life. I thought forever." He looked at her sternly. "What happened?"

She paused, studying him. "You met part of the reason tonight. Matthew and I tracked the disappearances down to Adela. Then she...made Matthew into one of them. When she was through with him, she killed him. Adela locked him out of his...it was daylight." She turned around. "I couldn't do anything to save him!"

"I'm more than sorry." Steed touched her shoulder. "He was a good friend, as well as a worthy rival. And...you?"

Karenina cleared her throat. "Adela left. She didn't care about me, knew I couldn't hurt her and knew that she couldn't do anything more than what she'd done. I wanted revenge, that's all I lived for. I went to...one of them. I asked him to make me one of the undead."

Steed was stunned, half-horrified and half-disbelieving. "You asked...?"

She turned to face him quickly. "You misunderstand us terribly. Under his reign, we can't take a human life or destroy one another. There are...others, they give us a bad name." She looked away. "I'm different from the rest, though neither of us knows why. So, he gave me a special position. I track down the mischief makers and exterminate them. I have carte blanche, in that respect. I never really gave up my job." She sighed. "I didn't want to do this to you, I never wanted you to know...but Adela and Jackson...I needed help."

"I see." Steed swallowed. "And you didn't think I'd recognize you?"

She hung her head. "I was almost hoping you would. I've missed you so." Karenina looked up at him, then, seeing the set of his face, looked away and moved forward. "Goodbye, John. You'll never see me again."

Suddenly, his hand touched her shoulder and she dropped back in pain. "How?"

He unclenched his fist, revealing the holy medal.

"That's how you took so much out of Adela," noted Karenina. "You've got more cunning than I ever gave you credit for."

The lift door opened. Purdey stepped out, walking past Karen, then stood beside Steed. "He's all right, there's not a mark on him." she frowned. "You'd better hurry, he'll be down here in a minute."

At first, Karen seemed astonished. Then, she laughed.



"Do you really think I'd...? You know me better than that!"

Steed smiled. "Yes, I was hoping that I did."

"Then let me go."

He still blocked the way, his fist tightened around the medal. "I'm sorry, Karenina, but I have to keep you here until dawn."

She stared at him in hurt surprise. "John, I'll die! Do you want to murder me?"

With that, Purdey hit Steed at the back of the neck. The medal flew out of his hand. They caught him before he hit the floor and leaned him against the wall.

"He'll be angry tomorrow," said Purdey ruefully. She looked at Karenina.

"Thanks for the help," she said softly. "But why?"

"He still loves you." Purdey frowned. "From the moment you walked into the living room, he hasn't really thought about

anything else. I think killing you would be like killing part of himself. I couldn't let him do that. Besides, I own one."

"Pardon?"

"I've pieced together what happened to Mike." Purdey's eyes were haunted. "I think you saved his life."

"I did," admitted Karenina. She tilted her head curiously. "If I had...."

Purdey didn't blink. "I would have killed you."

She smiled. "We're not too different. I'll never tell about them, knowing that you're here. Use the hypothesis, John might believe it. But if you ever need help, Karen tossed a piece of cloth to Purdey. She bent down to pick it up, but when she rose, Karen was gone.

The initials K.B. were embroidered on it and an address was attached. Purdey tucked it away for future reference.

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