

# SHADOW DOCTORS

A Novelette By

CORTEZ LAW III

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**Evil Apprehended.  
Justice Served.**

Romans 13:4, "For he [governing authorities] is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

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**2700 Macon Drive  
Lakewood Heights  
Southeast Atlanta, GA  
1:30 A.M.**

Despite being gagged, the man screamed. It was a futile effort. He squirmed about with the overhead lights reflecting on the metal silver gurney. His arms and legs were leather strapped with big shiny steel buckles. The white male looked sixty-something with his short-cropped black hair mopped with sweat. His entire body resembled his hair. He continued to lick his trembling lips more in a nervous action than to dab any much-needed moisture for them. His brown eyes, wild with terror, attempted to defy the added strap that crossed over his forehead. Everything in his sight blurred. He continued blinking and stretching of his eyes.

Footsteps echoed in the semi-lit room. Gray cement block walls about ten feet high surrounded the scared man. At the head of the gurney, on both sides, and the foot of the table, four men stood stationary. The man at the head of the table studied the near hyperventilating man. The figures remained blurry.

“Randall Mark Joseph. Age sixty-seven, a native Georgian, birthplace Augusta, GA. Son of parents Reiss and Annabelle Joseph. Grandson of Robert and Lewellen Joseph. All four deceased. Doesn’t have to be your fate, Randall. We won’t keep you long. We only need one thing from you—” His right index finger shook in the air just above his nose and remained there. “One. Financial access to your bank accounts and investments.” The man removed the gag.

“That’s all you want?”

“Yes. But before you ask questions...”

Another indistinct shape appeared and wheeled a second gurney that ceased movement to the bound man’s left. He strained to glimpse, but his head fasteners restricted any movement.

“R-Randall?”

He about convulsed at the sound.

“Margaret? Margaret, is that you?”

“Oh, Randall! I can’t see too well. Are you here?”

“Right here. I’m right here, Margaret. I can’t see you either. Did they hurt you?”

A latex-gloved hand from the man at his head smothered Randall’s mouth to silence.

“No one has to get hurt. If you don’t comply with this one request that will change. For her. Is anything you’ve heard unclear, Randall?”

His breathing quickened but his head nodded in compliance.

“Don’t hurt my wife—”

That gloved hand silenced Randall once more.

“Good. Good. The effects of the drug will diminish and I have a series of phone calls I need for you to make. This is all so easy. Let’s keep it that way, okay?”

“Okay. Just please, she has nothing—”

This time, however, the gloved hand slammed over his lips with such force he shrieked, and Margaret joined him. The wheelman for her eased his latex-gloved hand over her mouth and muzzled her with head shaking for ‘no.’

**2332 Los Angeles Avenue  
Virginia Highland  
Midtown Atlanta  
9:30 A.M.**

Virginia–Highland, or “VaHi”, was an affluent [suburb](#). The busy commercial district in the neighborhood made a name for itself with its bungalows and other historical homes from the early 1900s. The Atlanta population enjoyed its mix of restaurants, bars, shops, various festivals and other diverse activities.

Atlanta Police Department cruisers’ red and blue light bars flashed in and out of sequence as they parked on Los Angeles Avenue and in the driveway. The Medical Examiner van pulled up to a quickened stop followed by a pair of unmarked dark blue Ford Tauruses.

Homicide Detective Orlando Queen emerged from the driver’s side of the first vehicle. From the passenger side, his partner Pepper Love stepped out. Both closed their doors and waited. Queen, a mid-thirties African-American man who appeared as if someone dipped him in dark chocolate, flickered a toothpick right and left in his black-haired mustache covered mouth. His trademark all-black attire displayed in full effect for all to see: Full-length leather coat, black slacks and black dress shoes. Between slivers of separation, even his dress shirt pushed the 100% black theme except for the white pinstripes on it. One of the more experienced detectives in the ‘X-Men Homicide Squad’, he’d served the city of Atlanta in the unit for over five years.

Love, a five-foot-eight-inches tall African-American woman, was another veteran of the X-Men Homicide Squad of

about five years. Her tanned overcoat masked her clothing choices, but her brown ankle-high zipper boots shone in the crisp morning sunlight. She removed a pair of tanned leather gloves from her fuchsia painted fingernails and hid them in the overcoat's pockets.

As the patrol officers controlled a small gathering of neighbors, the other Taurus' front passenger doors opened. An authoritative voice barked a command:

"Inside."

With that, Homicide Sergeant Malcolm X. Hobbs galvanized his team to enter the home. Classic home, he thought. Typical Virginia-Highland residence: The Craftsman Bungalow. Beautiful.

Hobbs maintained his position of authority over the elite squad for about six years with eight in homicide detection. In fact, it was his suggestion to Mayor of Atlanta Ronald Fleming to create a dynamic homicide unit to tackle the city's most heinous murders within the entire homicide division.

An even six-foot tall and with a muscular mesomorph body type that fluctuated between 200 and 225 pounds, the regal-faced detective resembled a milk-in-my-coffee Café au lait skin tone that turned female heads in and out of the office and health club.

He led the way up the brief cement stairs in his own full-length brown leather overcoat with taupe dress shoes. Once inside, he slipped off his own pair of tanned leather glove wear. Hot on his heels was the youngest member of the unit, Detective Selena Monet. Creole through New Orleans and California, the fair complexioned, brunette beauty in her late twenties was more than mere eye-candy. She made her bones in the rough-and-tumble world as an undercover in the APD Vice Squad. She more than held her own against any foe.

Malcolm started the inquiry and his work week was off to another someone didn't reach their destiny start. God help humanity please, he thought.

They followed single file up the stairs and into a master bedroom. Old money wooden furnishings enclosed by flowery wallpaper dressed the space.

"What do we have, Victor?"

Already hovering over the deceased in his customary wares, Chief Medical Examiner Victor Hernandez, MD, explained. Hernandez, a handsome and tanned mid-forties Mexican-American with an ancestry that hailed back to the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, served his tenth year with the Fulton County Medical Examiner Center; five as Chief M.E. As a testament to his never-say-die attitude in death investigations, he married and divorced the same woman twice. Malcolm was one of the few people Victor talked to about the present condition of that situation. He felt like a privileged confidant he guessed.

"I can't tell yet, Malcolm. Nothing obvious like GSW or sharp object cuts or blunt force trauma. I'll let you know."

Malcolm gave him a little pat on the shoulder and stepped away with this unit.

"What's the specs on the vic?"

Pepper revealed a notebook for the rundown.

"Thomas O'Malley, white male, age seventy-one, married to Geneva for over fifty years. Both retired, got out and about according to neighbors so they weren't shut-ins it seemed."

"Right," Orlando said, "Active social life, this husband and wife. Church, neighborhood parties and social clubs, the O'Malley's were always the Virginia-Highland hub."

Selena nodded, "Patrol consensus labeled the couple as leaders of the Virginia-Highland Civic Association, a volunteer board that oversees neighborhood events such as

community festivals, community safety, beautification and efforts to improve parks, sidewalks.”

Malcolm nodded himself. “For sure, this attention around here is rare. A neighbor called it in?”

“Yes. A widower named Francine Francois. Lives at 2345 LA Avenue. She gets a late-night phone call check-in without fail since forever,” Selena said. “Nary a ring for the customary goodnight for the last forty-eight hours, boss.”

“She communicated with others inside their social circles and the same thing. *Paul Revere* took full effect and here we are,” Pepper said.

Selena added, “Contrary to all of that, the O’Malley’s never made their two-week Aruba vacation.”

C.M.E. Hernandez interrupted. “Ladies and gentlemen, I confess. I’m not sure what killed him. But I saw some—”

He turned back to the corpse and stooped to it. The X-Men Squad followed the short distance and surrounded O’Malley. Hernandez pointed to the skin along the arms and torso.

“Several things can cause these.”

“Which are?” Malcolm asked.

“Warts, lesions. Skin’s reddened and swollen. I don’t want to fall into conjecture, but my mind is racing about it all.”

“Conject, doc’. That’s what you do.”

He smiled at Orlando. “That’s correct, however, that conjecture would be too broad in its possibilities. We’ll run more thorough tests in the lab.”

Humph. That tidbit from Orlando about Aruba paused Malcolm, and it brought up a question.

“What’s Ms. Francois’ age, anyone?”

“Ah, knockin’ with gusto on eighty-five which she’ll register in about three weeks,” Orlando said.

“Okay, and the health of Ms. Francois?”

“Her health, boss?”



“Her health.”

They all checked their notes. Blanked faces one and all. That wasn't good, Malcolm thought. It's early in the investigation, Sergeant Hobbs. He relaxed and took the reins again.

“If it isn't good...maybe she didn't remember right. Did she call the O'Malley's forty-eight hours ago?”

Everyone paused a moment before they continued.

“Ah sookie sookie now,” Pepper said as she sniffed with her head on a slow swivel. “Smell that?”

“You know I caught some of that but figured it was our vic’,” Malcolm said.

“Which, sorry to say, means that if the additional aromatics emanating from Mr. O'Malley isn't emanating from Mr. O'Malley—”

Malcolm cut off Selena. “That may mean they never left for that Aruba getaway.”

“My Q and our A: Where's Geneva O'Malley?”

Malcolm studied Orlando. Yes, where was she? The reports were that they hung out and did everything together. Had they died that way too? Inside this house? He looked around in a calm, manic fashion.

“Wayne? Wayne, you in here?”

Footsteps in rapid session beeline for the squad.

“Malcolm.”

Atlanta Zone Six Patrol Officer Wayne Voight stood six-foot-two-inches and carried a solid two-hundred and thirty-pounds on his Caucasian mid-thirties frame. A true blonde, he sported a military buzz cut and sometimes joined him in bodybuilding workouts at *Ironman Fitness Center*. Malcolm seldom out lifted the man, who displayed the strength of a man at least fifty pounds heavier. Voight worked a broad sector that included Interstate 20 and the divergent

populations of Little Five Points, Cabbagetown and Virginia Highlands. Good police.

“You didn’t find, Geneva O’Malley?”

“No, sir. We checked the whole house. Nothing.”

“You catch a whiff of that?”

“I and patrol did. Attributed that to Mr. O’Malley.”

Malcolm dismissed that with a head shaking.

“No, it’s something else. Search the house again everybody. Now.”

Professional investigative bodies displaced themselves about the house that Malcolm estimated was worth north of \$750,000. Minutes passed as voices of “Clear” reverberated everywhere. Latex-gloved hands moved items and flashlights lit up the nooks and crannies.

M.E. Hernandez stopped his supervising of the O’Malley body which now was gurney transported for the coroner van. His face wrinkled up like the full brunt of the odor overwhelmed him. Because it did. Malcolm took inventory of the doctor’s face. As the others returned, they shared in the repulsion. In a matter of seconds, detectives and patrol officers scoured the master suite: Bathtub, shower, closets, under the dressers, even in the dressers deemed by looks from all as improbable. Nothing. Two patrol officers pulled up the lavish comforter on the bed...nothing underneath. Malcolm dipped his head for the mattresses and sniffed. First atop it where Mr. O’Malley laid, now in between them. His head shot back in repulsion. Message received. The others surrounded the top mattress and lifted it up.

The odor tried to knock the rest to the floor. Exasperated gasps represented the emotion of the moment.

“Let me take a wild guess. Mrs. Geneva O’Malley, I presume.”

The throng agreed with Malcolm. Beneath that top mattress, the mummified remains of a female victim stared back at them.

**Atlanta Public Safety Headquarters  
Homicide Unit/ 3rd Floor  
226 Peachtree Street, SW  
Downtown Atlanta  
11:30 A.M.**

Atlanta's Homicide Division was a maze of cubicle offices for the detectives and separate office spaces for their higher-ups. The X-Men Squad sat near to one another. A fifth detective in the select group stood at the Portable Profiler Board. Detective Shepard Cush, out of Columbus, OH, held the space for the newest member of the unit. Standing six-foot-two and weighing in at one-hundred and eighty pounds, the light-skinned African-American cop brought a perfect arrest record from the Buckeye State and was instrumental in helped to halt a terrorist plot in the city a few months ago in only his second case on the new job. Decked out in a bright white shirt, red and gray tie, gray slacks and red Stacy Adams, he looked all the part of his favorite college team and alumni of *The Ohio State University*.

"What's up, Shep'?"

"Can I say the same back at you, my brother? I can and will. What's up with you, Detective Queen, sir?"

"Starin' at the unsolved won't get 'em solved."

"Yeah, well, can I have revelation knowledge then?"

Orlando shook his head with that toothpick still dancing in his mouth.

"When I get it, you'll get it. Bet?"

"Full House, Inside Straight, Three-of-a-Kind, Straight Flush. Is any of that sinking in?"

Orlando smiled and continued to work at his desk. Malcolm appeared from one of the private offices with sheets of paper in hand which he shook to finagle their attention.

“Fresh off the presses, ladies and gentlemen.”

“What do you have, Brother Malcolm?” Pepper asked.

“The O’Malley financials show abnormalities. Dated a few weeks ago, they made several cash withdrawals from their bank that totaled \$50k. Talked to the bank manager and while it was unusual, they or I should say, he, had done similar in times past. These amounts were a lot larger though.”

“Can I guess and say they don’t know who the recipients were, or do I need to ask that question?” Shepard said.

“No need,” Malcolm said.

“Wow. Just how affluent were they, boss?” Selena asked.

“House estimated at \$825,000. Money market account even after the series of withdrawals still credited with \$1.77 million—”

Orlando whistled. “And here I thought Ms. ‘Black Sheep’ Monet’s family printed all the moola.”

Selena’s eyes rolled to the ceiling, and she bit her tongue. Uh-huh, Orlando thought. She better had because she wants none of this over here, baby. He’d had about enough of her shenanigans, anyway. All that glittered ain’t gold or platinum, jack. Malcolm rebuked him in three, two, one...

“Chill, Detective Queen, sir, and keep focused.”

“Show ya right, Sergeant Hobbs.”

Regular as clockwork and as welcomed as an ulcer. He ain’t gonna let his immediate superior do that to him though. Life was too short and so was his temperament. Everybody had their limits. Mr. Hobbs, here’s hopin’ you never find that out. He cracked a small smile.

“If he was that liquid, I assume they had investments, Brother Malcolm.”

“Valued at over \$50 million. Oh, and they paid off the house.”

“Should it be any other way? Could the O’Malley’s pay off theirs and some other folks in Virginia-Highland too? I don’t think I need to answer those questions.”

Malcolm raised his eyebrows at Shepard.

“We have to check into the family, past business associates, maybe even the neighbors. I want Shepard and Selena as the leads on this one. Unless otherwise stated, Orlando and Pepper are backup. Cool?”

Nodded heads confirmed the plan. Malcolm’s cell rang from his shirt pocket.

“Sergeant Hobbs...”

Orlando surveyed Malcolm’s mug. Uh-oh. They were all well-acquainted with that, ‘ain’t nothin’ good comin’ next’ face. He ended the call with solemnity his new best buddy.

“We got another body. Peachtree Park. Orlando and Pepper, you’re up.”

They gathered coats, fedoras, pad and pens.

“Peachtree Park, Detective Queen, sir.”

“Buckhead is the spot, huh? We’ll see how another half of the other half lives after murder comes to their side of town.”

“Up and at ‘em, partner.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

They scooted out of the office with a quickness.