The house was a warm beacon of light in the dark woods that concealed it on three sides and partially obscured the distant road on the fourth. Within that darkness crouched a black clad figure. A patch of darkness a shade different from his surroundings, he crouched invisible as he watched the scenes lit by the home’s cheery sparkling lights. His target wasn’t there yet. It would be.

The nighttime woodland symphony rose around him while he continued to wait. Nothing else disturbed the night or darkness outside those cheery lights for quite some time.

Then came the distant sound of a diesel engine. He had a coworker that could distinguish the make and model of most vehicles by the sound of their engine, but he couldn’t. But the rumble of a large diesel was unmistakable.

Up the winding road to the house came a light colored suburban type vehicle with its brights and overcharged foglights on full. Even only catching those lights out of the corner of his eye momentarily blinded him where he crouched. As the vehicle drew near the house with it’s huge floor to ceiling glass doors and windows, it dimmed its lights to normal and killed the foglights. Moments later, the driver killed the engine and turned them off altogether before stepping out.

He had arrived.

The target was a man of just over average height who hid the grey fringes edging his bald pate under a small Ivy cap of indistinct color. A small girl, five or six perhaps, ran out of the front door and leaped to wrap her arms around his leg in welcome. In the doorway stood his wife, a middle aged woman with bright auburn hair, her arms crossed on her chest but a wide smile brightening her face.

The wait was nearing its end.

The man retrieved a document bag from his vehicle, lifted his daughter into his arms, and walked into the house, pausing to greet his wife with a kiss on her cheek as he passed.

The darkness was broken with a dim glow as the watcher checked his watch. After eight. His target was late tonight. He continued to wait.

It was more than two hours more before the house lights began to turn off one by one. In one large room, a table lamp was the last to remain lit. The watcher waited thirty minutes before rising to make a complete circuit of the property, peering thru windows on each side s he went. No one was visible in any room.

It was time.

He trekked farther into the woods, across other properties, back to where he had parked a Ford Taurus off a main road, past the light from the main road that fed this neighborhood of rural properties at the base of the mountains. Privacy and distance from neighbors was prized by the residents, but it also provided ample opportunities to move unnoticed. Most of the residents kept dogs and many had other alarm methods to alert them as well. Tonight’s target almost certainly did as well, though he was allergic so they didn’t keep a dog.

The watcher retrieved a boxlike device about the size of a car battery. He rummaged thru a satchel, checking its contents one by one before he shouldering it and picking up the unmarked box and trekking back to the now dimly lit house of glass. He performed one last circuit of the property before approaching closer. Still not seeing anyone, he paused to put on a snug pair of surgical gloves.

He walked up and set the box down on a brick near a dark window and toggled a couple switches on. There was no obvious effect.

He put on a pair of gloves and removed a small heavy pair of wire cutters from his satchel to cut the power line nearest the ground where it ran inside the house. The end that now led off the property, he attached to his box with a rubber insulated clamp.

Next, he walked around the corner of the house to another window, where he took out a roll of tape and a glass cutter. He placed several strips of tape before he scored the glass. The tape held the glass in place and prevented accidental noises as he tapped himself an opening in the window, which he then unlatched and opened. Inside, all was now darkness. He removed the tape, putting the wad in his pocket.

In he went.

He paused to listen for movement. Then he removed a rag and plastic bottle from his satchel, which he used to soak the rag before returning it to his bag. He unsnapped the bindings from the handles of the knives on his belt and thigh.

The watcher moved thru the house room to room, checking each as he went. From the kitchen, he removed a saw edged bread knife and tested it’s edge before sliding it into his belt. When he came to the little girl’s room, he quietly shut the door her parents had left open a crack. The parent’s bedroom door was closed. He eased the door open, prepared to rush inside if it made any loud noise. The noise was coming from inside their room, not from the lock. The door opened without a sound.

With the door open, it was obvious the couple inside were asleep. Both snored. The watcher paused to wind the rag once around his hand and drew the smaller of his knives from its sheath before stepping thru the door and closing it quietly behind him. He walked over next to their bed and paused to examine both of the bed’s occupants. He slept on the right side of the bed, and he knew the wife was right handed from watching her earlier. He walked around to her side of the bed and pressed the rag down on her face, careful to cover her mouth and both nostrils. He held the rag there for a thirty count before returning his attention to the man, his original target. He took his knife now and walked around, examining the sleeper, resting on his side, facing away from his wife. When he was ready, he pushed down on the sleeper’s shoulder, turning the waking man onto his back.

His eyes were opening in confusion as the wide leaf shaped blade sank into the left side of his neck at an angle. The watcher covered his mouth with the rag and planted one knee on the man’s chest before he could cry out and wake the child. Pinning his target to the bed in this fashion, he removed his knife and turned the dying man’s face away from his wife, twisting open the wound in his neck as he did so, to encourage the blood flow even as it sprayed from the wound. As the struggles subsided, he removed the bread knife he had taken from the kitchen from his belt and drove it into the wound, sawing and twisting as he went, leaving behind a very ragged wound. Before his target was dead, he rose from his chest and added a couple more wounds with the bread knife to his victim’s chest, though not as messy as the first in his neck. Once there wasn’t enough blood pressure left to spurt from the neck wound, he pulled the sheets off his victim and removed his boxer briefs. He used the bread knife to saw thru his genitals, which he stuffed in his victim’s open mouth.

Fitting, in more ways than one.

This man was responsible for the deaths of two hundred thirty nine lives lost when an airliner was sabotaged by terrorists. They gained access thru information this man had leaked to them while he worked as a consultant on a classified government project. The government couldn’t out him without revealing what he had done for them, which needed to remain a secret. But he wasn’t untouchable.

Justice had been served.

Next, he turned his attention to the still unconscious wife.

First, he wiped his own blade with her long dark hair. Next, he removed a folded piece of paper from his satchel and placed it in her left hand, using her own hand to crumple it into a wrinkled ball. In her other, he placed the bread knife he had used to mutilate her husband. Then he slapped her hard across one cheek to help rouse her.

As she came to, he propped her into a sitting position while he held her wrists from behind, effectively hugging her at the same time. Before she was fully aware of her surroundings, he placed both of her hands on the knife, with the blade turned towards he own chest and drove it into her midsection right below her ribs, angling upward. As she gasped in shock and surprise, he wiggled and twisted the blade upward in her hands to do more damage to her vital organs. Then he released his hug, grabbing her by one shoulder and violently flung her backwards off the bed, while she still held the blade buried in her midsection.

She had never seen him clearly and couldn’t possibly identify him. The room was still completely dark. It didn’t matter now if she lived or not.

He left the way he came, stopping first in the kitchen to take a tea kettle from the stove, which he hurled thru the same window he had cut to enter their house before stepping out thru the open window.

He retrieved his machine box, removing the clamped power line, which he bandaged with a roll of electrical tape from his satchel to reconnect it to the house line he had cut and restore power to the home.

He lifted his box and disappeared back into the darkness of the woods. Once he reached the Taurus, he put his box on the backseat’s floorboard and covered it with his satchel. He quickly changed clothes, putting the clothes he had been wearing in a plastic trash bag which he tied off and placed in the trunk before he drove off.

He never heard the sirens as emergency vehicles approached the house.

He stopped for a drink at a hole in the wall joint before he returned to his hotel for the night. In a few sleepless hours, he would check out of the hotel, grab breakfast, and catch an early flight home. He brought up the Redphone app on his smartphone and sent a coded confirmation message to a saved contact.

Moments later, he received a coded response that told him his funds transfer had been processed. From past experience, he knew he’d be able to confirm it after his bank opened for business.

He passed a bill and downed the shot he’d ordered. The drink he finished a couple mouthfuls later.

Another assignment completed.

He drove back to the hotel.

**1613 PST - NEAR THE ARTS DISTRICT, DOWNTOWN, LOS ANGELES, CA**

The Watcher waited outside the designated abandoned warehouse. He never waited long. Soon, an official looking car arrived nearby and pair of suit and tie wearing security men stepped out. One opened the door for another smaller man inside who stepped out and looked around before he approached.

“Walk with me.” He headed for a door into one of the surrounding warehouses that the second of his security suits held open for them.

The watcher followed.

He preferred “watcher” to assassin, killer, or executioner, though any of those might seem more fitting to his usual role.

His given name, for now, was Glenn Rice. How long that would last was impossible to say. It changed often. Sometimes on a mere whim.

The suits did change, but not very often. They were his handlers.

Inside, the two walked down a long hall lined with bare wood and metal struts. The walls were either unfinished or had been stripped since the building’s last commercial use.

“We called this meeting to inform you of your reassignment,” suit began without preamble.

“Good work last night by the way, the wife is hospitalized. They don’t know if she’ll pull thru, and if she does she’ll have to defend against a murder charge for her husband’s death. The note was a nice touch by the way.”

The watcher nods.

Suit continues: “You’ve proven one of our most reliable assets.”

A pause.

“We want you to take part in a new pilot program we’ve developed. It will build on your skills for a new application. The program requires someone with a degree of experience and flexibility that we think you have displayed, and displayed well at that.”

Suit seems to be appraising the watcher for his reaction.

There is none an ordinary eye might note.

But suit isn’t ordinary. He snorts.

“Don’t get too excited. This is something else all new. An experiment of sorts. Not like any of your usual assignments. It’s expected to require a level of creativity beyond the norm for your position.”

The watcher watches. And waits.

“Of course, as of now, you cease to exist.”

They continue walking thru the deserted building. Around them are trash and debris that evidence its continued use by vagrants and teenagers seeking freedom from adult supervision. A few gang tags are in evidence among the graffiti as well.

Suit withdraws an envelope from inside his suit jacket and passes it to the watcher.

“The usual.” He stops and turns to face the watcher before he continues “This time, you really will disappear. Once you report, you cease to exist to the outside world. Plan accordingly. Your reporting directions are in there was well.” He nods to the envelope in the watcher’s hands before looking up into the watcher’s face. He searches it for something, then nods and extends his gloved hand.

“It’s been a pleasure serving with you.”

The watcher shakes the offered hand.

Suit turns on his heel and starts walking back toward the door they first entered. His sentry still stands there, on guard. Watcher follows.

He waits outside as the bodyguards open the door for smaller suit. They all climb back into the car and drive away.

The watcher looks up and down the deserted street. He looks up and studies the sky between the warehouses on this narrow street, then he turns and walks in the opposite direction from where their care drove, back towards the sounds of traffic and bustle of city life.