

Kirk's eyes snapped open. With a suffocating gasp he sat upright in the green glow of the room. The oxygen mask tightened. Its tubes and monitor lines brushed his skin. Kirk's first thought, he was tied and gagged.

He tore the mask off. His hands went to his throbbing head and he felt the roughness of the bandages.

Hospital, Kirk understood finally.

The door opened. The corridor lights brightened the room. A man in silhouette stood at the threshold. He entered, shut the door and clicked the fluorescents on.

Kirk squinted under the glare. A doctor, he supposed, dressed in a suit and overcoat.

Pain subsiding, Kirk settled back on the pillows and watched the square-jawed Asian remove his coat, the sleeves of his suit jacket tight over muscular arms.

"Name's Tommy Shee," he smiled, dropping his coat on the chair. "You know where Ling is?" he asked. "Called me just after he followed your wife here." He said, "Would've been here sooner, but got hung up in a poker game; was dealt some pretty good hands."

Kirk's confusion showed on his face.

"That's okay," Tommy said, misreading the look. "Happens all the time, people expecting me to have an accent. Might surprise you to know that I was born and raised in Trenton."

"Trenton," Kirk said weakly.

"What Trenton Makes, the World Takes," Tommy recited.

"That's the Trenton motto," he explained. "Y'know, we've never met, but I can tell we're going to get along. All you have to do is let me know what happened."

Kirk said, "That's what I was going to ask."

Tommy edged closer to the bed. "Sense of humor's important in life, but not right now. Maybe we can have some laughs after you tell me where it is."

"Where what is," Kirk sighed tiredly.

"That's okay," Tommy shrugged. "Don't have to be a doctor to see how messed up you are."

"You're not a doctor?"

"Tommy Shee, that's me. Best memory therapist you'd ever want to meet." Tommy noticed the tattoo on Kirk's forearm.

"Marine," he said. "I'd better be extra careful," he smiled.

Tommy grabbed the tattooed arm, pulled Kirk from the bed and hurled him across the room. Kirk hit the cabinets under the countertop and sank to the floor with a dreadful moan. Head pounding, IV yanked from his arm; hands on his groin, catheter ripped from his urinary tract.

Tommy marched over to him. He lifted him by the throat and said, "Tell me where the money is," thick fingers putting the pressure on.

Kirk's hands fumbled blindly over the countertop behind him. In a fit of desperation, his arm swung around. With it, a flash of steel was followed by the crack of bone.

Tommy reeled and toppled back onto the floor, the scissors driven deeper into his skull.

Kirk collapsed down against the cabinets, chest heaving, pain racing through him, eyes on the dead body that jerked like a windup toy gone berserk.