Shadow strings of the Unforgotten Past

By Ben Ayad Hatim

**Chapter 1: Unusual Day!**

Seated in the courtroom's front row, awaiting the trial of a thief he had apprehended, Paul sat with crossed arms and a stern countenance, yet an emptiness lingered in his heart. He had arrived at the court well in advance, striding purposefully into the trial chamber. As he entered, the resonating click of his shoes against the polished marble floor reverberated throughout the grand hall, with its towering columns and stately decorum. It was a solitary sound, for he was the sole occupant of the courtroom at that moment, awaiting the arrival of others.

Paul stood as a commanding figure, tall and broad-shouldered, with a head that seemed sculpted—more oval than round. His deep-set eyes bore a dark intensity, complemented by a slender nose and finely tuned ears, all exuding an aura of unwavering determination and resolute commitment. His jet-black hair was impeccably combed and swept back, while his attire, consisting of blue jeans and a black shirt, marked him as one of Chicago's finest police detectives. When one gazed upon his countenance, an immediate impression of dedication and focus emerged. His eyes, perpetually sharp, were framed by eyebrows meticulously shaped to reinforce his determination. However, this exterior demeanor concealed a deeper truth. Behind the façade of unwavering strength lay an emptiness—a lost soul in search of salvation, a thirst for meaning in a world often devoid of it.

"All rise, please. The Honorable judge Clark presiding." Announced the Bailiff.

It didn't take more than five minutes for the judge to sentence the thief to three years in prison, bringing the trial to an end. Another closed case for Paul, yet expressions of success, happiness, or pride never adorned his stern face. As he exited the court, strolling alone through the empty hall, a young and attractive reporter approached him, holding a recording device, and requested a moment with the 30-year-old, single detective.

"Detective Paul, you've successfully closed another case and made our streets safer," the reporter said in a seductive yet professional tone. She then added, "Can you share your secret?"

Paul was the type of man who didn't have time for frivolous pursuits, and the emptiness in his heart posed a significant obstacle to his engagement. Nevertheless, women often fell for him due to his striking appearance and confident demeanor. So, when he spoke in his deep, resonant voice, uttering just a few words, he transformed into one of Chicago's most charming men.

"I simply do what needs to be done," Paul replied, maintaining his reserved demeanor.

"Detective Paul, I truly implore you to provide a statement. I must deliver an article by evening, or I'll be in quite a bind," the reporter urged, her professional composure hinting at the urgency of her deadline.

"Sorry, but I can't assist you, miss," Paul replied, walking away.

The reporter wasn't surprised, as she understood Paul's character, but she felt deeply frustrated that her urgent request had gone unfulfilled. She had acted like any other woman would, but Paul was not the type to notice such things. As he quickened his pace upon receiving a call about a crime scene in the western part of the city, where the Kabachi drug syndicate operated, the reporter found herself compelled to follow, her gaze lingering on Paul's strong, muscular physique.

Paul got into his car and headed to the crime scene, contemplating this new bizarre case. It was a murder that had occurred in a renowned spa on Madison Street, a neighborhood under the control of the Kabachi syndicate. However, that wasn't what preoccupied Paul's mind. It was the ID of the deceased person—Ricardo Kolini. The famous businessman had always been on the radar of various justice departments for his alleged involvement in human trafficking, though it was never proven. Moreover, Ricardo and the Kabachi syndicate were known to have amicable relations with each other. Therefore, the fact that Ricardo was killed in their territory raised numerous questions and foreshadowed a potential storm of mob wars.

That's what Paul was contemplating as he drove at a brisk pace, prompting other drivers to honk their horns. Additionally, the determined reporter was doing her best on a scooter to keep up with Paul's impressive driving.

“Detective Paul Kirilis,” Paul announced while showing his badge to a police officer standing behind the crime scene tape.

"The famous Detective Paul," exclaimed the police officer with a proud and excited tone, and then added, "the corpse is on the second floor in the sauna chamber."

Paul quickly entered the five-story building with purposeful strides and headed to the corpse's location, receiving salutes from the police officers he passed along the way. Meanwhile, the beautiful reporter had just stopped in front of the police officer guarding the crime scene tape while playing with her hair. She smiled at him and flirtatiously toyed with her lips in the hopes of causing a reaction. She wanted to gain access to the crime scene, so she made a subtle attempt to take a step closer, indicating her intention to cross the tape. However, she soon realized that her seductive tactics were having no effect on the cop.

“I’m a reporter! I heard that you have something interesting going on inside,” said the reporter in a hushed voice, hoping her playful gestures might at least elicit some information.

“Well, a powerful man was killed in the sauna chamber,” replied the officer, placing his hands on his equipment attached to his belt.

“No way!” the reporter exclaimed, her face displaying surprise. She placed a hand on the officer’s arm and continued, “You must know who that man was, right?” She accompanied her question with a sly smile and a provocative tone.

“Yes, of course! He’s Ricardo Kolini,” the officer replied with determination and pride.

Meanwhile, inside the sauna chamber, Paul stood, meticulously analyzing the crime scene with his sharp eyes. The chamber was square-shaped, with wooden floors and walls, and wooden seating. The room remained empty, with only Ricardo's lifeless body, partially concealed beneath a white towel, sprawled on the floor, with clear signs of strangling. Paul's trained mind swiftly recognized that the high humidity within the chamber might have already compromised fingerprints and DNA samples.

"When will the forensic team arrive?" Paul inquired in his customary serious tone, his face etched with determination.

"They're just three minutes away, Detective Paul," replied a nearby police officer, stationed by the door.

"Was he alone in the sauna?" Paul continued in his unwavering demeanor, then added, "Were there any witnesses?"

The officer responded with a hint of urgency, "There were no witnesses, but he wasn't alone. His son, Ronald, was with him just minutes before the incident. In fact, it was the son who reported his father's death."

After learning Ronald's whereabouts, Paul headed there without second thoughts. He harbored deep suspicions about this case and was determined not to waste any time in uncovering the truth behind the death of a man whose demise threatened to disrupt the delicate balance of power within Chicago's criminal underworld. Moreover, Paul saw an opportunity to unveil the mystery behind Ricardo's human trafficking operations and, just perhaps, gain insight into the clandestine workings of the Kabachi syndicate in the drug trade.

"Ronald Kolini?" inquired Paul, his voice laden with seriousness, as he entered the reception room on the second floor of the spa building.

"Yes. Who's asking?" replied Ronald, without lifting his face from his phone screen, where he had been engrossed in a game.

"I'm Detective Paul," Paul declared with determined composure, taking deliberate steps into the reception room. He continued, "I have some questions for you."

"About my father?" Ronald responded. Then he shifted his gaze from his phone screen. He looked at Paul deadly serious as he said, "I killed him."

For the first time in many years, Paul felt his body tremble. It wasn't fear or shock from hearing those words delivered with such gravity. Instead, it was an eerie sensation emanating from the peculiar and unsettling man seated before him, engrossed in his phone.

"Damn!" Ronald exclaimed suddenly, raising his phone in the air as if to smash it against the ground after losing in the game. However, he halted and remarked, "Nah, this is just a game. I can try again later." He then looked up at Paul with a calm, composed expression, indicating his readiness to cooperate. "You mentioned you had some questions for me? ".

"Where were you when your father died?" asked Paul, standing still, away from Ronald.

"I was getting water," replied Ronald, rising from his seat. He added, "By the time I was back, he was already gone."

"You didn't see anyone suspicious coming out of the chamber or walking in the hall?" asked Paul.

"No. It was just me the whole time, me and my beloved daddy!" replied Ronald, with a slightly sad expression, looking down and walking closer to Paul.

Paul once again felt the strange, unsettling vibes emanating from Ronald as he spoke those words. However, the feeling quickly dissipated when he heard a voice calling his name from the entrance of the reception room. It was the family lawyer, a mysterious and resourceful man who had worked alongside Ricardo for over 15 years. Suddenly, as Paul turned his gaze to the lawyer, who was dressed in a black suit and carrying a briefcase, Ronald seized the opportunity to steal Paul's unsecured gun. With the dexterity of a seasoned thief, Ronald expertly removed the weapon from its holster. Paul stood there in shock as Ronald pointed the gun at him, an evil, triumphant grin on his face.

"So, any more questions, detective?" said Ronald with a mocking tone. Then, he added, "Or should I say, any last wishes?"

"Do you have the guts to shoot, kid?" wondered Paul while standing still and wearing a very serious expression.

"Do you challenge me, Detective?" reacted Ronald, his face even more excited. Then, he added, "You appear ready to die, but not willing to. In fact, you seem to be looking for a way out to reverse the situation, yet you're not showing any signs of weakness. I like that!"

Paul was amazed by the astute analysis the 24-year-old Ronald had made because it was entirely correct. He was even more surprised when Ronald handed the gun back to him and raised his arms in the air. Ronald's behavior was completely unpredictable and didn't follow the pattern of a normal person. However, Paul carefully took his gun back and pointed it at Ronald while maintaining the same serious stance and expression, and Ronald simply stood in place, wearing an excited expression, much like a baby tasting ice cream for the first time.

"I suggest you put your gun down, Detective Paul," announced the family lawyer as he approached the two. Then, he added, "Keeping your gun unsecured could have severe consequences. Let's just forget about the incident."

Paul agreed to the lawyer's suggestion, not because he was afraid of the consequences, but because he didn't want to waste time on protocols. Moreover, he had resolved to keep a close eye on Ronald and uncover the mystery behind his behavior and his father's death. Similarly, Ronald was, for the first time in a long while, excited that destiny had finally led him to someone who could satisfy the needs of his unusual character.