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Opening extract from

Nemesis: Into The Shadows

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FRIDAY, 4 AM

I stirred in my sleep. The cold was seeping into my dream, turning the fire that surrounded me in my nightmare into flames of ice. Tendrils of ice reached out to me, licking at my fingers, encircling my ankles, holding me back from running. And I had to run. There was just a desperate urge inside me to run, to hide. To keep on hiding.

Had I had this dream before? There was something familiar about it. The ice-cold fire, and the sound. A rhythmic thumping somewhere in the distance. Like the beat of a war drum. Something else to be afraid of. Warning me. Louder and louder. Closer and closer it came, dragging me from my dream.

I jumped awake. Cold concrete soaked through my clothes, through my skin and deep into my bones. I bolted upright. Where was I? Why could I never remember anything but the dreams? Since when? I couldn't remember.

I was in a stairwell, a dark stairwell, with just a dim wink from a flashing bulb to lighten the shadowy corners. On a landing. And there were stairs going down and down and down. I didn't want to think how far

down. Too scary. I wasn't alone. I could hear coughing, echoing from somewhere below me, unhealthy, grating, racking coughs. Another derelict sleeping rough like me in the only warmth they could find: the stairwell of this tower block.

Now something was coming back to me. The town by the river. I had arrived here yesterday. But from where? I didn't know. I could remember someone pointing out the tower block on the hill. Wellpark Court. Telling me this was a place where the junkies and the derelicts came to sleep at night. For warmth. For shelter.

I was no junkie. Was I a derelict? I didn't know what I was. Or who I was.

I had no memory. No memory before yesterday. Except for the nightmares.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

I tried to shake my head free of the noise, but it was still there.

Not a dream.

Real.

But what was it?

My legs were stiff and sore as I stood up and moved to the door that led to the landing. I listened silently. The noise was coming from somewhere beyond that door. And suddenly I recognised what it was. The lift doors, trying to close, and then opening again. Open and close. As if something was blocking them.

I pulled at the door. I didn't step through, not right away. Just in case there was someone waiting there, watching for me. There was a door into one of the flats ahead of me. 153, a brass number plate proclaimed. I

was on the fifteenth floor. It was coming back to me – walking up the stairs, past junkies and the homeless. Stepping warily over them, hoping no one would notice me. Trying to find a landing that was empty, one that no one else was sleeping on. I hadn't travelled up on the lift. I was afraid of lifts. That much I knew. Couldn't step into one and not think of the drop below me. The drop into nothingness. I was afraid. Always afraid, it seemed to me. Always wary of what I might find. And though my mind was still fogged with the nightmare, hidden deep in some recess of the memory I no longer had, I knew that many times before I had been in danger.

Open and close. Open and close. Thump. Thump.

Common sense told me to ignore the sound, but I didn't seem to be strong on common sense. The landing turned in an L shape and I had to take another reluctant step to peer round the corner to see the lift. Directly facing it were two more doors into flats. 155 and 157. Now I could see what was stopping the door from closing.

Someone's arm.

It lay outstretched on the ground, immobile. I almost stepped away. An old drunk, I thought, who had had too much whisky and had collapsed. Comatose. Not my business.

Until I saw the blood.

Still, I didn't move closer. I waited and listened. A door was swinging shut, footsteps taking the stairs two at a time to the ground floor. Someone running from this? I held still, waiting for the sudden rush from one of the houses. Other people alerted by the sound. But no one came out on to the landing. No doors opened.

Either no one had heard, or, having heard, decided it was wiser to ignore it. No one wanted any trouble. I took a step forward, still ready to run. For one awful second I thought that there was only the severed arm, sliced off by guillotine-like lift doors. It was almost a relief to see that the arm was still attached to a man, lying inside the lift. He was on his back, his mouth open. His white shirt was soaked in blood. Was he dead? At first I thought he must be. There was so much blood. No one could survive losing so much blood. But suddenly the man stirred. He let out a painful moan and his eyes fluttered open.

I froze to the spot as the eyes focused on me. Stared at me. I couldn't drag my eyes from his. The hand, outstretched on the ground, beckoned me closer. I didn't want to move. If anything, I wanted to run. But something drew me nearer. The man's lips were moving as if he was trying to speak. With each painful muttering blood gurgled from his mouth. I stepped inside the lift, bent down towards the figure, trying to make out his words, but there was no sound, just the gurgle of blood.

This is crazy, I thought. I should be running. Running away from this. I almost took a step back, would have taken a step back, when all at once the outstretched arm shot into life, reached up and, with a strength I wouldn't have believed, pulled me close. Dragged me down towards his face.

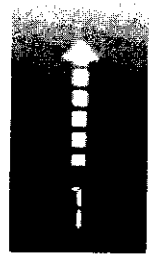
I tried to pull away, but the man for all his loss of blood – could there be so much blood in one man? – had strength. The strength of the dying, for in the man's eyes I could see death. And even in that second I won-

dered how I could know such a thing.

His teeth were stained red with blood. He mumbled something I couldn't understand. A jumble of words I couldn't make out. I wanted to break free. I was afraid. Was this still part of my nightmare? I hoped that any second I would wake up. But the fingers curled around my coat were real, the smell of so much blood was real.

The man tightened his grip, drew me closer. And with nothing now blocking the doors, they closed. The lift began to move.

And I was trapped inside with a dying man.



I panicked. The lift began to close in on me. I was aware suddenly of the graffiti scratched into the stainless steel walls, the smell of stale chips and something else, something sinister. It was blood. The lift seemed to be filled with the sweet smell of it. I tried to stand, but the man on the ground, weak as he seemed to be, was stronger than I was. His breath was coming in dying gasps. His fist tightened on my coat. His eyes, watery blue, were wide with alarm. Afraid to die, or afraid of something else? His mouth moved, but no sound came out.

'Let me go.' I said it softly. I was afraid too. Afraid to be here. What if whoever did this came back? What if the lift doors slid open and he was there? I could almost picture him, all in black, a balaclava hiding his face, holding his knife high, the steel glinting in the light. Ready to strike again. Ready to plunge that knife into me. I felt a cold sweat cover my body. 'Let me go,' I said again. But the man only pulled me closer to his face.

I couldn't make out his whispered words. Not at first. The man drew in his breath painfully and tried again. He wet his lips with his tongue and smeared more red blood across his teeth.

This can't be happening, I thought. This can't be real.

'Stop.' One word exhausted him. But he said it again. 'Stop.'

It seemed like agony for him to speak. What was I about to get? A death-bed confession?

'Four teeth.' My brain was racing. Four teeth. I almost giggled, hysteria setting in. Was he trying to tell me he only had four teeth?

There was a rattle in his throat and he said it again. 'Four teeth.'

Was that really what he said? A few painful seconds passed and the man spoke again. Spluttering out the next words. 'Heartbeat. Stop.'

There were more muttered words I couldn't make out. A desperate string of incoherent words. He shuddered, made one final dying attempt to make me understand. 'Four teeth. Heartbeat. Stop.'

And in that second that's what happened. His heartbeat stopped.

Death flushed across his face, draining the life from it. And I knew in that second that I had seen death before.

But where?

No time to think. The lift was creaking to a halt at the ground floor. The man's hand was still clasped tightly on my jacket. I had to touch those hands to pull them from me. No choice. As soon as the doors opened I had to be ready to run. I was shaking now with fear. Covered in blood myself. If I could I would have prised those doors open with my bare hands. My heart was pounding. If I was found here in this lift with a dead body, it would look as if I was the one who had killed him. But who'd

believe that? I was just a boy. How could I be capable of murder?

The doors opened at last as if in slow motion. A girl was standing there. She wasn't looking at me, too busy studying her nails, chewing gum, hardly interested. At this time in the morning she had obviously been out at a late-night party, though she looked too young. Even with the black mask of her eyes and the white face, she looked young. Not much older than I was.

She stepped back to let me out of the lift and her eyes shifted to me, roamed over me, appraising me. Suddenly she saw the blood. The blood on my clothes, the blood on the floor, and then her eyes followed the trail of blood to the body, a scarlet streak of blood.

She stopped in mid-chew. Her eyes popped. She began to scream.

I couldn't move. Try as I might I couldn't move. I stood staring at the girl as she screamed and screamed. The sound pierced into my eardrums like a skewer.

'Please. Please.' I muttered the words, wanting her to be quiet. I stretched out my hands towards her. I only wanted to reassure her that I meant no harm, that I was no threat, that I had nothing to do with this. I was as innocent, as scared, as she was.

That wasn't the message she got. Her eyes opened wider. She stepped back, still screaming, as if she thought I was about to attack her. My hand brushed against her jacket and smeared blood on it too. 'Please,' I said again. I half expected her to crumple to the ground. She didn't. She lifted her handbag and swung it hard at me. It sent me hurtling back against the wall.

Only will power helped me keep my balance, and I stumbled away from her. Why wouldn't she stop screaming? Why wouldn't she listen?

I took another step away from her, backing towards the entrance to the flats. I didn't take my eyes off her, sure she was about to attack me again. For a second our eyes locked.

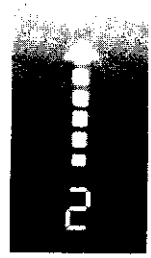
'Please . . . don't think I did this . . .' I tried again to talk to her, to explain, but my words were lost in her screams.

It was no use. No time to waste. I turned and ran. Any moment now, doors would be flung open, people would flood down the stairs on to the street, investigating those hellish screams. A police siren would be heard in the distance. Police would be swarming everywhere.

And I couldn't be caught. I couldn't risk waiting around to give any explanations. I didn't have any to give. There was a blackness in my mind, like the darkness looming inside a tunnel. I didn't know who I was, or where I came from. I didn't even know my name.

I ran into the night air, stopped for a second and looked up at the tower block. Already lights were being snapped on, floor by floor, curious tenants awakened by that girl's persistent screaming. In the flats across the street, someone was at their window, peering through Venetian blinds. I looked all around, at the houses, the boarded-up shops, the lonely car park.

I was terrified that someone might see me. I began to run.



Someone was watching him, though he didn't know it. Someone sitting in a car in that car park, engine off, lights off. The man they called 'the Wolf'. He had a clear view of the street, saw the boy stumble from the building. Afraid. A young boy, his hair dark, wearing clothes too big for him. The Wolf watched him stand, transfixed, not knowing what to do. Who was this boy? Because of him, the Wolf hadn't had time to finish the job. And he didn't like leaving anything unfinished. He had heard the boy coming, heard the door of the landing creak open. And the Wolf had run. The Wolf didn't like running. Decided he didn't like this boy. He watched as the boy's frightened eyes searched around the street. The figure in the car slid down further in the front seat. Just in case. But the boy saw nothing. Only an empty car parked inconspicuously among others in a lonely car park.

As he watched, the Wolf lifted his mobile phone. A number was punched in. A moment later a voice asked, 'Is it done?'

'Done,' the Wolf said.

'No problems?'

The hesitation said there was. 'Nothing much. I can handle it.'

'What problem?' The voice on the line was on the edge of anger, but then he always sounded on the edge of anger.

The Wolf was angry too. He had every right to be. 'Why was I told to do it here? This is not a good place.'

'It's done now,' was the answer. Then again: 'What problem?'

'A boy,' the Wolf said. 'A boy found him in the lift. One of the junkies who sleeps in there. I'm watching him now. He's terrified.'

'Who's the boy? Do we know him?'

'Not local. He's probably a junkie,' the Wolf said. 'Out of his face. No threat.'

The anger spilled through the phone like lava. 'No threat? That junkie found him. Was he already dead . . . or just dying?'

The Wolf sounded confident when he answered. He had every right to be. This was his job. He had killed many times before. 'I don't make mistakes. He was dead. He had to be dead.'

'Did he tell the boy anything? Did he?' The man on the line wasn't going to wait for an answer. 'Follow that boy. Don't let him out of your sight. Keep me in touch. We have to find out what he knows.'

The phone was clicked off just as the boy in the street took to his heels and ran. The car door opened and the Wolf sprinted after him.



I knew I should run and keep on running, but I had to see what was happening. I stopped for breath in a pathway between the tenement flats. It was overgrown with bushes, plastic bags trapped in them, snapping like flags caught in the wind. From here I couldn't be seen from any windows but still had a view of the entrance to the flats.

The girl was still screaming. What was it with her? Why didn't she shut up? She hadn't stopped since the lift doors had opened and she'd first seen me. Now there would be blood on her too. I remembered the way I had reached out to her to try to quieten her down, to reassure her I meant no harm. There would be blood on her arm, on her clothes. Maybe that was why she was still screaming. The smell of blood was on me too. Blood all over me, soaking into my skin. I would have to get more clothes. But where? How? I could go nowhere like this, covered in blood.

The girl was being brought out of the flats, almost carried. A man with his arm around her seemed to be holding her up, leading her out into the open air. Her screams were suddenly louder, filling the night with their sound. People were spilling on to the streets now from the flats nearby. Windows were being thrown wide and curious neighbours were looking out, shouting, asking what the trouble was. The junkies and derelicts, who used the stairwells for somewhere to sleep, were spilling out too, running like rats from a sinking ship. Trying to get away before the police came.

And still the girl screamed.

Why didn't somebody slap her face? Wasn't that what

you were supposed to do if someone was hysterical? I would gladly have done that just to shut her up.

I could hear the wail of a police car in the distance. They would arrive soon, any moment now. Time for me to run. My eyes searched out the best route. Over the back gardens, leaping over hedges and walls. Out of sight. And then, in one of the gardens, I saw exactly what I needed. Some obliging mother had left her son's clothes hanging on the line. Jeans, a T-shirt, a sweater. Why, they were almost waving at me. Beckoning me over. *Come and get us!*

So I did. I sprinted into the garden, snapped the clothes from the line and with hardly a pause in my step I was off, into the shadows again.



PC Lewis Ferguson sat in the car with his partner, Guthrie. Of course, in this force, he was supposed to call him his 'neighbour'. That had disappointed Lewis. 'Partner' had a kind of NYPD ring to it. Lewis had only been on the force for a few weeks, a rookie, but he meant to make his mark. A detective, that's what he was meant to be. He could see it now. Rising in the force, achieving promotion after promotion, making a name for himself as a smart, sensitive, on-the-ball kind of guy. Maybe win a couple of medals on the way. That was his plan. His mother would be proud of him one day. At the moment all she seemed to do was complain about all the ironing she had to do for him and how hard it was to press a crease into his uniform trousers.

'A crease! I'll give them a crease all right! They'll be

able to cut their hair with the crease in your trousers.'

Ah, she was an old battleaxe, he thought, but lovable with it.

Suddenly, it seemed his day of glory might arrive sooner than he thought. The message on the car radio was clear. There had been an 'incident' at Wellpark Court.

Wellpark Court, just round the corner. It was on their beat. They never seemed to be away from the place. Junkies sleeping in the stairwells, leaving used needles on landings, dealing drugs. Tenants always complaining.

'Here we go again,' Guthrie said. An older man, he was marking time till his retirement. He planned to buy himself an apartment in Spain. Didn't want any trouble till then.

Lewis listened to the message on the radio. 'A body's been found. Looks like a stabbing.'

'Another stabbing,' Guthrie said drily. 'Maybe we should just move into Wellpark Court.' He sighed. 'I suppose we'd better go.'

'Should we not hurry?' Lewis made an attempt to sound casual.

His partner smiled at him. 'You'll be wanting to use the siren?'

Lewis tried to look as if the thought hadn't occurred to him. That he still didn't get a kick out of driving fast past the punters, blue light flashing, with the siren at full blast. But he couldn't keep the excitement out of his eyes. He was only a rookie after all.

Guthrie smiled. 'Go on then.'



It was no good. Common sense told me to run, to get as far away from there as possible, but the sound of the police siren made me stop in my stride again. I watched the car swerve round the corner. It seemed now that the street was alive with people, surging into the night. People in dressing gowns, people with coats thrown over their pyjamas. Old people, young people, their voices carrying through the still, icy night air.

Two policemen stepped from the car. The older one took charge immediately, holding the crowds back. I could see him talking into the personal radio on his collar. Then he headed inside the entrance to the flats. The younger one walked straight towards the girl, probably hoping he'd be able to shut her up. He was holding his hands out to her as if he was trying to calm her.

Better you than me, pal, I thought.

In a moment, she would tell her story, describe the boy she'd seen, and they would be after me. Those radios would call in reinforcements. I imagined them panning out, lines of police, battalions of them, searching for me.

Time for me to go.