

Excerpt

The man gasped for air under the rough cloth hood that covered his head. His breath was hot against his sweat soaked skin and he tried to steady the shaking in his arms and legs, fighting to control the rapid thumping of his heart.

Muffled voices talked to each other outside the confines of the hood, then a hand gripped the top, catching strands of his hair, and pulled the hood up and away from his head.

Two bright lights obscured the room and the features of the two other men. One sat at a table behind a laptop, the other leaned against the table, arms crossed, clutching the cloth hood in one hand.

‘You two fellah’s are in some serious trouble,’ the bound man said. ‘You have any idea who I am? Who you think you have trussed up here, like some pig?’

The bound man grinned into the glare, revealing a mouthful of gold, intricate wire work around the gums and a solitary ruby in one incisor. That smile had helped intimidate many people in his rise from South London foot-soldier to the head of his own criminal organisation.

‘Hello Julian.’ The man behind the laptop continued to tap away at the keyboard. ‘We know all about you and your infamous career. Most impressive.’

‘Then you know what you can expect. I walk out of here and only you two get ended. Otherwise, your family, your friends and the first girlfriend you ever had gets their throats cut.’

‘Hmmm. Not particularly inventive,’ the man behind the laptop said. ‘Finn, a DNA sample, if you please.’

The other man stood up and walked into the light. Heavily scarred over his face and arms, he looked like someone had scribbled over his skin with a razor.

‘You touch me, whiteboy, and you’ll lose a mngh, mmmph.’ The last words were lost as powerful fingers pinched open his mouth. The other man’s hands were as strong as a Rottweiler’s jaw.

Finn peered into Julian’s mouth and carefully scraped the inside of his cheek with a wooden swab. He released his grip and walked back to the table, where he placed the swab onto a metal plate. The laptop began to hum.

Julian seethed as he watched the two men hover around the laptop. He let his imagination play through fantasies of revenge as he vowed to hunt these two abductors down.

The other man moved around the table and into the fringes of the light. He was old, his face creased with age, but there was something familiar about the black-rimmed glasses. The man stepped into clearer light and Julian stared in shock.

‘You recognise me, do you?’ Duvalier said.

Julian nodded. ‘My gran’daddy had photographs of you from when he was in Haiti. Said you were the vilest man alive. “Papa Doc” Duvalier.’

‘Papa Doc. Now that is a name I have not heard in a long time. Brings back memories. Your Grandfather became a refugee and escaped Haiti. Lucky for him. Unlucky for you.’

‘But - he said you was dead.’

‘I am Hougan. Vodou. Bokor Sorcerer. Death does not easily find me. Tell me, what do you know of my army, the Tonton Macoute?’

‘Stories my grandfather told me.’ Julian’s throat was painfully dry and he realised he was feeling fear for the first time in his life. ‘I based my gangland reputation on their terror tactics. Some evil stories.’

Duvalier dipped his hand into a pocket and pulled out a paper sachet.

‘And how do you feel about joining the Macoute?’ Duvalier said.

‘Me? There is no way I’ll join the Macoute.’

Duvalier smiled. ‘That’s what they all say.’ He opened the sachet and blew red dust into Julian’s face.

Julian coughed and spluttered, hacking at the burning sensation in his throat and eyes. He pulled at the restraints, stretching his powerful neck upwards.

‘The poison and venom concoction will quickly soak into your blood stream snuffing out that part of your soul that makes you you. Once the *ti bonanj* is withered and dead, this makes room for something else to take up residence.’

Duvalier looked about the room. Already dark figures crowded around the bound man. Demonic creatures, red cast and sallow, waiting for the first flakes of the dust to reach the heart and snuff out the soul.

Julian screamed, his body shaking and spasming as the last spark of his *ti bonanj* flickered out. One of the creatures slipped into him, like a scaly hand into a glove.

‘How did it go?’ Duvalier questioned Finn, who sat in front of the laptop.

‘Results are coming through now. It’s looking good. About ninety one percent confirmation.’

‘So close,’ Duvalier whispered as he stared into the red-veined eyes of the husk of Julian. The Tonton Macoute stared back at him and grinned.
