

NEW YORKER IN LONDON

by

Jeannette Dean

Excel stepped back into the alley. “You think he’ll be here before midnight?”

Long, sparse chocolate Duo leaned casually against the graffiti enhanced stone wall. “It’s possible. If it’s a quiet Saturday night. Few are.”

Under her long brown wool cape Excel stroked the trigger. Her short, unvarnished nails reflected her young clean-cut look. Green eyes, long straight brown hair, the petite girl next door. She smiled. He’d see her, but never suspect an ambush.

“You know, Ex, I never expected this from you.”

“And what did you expect? Can’t let the bastard get away with trying to rape my sister, can I?” She gave Duo a quick wink then centered her gaze on the busy corner again.

Since the student exchange when they were fourteen they had been like sisters, though a more unlikely pair you’d be hard-pressed to find. Excel smiled. She loved the reactions when they made an entrance together. They now spent a month out of each summer together, alternating between Duo’s family in London and hers in New York.

“I’ll never forgive myself if you’re caught.”

“Chill, Duo. At home I wouldn’t consider this move, he’d probably out-draw me. But your guys aren’t armed. A sittin’ duck.” She liked being back in London. Old and soft and clean, it felt sleepy in its progress.

“Father says it was my own fault. Skirt too short, wrong sort of club, partying with brothers.”

Excel snorted, “He’d have you a virgin ‘til you start handing him grandsons sired by a titled aristocrat.” She could feel Duo staring at her.

“Listen, you know I love your father, but he wants to dilute his West Indian blood into non-existence. Oh, he sends money back to the family, but where does he take you guys for vacation? Big European cities. He should take you to Barbados and Nevis to get to know his relatives and customs, your heritage.”

“Maybe you Yanks put too much importance on this ‘roots’ thing.”

Excel spun from her surveillance. “I don’t believe what I’m hearing! Have you looked in the mirror lately? You got your mother’s blue eyes but not her blonde hair and milky white skin.”

“I know it only too well, Ex, more than you ever will! I see the looks, get the condescension, was all but raped by a racist cop.” She was trembling.

Excel threw her free arm around her. “God, me and my mouth. I’m sorry, Duo.” They stood for a bit in the semi-darkness, oblivious to the stop and go of traffic at the light, the flow of the Saturday night social scene along the square.

Duo pushed her away. “Don’t miss him, Ex. Get him for me. Right in the face.” Her words were hard, not the warm flowing voice that brought poems and essays

to life.

Excel scanned the vicinity, prayed he hadn't passed, settled in again. Her anger was divided between her prey, Duo's father, and herself for her insensitivity. Poor Duo. Beauty, brains and money weren't everything.

Duo moved beside her. "It's five minutes 'til twelve. I'll do a quick round of the area."

Watching her march purposefully away, then slow to a casual cruise, Excel swore softly. Such frustration and anger her friend kept locked away, had not voiced even to her. Duo had refused modeling offers for the mindlessness of it but had loved acting. Her father had curtailed her plans, pushing her toward an academic career but she had taken on board enough of an American attitude to see she could choose most any direction once she got her degree, so had gone with the flow. She, like Excel, loved university.

Seeing a uniform, Excel tensed, her latex gloved finger double-checked the safety was off. He approached the corner, turned to retrace his steps and disappeared behind the corner shoe store. Was that the bastard? Why had he turned back? Stroking the trigger, she went over the moves she had practiced. Her older brother, then a cop in New York, had her training with weapons as soon as her periods had commenced. She was good, wasn't worried about missing, and this would be within twenty feet.

Duo rounded the corner, nodded with a grim smile as she stepped around her into the alley. "He's just separating two drunks who were arguing. It should be soon. Be sure you've got the escape route clear in your head. I'll meet you at the

airport.”

“Shhh!” Excel needed full attention. Everything had to go according to plan. Step, smile, aim, shoot. She froze when the uniform appeared.

She breathed deeply. “Duo?” she whispered when he looked in the other direction.

“It’s him,” Duo confirmed and stepped back into the shadows.

Excel faced the street at a slight angle. He would automatically look in, part of his training, a natural move in his job. She set her feet, could feel the cobblestones through her sneakers. Trainers, she corrected her English.

And he was there.

She threw the left side of her cape back over her shoulder. Up came the gun as he turned his head to look in. She pulled the trigger. His face became a mask of red. Again as he reeled back and the side of his head seemed to explode.

She dropped the gun and they both fled. Down the alley, across the one-way street, into the park. Excel handed her cape and gloves to Duo who stashed them in her sports bag and quick-walked to her car that was meter parked one block over. She pulled out and joined the flow of traffic.

Excel took a knit hat from her belt, stuffed her hair underneath as she ran for the taxi stand on the next cross street. With exaggerated French accent she asked the bored driver at the head of the line to take her to the Dorchester. From there she took another taxi to Sloan Square where she took another to Gatwick Airport.

Duo met her in the assigned toilet at 06:00 with her bags. They were silent, tense as Excel changed into her conservative black suit. Check-in seemed to take

forever. They hugged at the duty-free gate and Duo handed her the tabloid with the article she had entered before the event. They looked at each other and began to laugh. The tears began flowing freely, tension and emotions releasing in uncontrollable waves.

With the first boarding call they began to sober. "Are you positive the dye will last?" Duo asked between gasps, wiping her eyes.

"The cops tested it in the City. It'll eventually wear off, but nothing short of battery acid will remove it. He's a well-marked man for weeks and he got a real earful." Excel began giggling and collapsed again, holding onto her friend.

When last call rang out, they embraced, "He'll think he's blind and partially deaf for a couple of days," Excel chuckled.

"Thanks, Ex," Duo kissed her cheek, "revenge is sweet."

On the plane Excel leafed through the paper to find the article. It was titled 'Rapist Stained by Victim'. It was vague, slightly exaggerated. Duo wasn't identified and of the attacker it was only said that 'he was in a uniform'. The closing quote from the anonymous victim was, 'Please tell your local constabulary if you spot a man with red-stained face. I cannot prove he did this to me, but at least he'll know that the public doesn't approve.'

Excel sighed, asked for a wine to toast a job well done. She began to contemplate formation of 'The Anonymous Avenging Angels'.

finish