

Red Velvet Memories

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Water. Acidic and polluted, from the East River, it drips into the abandoned Subway tunnel. Feeding the Algae and Slime that covers the decaying concrete.

Through the muck a man creeps forward. His backpack a burden of destruction. He switches off his torch as the light from his quarry begins to cast its glow. Raw and powerful music thunders in the tunnel confines, masking the hunters footfalls. The sounds are familiar to him. Part of his past.

36 hours ago the hunter, just another man. Judas Domingo, superintendent of the New Herbert Apartment Building. Odd job man for the 15 tenants of the decaying, late eighties building.

Finishing his morning patrol when he spotted Rickman waving his arms. Just trying to make himself a target for any passing maniac.

“Hey Domingo!”

Judas wandered over. Rickman was unusually excited, the smell of Scotch heavy on his breath.

“Lucy needs you, she’s in a hell of a state.”

“Where is she?” said Domingo slowly.

“She’s in her room, look I’d help but I’ve got a meeting on Park Avenue in half an hour.” more like in Central Park, with a crack dealer thought Judas.

Rickman gave Domingo one of his casual pats on the shoulder, the kind reserved for the hired help and welfare cases, and disappeared to his fictitious business meeting. Judas went back inside the building and took the elevator to the 15th floor, and Lucy’s apartment.

Lucy had seen better times. Better but not happier. She made her name as a hard-core porn star. Earning up to 2 million a movie. Legitimate stars lined up to be seen with her, everything she did was news. With homes in Beverly Hills and the south of France she seemed to have turned her life into an American Dream. But for Lucy those years were spent in an abyss filled with hard drugs and physical abuse by Jack Scott, her co-star husband.

Jack would have ended up killing her if he hadn’t made her pregnant. When the doctors confirmed she was going to have a daughter Lucy swore she’d go clean. And swore that she’d leave Jack. Jack had other ideas.

He left her alone while she was going through rehabilitation but once she was out the beatings started again. Lucy, however, had taken enough. She bought a Colt .45 and, while he was sleeping, pumped six rounds into his body. The case was plea-bargained down to assault and the Judge gave her 6 months suspended.

Her movies are still shown on all the NYC porn stations and the MTV porn network regularly has Lucy Clarke weekends. Judas has all her movies on CD.

The door to Lucy’s apartment lay open. She was sitting on her bed, drink in hand, sniffing back the tears.

“Mr Rickman said you wanted to see me.” said Judas. Lucy looked up.

“They’ve taken her Judas. They’ve taken Jane.” Her voice cracking with emotion.

“Who’s taken her?”

Lucy pointed to her fax machine, a single sheet of paper hanging out of it. Judas tore it off and read the message.

“You want the kid back. We want a million. Don’t Jerk us around and it’ll be sweet. We’ll be in touch.”

Judas looked at Lucy as she took another gulp from the glass,

“What do you want me for?”

“Just look at the bottom.” she said. Underneath the message was a crude drawing of a hooded figure holding some sort of gun. Judas recognized it. Screaming Hoods.

“You were in the gangs,” said Lucy “you can find them. You can get her back.”

“Why don’t you pay the ransom?”

Lucy looked away,

“I don’t have that kind of money anymore. Look. I could make it worth your while.”

Lucy stood up and slowly placed her glass on the bed, turning slightly so the curve of her body showed through the dress. Then as she casually brushed her hand through her hair she said, “I know you think about me.”

Judas was silent as Lucy moved over to him. Their faces inches apart she could see the sweat forming on his upper lip. She knew it was caused by more than shitty air conditioning. Her tongue lashed out and licked off the sweat. Judas stumbled backwards. His body reeling.

“Its been years since I was in the gangs. But I’ll see what I can find out.” he said, and then he was gone. The door shutting gently behind him. Lucy sat back down on the bed and the tears came.

The bass thumped out, shaking rust from the disused tracks. Slowly the hunter pulled the gun from underneath his jacket. If they were smart guards would be posted. He cocked the gun and slipped off the safety.

Moving again, deeper into the wall of sound. As he rounded the bend he realized they weren’t that smart.

Judas knew the bar would still be open at two a.m. In fact he’d never known it to be shut. The door swung open with the groaning he remembered, and he walked back inside the Shamrock after an absence of ten years.

The same smell, the same paintwork, the same customers. Judas was counting on it. He needn’t have worried. The bar was small, with just six tables and a two meter long counter, but it stocked the most eclectic range of drinks in the city. If it was brewed and bottled it was here.

Domingo walked up to the counter, trying to avoid eye contact with any of the other customers. This was still a gang hangout after all. There were three others standing at the bar, all huddled together. Plotting. Behind the bar a disinterested blonde in cut down jeans and a leather jacket was watching an Evangelical Soap.

“Hey, Den in?” asked Judas.

The blonde flashed him an icy look, kicked the floor twice and went back to her soap. Judas heard footsteps on the basement stairs and a trapdoor behind the bar flipped open. The man that clambered out was about fifty, unshaven and black. Judas had never figured out why a bar with an Irish name, and a black owner had mostly Puerto Rican clients.

“You look like shit Den.” said Judas. Den smiled and shook Judas’s hand.

“Damn its good to see you.” he said “what makes you come back here? It ‘aint just to see me.”

“I need some help” said Judas “For a friend.”

“I know this friend?” asked Den pulling two beers from cooler.

“No, not personally anyway.”

The Jukebox began to crank out old Eighties hits. The Blonde in Leathers turned the TV up with the remote, and settled back again.

“So what do you need?” said Den rubbing his hand across his stubble.

“Where are the Screaming Hoods now?”

“Jesus! You don’t fuck about do you? If your friend has a problem with the Hoods then they’ll only come out of it one way. In a Bodycrate.” Den laughed “The FBI and the cops don’t mess with the Hoods, they give them their turf and leave well alone. You should take the hint.”

Judas looked Den right in the eyes and said,

“Are you going to help me?”

“Shit!” Den slammed his bottle against the counter, smashing it. Grabbing the attention of everyone in the bar, even the Blonde. “Look Mr Judas Domingo, I didn’t risk my neck pulling you out of the Red Velvet’s just for you to back into that tribal madness all over again. Jesus Christ I thought you were smarter than that!”

“I take it that means that you’re not going to help.” said Judas brushing the Beer off his jacket. Den paused. Glared at the other customers and looked back at Judas.

“What do you need?”

“The location of the Screaming Hoods and a gun. My permit got revoked after my last bust.” said Judas “Oh yeah and something very lethal. I can pay.”

Den smiled,

“Damn right you’re going to pay.”

The hunter examined his prey. About twenty youths, Mixed Sex, lounging on stolen furniture. Light was provided by flickering spot lamps, of varying colours, hooked up to the old power sockets. The effect was mesmerising. Porn and news-sheet clipping were splattered across the walls. Perhaps an attempt to hide the coarse brick of the far wall, where the tunnel has been sealed. A stale smell pervaded the whole area, human fluids had obviously mixed on the various mattresses strewn across the makeshift room.

The hunter spotted something on one of the mattresses. A body. No gang clothes. Jane.

Her hair was matted and dark, the mattress looked wet. The hunter moved forward slightly, exposing himself, and watched the girl. She was still. Breathless. Dead.

The Hunter moved back, pulled off his backpack and flicked it open. He slipped a gas mask over his face, making sure no skin was showing, and pulled on a pair of rubber gloves. Then he yanked out a battered olive drab canister. Stood to his full height and walked into the Screaming Hood’s home turf.

He stood their waiting for one of them to acknowledge his presence in the room. Just waiting. Trying not to look at Jane’s body, helpless and alone. Finally one of the Hoods pulled himself out of his drug induced stupor enough to realise they had been invaded. He shouted at his compatriots to aid him as he flailed towards the hunter.

The Hunter screamed beneath his mask, something raw, primal, desperate, and pulled the pin from the canister. It hissed gently. A second later the Hood dropped to the ground at the Hunters feet.

Five seconds, and the last of them had ceased to be a menace to society.

The Hunter moved in, dropping the canister, and picked up Jane’s body. Blood slowly ran down her hair. It had been bullet through the temples. Probably recently. Boredom had killed her.

As the Hunter left the room he noticed the can was still hissing but walked on, ignoring it. With any luck the nerve gas would take out more subway vermin.