

Excerpt

With a takeout coffee in one hand and the Financial Times in the other, Duncan leaned against a doorway, waiting for the estate agent to show him around the ridiculously over-priced inner city office suite. He sipped at the coffee and admired his reflection in a car window. The suit was sharp, button down collar shirts were the season's darling and his long fringe and shoulder length hair gave him a moody yet deep quality. Just the look he was going for.

A couple of young women walked by and Duncan smiled at them whilst flicking the hair out of his eyes. They giggled, hand over mouths, as they passed. His stare bore into the back of their heads, willing them to turn round as they headed down the street, his smile fixed in place. But they didn't turn round and the smile turned to a sneer. He turned to the reflection in the nearby car, dark fantasies playing in his mind.

Traffic kept the streets noisy with rumbling wheels, squealing brakes and infrequent horn blasts. Unlike most of the other Tonton Macoute, he enjoyed the city. The tang of exhaust fumes and the greasy feel to the skin. The anonymous presence and close-knit strangers. Many times he had followed a random woman through the streets, watching her shop and eat and idle along in her own world. Sometimes he would follow her home. He was rarely noticed or confronted. Once he knew where they lived he would find a shadowy corner and watch the lights in the house blink on and, some hours later, blink off. If opportunity allowed, he sometimes broke into the house and entertained himself.

The estate agent half ran down the street, skipping between parked cars, unbuttoned jacket flapping behind him. He was unkempt and fifteen minutes late, just as Dominique had forecast.

'You must be Mr Leven, here to see the offices for rent?' The estate agent used the name Duncan had given over the telephone.

'That's right,' Duncan said, slurping noisily on his coffee.

'Sorry I'm late, I've been running behind schedule since this morning. Crazy, crazy timetable. Everyone wants the prime spots overlooking the river. Let me take you up and show you around this little baby.' He inverted commas with his fingers whilst promising this little baby. Duncan smiled.

The stairwell to the third floor was narrow and smelled faintly of urine and mould. Large blotches on the wall and sticky carpets did not make a good first impression. The door to the second floor offices stuck and Duncan stood back whilst the estate agent opened it on the third attempt.

'This first room is well-placed and attractive with full window frontage looking over the city. Ideal, I think you will agree, for a meeting room or personal assistant's office.' The estate agent paced to the end of the room and beamed brightly.

'It's cramped,' Duncan said, peering out of the window to the busy road below.

'Economic,' the agent said. 'And with careful use of furniture you can create an effective illusion of space. The natural light brightens up the area and really promotes the feel good factor of this room.'

Duncan shook his head and the estate agent could feel a commission slipping away. He continued his patter with the adept skill of a fly fisher. 'And the location is just so convenient. Minutes from the nearest tube station. Victoria Station a few streets away. Why, there's even a Starbucks across the street. Great for those late night projects.'

Duncan watched the flurry of figures within Starbucks. He could make out Karen and the assassin facing each other. His trained eye watching the colourful fireworks. 'Can I have a look at the specifications again?'

'Certainly.' The fight ebbed from his fish and the estate agent considered which closing strategy he was going to use to reel him in. He handed the specification sheets to Duncan and talked about the additional options available with this particular commercial site.

Duncan straightened the creases out of the sales sheet, smoothing it flat against the wall. He then folded a triangle into the paper, scoring a fingernail down the fold to create a sharp edge. His hands moved rapidly, turning the paper over and over, folding this way and that, creasing and tucking and bending and straightening. Slowly, the paper took origami shape.

The estate agent continued to talk in the background, wandering from the tiny kitchen to another hallway. He returned through the original doorway when he realised Duncan was not following him. 'Do you have any questions?' the agent asked, a note of irritation in his tone.

'Only one. When is your next appointment?'

'As it happens, I have a showing in the Docklands in ten minutes. But if you were interested in this space I can rearrange.'

Instead of answering, Duncan brandished the paper model he had finished making. A perfect copy of a twelve inch Bowie knife.

'I never told you what I intend to use the offices for, did I?' Duncan said.

'Not exactly, no,' the agent seemed embarrassed to admit he didn't take any interest in whatever the office space would be used for. He was young and hungry for sales. 'Something to do with paper models? I must say you do have a talent for it, that's really good. You even have the serrations running down the back of the blade. It looks sharp enough to cut.'

Duncan leant forward and drew the origami blade across the young estate agent's throat. The agent jerked back in surprise, hands clasping at his severed neck. Blood pumped between his fingers and bubbled as he tried to speak. He sank back against the wall and slid to the floor, eyes glazed, the last thing he saw was the fading vision of the city skyline.

Duncan knelt next to the window and laid the Financial Times out flat on the floor. He thumbed through a number of pages until, satisfied, he threw the remainder to one side and folded the pages lengthways. He scored and creased, tore and folded the pink pages, rolling a long slim tube and twisting over and over the news section. In minutes he had five separate origami models before him. He inspected each piece before slotting and fitting each together.

Two minutes later he held a snipers rifle made from the distinctive pink pages in his hands, complete with telescopic sight. He smiled to himself, judging the craftsmanship at arm's length. He hoisted the rifle into his shoulder and slid the

breach back and forth, working the action to ensure it was free of kinks or tears.

Duncan placed the rifle carefully against the window frame and turned to the remaining pages. He tore at the city analysis section of the newspaper, tubing and folding and creasing a four inch bullet out of the pages. Three words could be made out along the length of the bullet. The typeset letters of the words were uneven and disjointed. A patch work line, like a ransom note.

Feng Shui Assassin.

Duncan loaded the bullet into the rifle and settled at the window, watching the events across the street unfold.
