

ICE

Episode One:
THE CONCRETE JUNGLE

A Novella by Sam Quo Vadis

Excerpt:

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As Harry stalked the cold, dank basement, he saw flashlight beams sweeping the walls like spotlights in search of an elusive, phantom quarry. One of those spotlights swung around and blinded him. "Get it off, please," he commanded tersely.

"Sorry, sir," replied a voice tightened by stress and registering an octave above normal. "You startled me."

"Are we afraid of the dark?"

Orin Glickman, 40, medium height with a stocky build, stepped forward so Harry could get a better view. He had a square face, punctuated by a rounded nose, and a short forehead from which his black hair was beginning to recede.

"I just didn't expect you so soon, sir."

"If I'd known that I wouldn't have been here for another hour. At least."

Orin felt vaguely like he'd done something wrong, but he wasn't sure what it might be. He thought it best to change the subject. "We found the body over there." He pointed into the blackness. "Well, we didn't. Agent Temple found him."

"Agent Temple?"

"Shirley. She was supposed to meet the informant here at midnight."

"I take it she did."

"In an unfortunate state, I'm afraid."

"Yes, we've already determined that," said Harry dryly.

"We have?"

"Fear. The presence of."

Orin had no idea what was Harry was talking about, but this time he decided he'd do best keep his mouth shut.

Harry turned his mini-flashlight on a faint silhouette blocking a doorway. A compact brunette of about 30 years

of age with short, black hair and energetic almond brown eyes shot into relief. "And you would be Agent Temple."

"Follow me," she said with a slight nod of her head. Orin had almost to jog to keep up with them.

"Shirley? The actress or the drink?" Harry asked in reference to her code name.

"The drink, of course."

"Care to fill me in?"

"One glass of ginger ale with a dash of grenadine. If you want to be naughty you can add some spiced rum."

"I was referring to the dead man."

At that moment, Harry stepped into a puddle of dirty, grey water that was seeping from a crack in the base of the wall and which quickly surrounded his expensive, Italian-made shoes.

"Sorry. I should have warned you. This building leaks like a sieve."

"Unfortunately, the one leak we wanted was plugged before you could get to him".

Ms. Temple set off again. "This entire scenario is bizarre. Of course I suspected a trap, but there was something too amateurish about the whole set-up. No names, no promises, no explicate enticements to draw us in. Neville characterized the caller as anxious and vague."

Harry had been a spy for ten years, and his instincts were good. What Ms. Temple was saying told him that the aspiring informant had never played this game before. Harry Lime, on the other hand, was a player. And he was an experienced one. And he was very good.

Ironically, Harry had learned that in the world of espionage there are no secrets. Someone always knows and someone is always willing to tell. The trick was to know whom to ask.

"Speaking of leaks, who else knew about this meeting?"

"Only Neville. And Marie, I suppose. She seems to know everything."

Harry thought he detected a slight tone of resentment. Was it jealousy, perhaps?

His flashlight beam met a pair of cement shoes. The shoes were attached to cement trousers that appeared to be holding up a cement shirt, tie, and jacket.

"His name's John Weston," said Temple, of the tall, lanky figure that was posed with both hands covering his mouth.

"You're certain he's in there?"

"I wouldn't have brought you out here in the middle of the night if he wasn't."

"Background?"

Orin saw an opportunity to redeem himself and jumped in. "An executive with Corporeal Technologies. Single; no children; no pets; one heavily mortgaged, three-bedroom house in the Shaughnessy district. Corporeal is involved in developing new technologies with ummm...concrete applications."

Harry and Ms. Temple regarded Orin with mild disfavour. "No pun intended," he added quickly.

Harry circled the pillar of cement that had been a man. "Department of defence? Political connections? Anything sensitive?"

Orin started to answer, but Ms. Temple cut him off. "Nothing shows up in our database. John Weston was, so far as we can ascertain, nothing more than he appears."

Under the circumstances, this struck Harry as a rather odd comment. "Then we'll have to ascertain a little bit harder. Let me know if you come up with anything else."

"Of course. Perhaps we can meet some time and discuss this case over drinks," offered Ms. Temple, but her almond eyes hinted at more.