

THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

By Augustine Sam

PROLOGUE

The dim figure continued to lurk in the dusking patch of tangled shrubbery until darkness enveloped him. Then he choked, swore, frothed at the mouth, and went down on all fours. After a while, he clambered out of the shrubbery like a ghost, picked himself up, and wiped his hand across his brow. Tall, with an athletic build, he covered his hands with fleeced gloves and masked his face with a hood. He had a definite presence in spite of the aura of repulsion that swelled around him like foul breath. For a spell, he stood in death-like silence, in a navy hooded sweatshirt, a pair of matching pants, and black running shoes. His dark brown eyes studied his environment like a bloodhound determined to unearth a misplaced object without losing its sense of smell.

A short distance away, small cylindrical light bulbs cast an eerie glow over the lush greenery of Glennon Park, capturing its beauty in a halo of kaleidoscopic brilliance. And then a throng of men in fancy tee shirts and short pants intermixed with women in jeans and sleeveless tops whisked into view. The dim figure, hearing their muffled voices over the sound of the fountain's cascading waters, stiffened. Like him, the fountain stood in an unlit area of the park. Surrounded by luxuriant shrubs, it was the place where randy youths who often exploited the shadows for romantic mischief loved to loiter.

On this night, there were no lovers necking by the fountain, something else took their place. A black diamond Cadillac stood beside the fountain. The unusual sight caused the dim figure's hands to shake with excitement. Cars were not allowed that far into the park, so whatever fantasies within the limits of human accomplishment the Cadillac's driver had conceived, this was the wrong night for it, he mused. *This'll be my last murder*, he decided, the climax of a long, enterprising career as the greatest hitman of all time. He was a killer so efficient and so elusive that even the FBI nicknamed him *Shadow of Death* for his uncanny ability to dissolve into a penumbra after every hit.

He recognized the wonderful head of hair and the slender, sensual neck as the lone occupant of the Cadillac appeared in silhouette against the fountain. His pulse quickened at once. He mopped his brow with a handkerchief and contemplated the lady's mesmerizing beauty. Thinking of her now as a victim seemed odd to him. He had loved her once; in fact, he still loved her, a reality that put him in a quandary—a lethal clash between his obsession and his survival instinct. *The survival instinct*, he knew, had to win, for between them now stood the only thing that love could not subdue—a dark secret.

The *Shadow of Death* moved with stealth in the semi-darkness toward the Cadillac, his hands shaking with excitement with every step he took. His only accomplice was his own shadow, perceptible to no eye but his. It seemed innocuous even to him, like a specter, only there to see, not to arbitrate. It moved when the killer moved and stopped when he did, like a minion with no initiative of its own, an android programmed to repeat the action of its mentor, as only a ghost would; and then saddled thereafter with the damning knowledge of the truth, a truth that would elude the rest of the world—an everlasting witness, a ghost that would never die.

There was deafening silence inside the Cadillac. All around it, darkness closed in as slowly and unfalteringly as the approaching evil. The killer's face was impassive, his heartbeat regular, but his muscles were taut as he strained to open the driver's door with his gloved hand.

She did not see him, could not see him, because she was leaning face downward on the

steering wheel.

Gripped by a morbid fascination with death, he stared down at her, the roaring tension inside him silenced by his cold determination. Everything would depend on this moment, this act, he mulled over, staring around the fountain. He wanted no interruption and there was none. He reached for her throat, giving her no chance to react.

There must be no error, he steeled himself against the guilt he knew was coming. His pressure on her throat was fierce. Time, thoughts, fear, regrets, all ceased to exist as an eternity seemed to roll by in a matter of seconds. And then relief flooded his being.

It was over, he almost smiled. It bore the mark of his usual professional touch—smooth, fast, painless, and very peaceful.

The Black Paradise—a majestic all-marble edifice on a 30-acre spread—was an imposing waterfront villa on Santa Monica’s prestigious coastal promenade. A figurative sanctuary of the mob, its grounds were dotted with palm trees, outbuildings, a tennis court, and a large swimming pool. An electronic gate fitted with security monitors led up the garden path, revealing a huge courtyard with a well-tended lawn that stressed the beauty of the elaborate flower garden. The distinguished abode, embellished with a spectacular glass-roofed, sky-lighted attic, boasted two exquisitely furnished living rooms and four bedrooms.

Every so often the waves crashed below, setting off a beautiful pattern of undulatory spectacle that was afoot at the precise moment the Organized Crime Strike Force of the L.A.P.D. swooped down on the villa.

Tailed by television cameras, masked men in riot gear, enraged by the absence of the mob boss, Talbot, kicked his minders out of their way and rammed rifles against locked doors. Then harrowing screams, not utterly unexpected, transformed the midmorning chaos into sheer pandemonium, when the officers, unaware of the three pythons Talbot nursed as pets, stormed a barricaded room. Cacophonous gunfire, accompanying the screams, preceded the unraveling of five officers, who would later be placed on a hospital bed.

Frank Talbot returned home at about midnight that day, to the gruesome sight of three dead pythons and a newfangled dynamics in *The Black Paradise*. After an initial shock at the images that made up some disturbing footage of the raid—a prime time topper that evening—he regained his composure. Clenched fists, preceded by a sweeping view of the scene, were quickly unclenched. For a man with a volcanic temper that could go off at any moment, he was incredibly composed, to the chagrin of the chief of police, Eason Grove.

“They want me to react,” he said aloud. “The bastards want me to make a false move and I’m not going to.” The mobster, reaching the attic, reclined on his favorite sofa, smoking a fat Havana cigar and drinking Cognac, as a quiet calm settled over his home.

A bulky, clean-shaven lawyer in a gray suit and white tie, sat across from him. Neither of them spoke. Stern-faced and methodical, the lawyer neither drank nor smoked; he gazed at the security monitor as the pinkish bulb blinked thrice, and then the electronic gate rolled back, admitting the chief of police into the villa. The blood pulsed through the mobster’s veins at the sight of the police chief in the monitor, accompanied by Brent Greenberger, head of the homicide unit.

“Word of advice, Frank, don’t say anything,” the lawyer rose to his feet. “I’ll do the talking.”

Talbot hunched his shoulders, pointing his fat cigar at the lawyer. “Can’t you see I’m

enjoying my Cognac, Steve? Do I look like a guy who'd waste his midnight smoke on a goon like Eason Grove?"

"Good," the bulky man softened his lips without smiling. His olive green eyes dilated as the mobster sat back, sipped his Cognac and dragged on the fat cigar. His pose, as usual, was snobbish; his dark, wide-nosed face, emphasized by high cheekbones, bore no expression, but the rest of his body, though seemingly relaxed, was discernibly taut.

Talbot's family, already upset by the afternoon raid, scrambled out of the way of the police chief as he stepped in, sandwiched between two gun-wielding officers. Unfazed by the pandemonium, Grove affixed a scowl to his face, betraying his irritation at the subdued murmurs of the mobster's family, as he made his way upstairs for the much-anticipated confrontation. Awaiting him in the uneasy silence of the attic, Talbot's lawyer adjusted his tie, grunting. Beside him, the mobster cast a sideways glance at the security monitor and noticed a welcome activity outside the electronic gate. In the excitement of the moment, no one noticed him depress a button on the tiny remote control in his hand.

And then, as the chief of police, his feet on the elegant Persian rug, started toward the celebrated mobster, his path blocked by the lawyer who stood with his back to Talbot, the sudden arrival of a horde of reporters shattered the serenity of the attic. Television cameras and fretful newsmen filled the room, jostling uneasily and noisily, for space, as powerful floodlights suddenly illuminated the fashionable loft of the villa, surprising the police.

"What the hell is going on?" Eason Grove muttered in indignation.

The chaos paralyzed the policemen, who stood back in disbelief, gazing at the unfolding drama with wide eyes. Talbot sat calmly, drinking his Cognac and puffing on his cigar, his visage unchanged, his composure amazingly unflappable, as if unaware of the commotion around him. The cameras found him, and for a long time, lingered for a close-up detail of his person the way old hatreds lingered after a war. Talbot looked impressive for the camera. He wore an unbuttoned gray housecoat over a blue shirt and a pair of white tennis shorts. His inner thigh hair was long and messy. His feet were bare and his toenails were clean. He was clean-shaven too, with no protruding stomach in sight. He had pronounced lips, mean, dark eyes, and a huge nose that gave him the look of a malevolent primate. At forty-nine, he exuded some kind of brutal sex appeal. The cameras, satisfied, shifted away from him to what should now be the news.

Hovering near the door of the attic, the policemen, stunned by the unexpected media scenario, gaped at their chief like dumb gawks as he stood dumbfounded, unable to make sense of what had just happened. Fists clenched, furrows in his brow, Eason Grove shook his head in anger at the realization that Talbot had outsmarted him once again.

"Son of a bitch," he muttered, unheard by the reporters. The bastard had apparently called in the press after speaking to him—*the usual mob strategy employed to embarrass the police*—cheap but always effective. He stormed around the attic, furious at his inability to keep the news media out of the drama.

"Can you tell us what's going on here, Chief?"

The reporters raised their voices above the noise. "Is Mr. Talbot under arrest? If so, what is he accused of?"

Eason Grove raised his hand in unfocused rage. As he tried to shield his eyes from the bright lights, he became aware of a hand shoving a microphone toward him. "What brought you here at this time of night, Chief?"

"It is morning already." The reporters roared with laughter.

“Gentlemen please,” Grove stood still. “My presence here does not call for this kind of excitement.”

“You are saying...”

“Listen, I came out here to have a little talk with Mr. Talbot.”

“About what exactly?”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you that.”

“But why now?”

The chief of police hesitated. He shoved his hands into his pockets, recalling his wife’s tease that he was always found wanting before the camera.

“Well,” he breathed. “Mr. Talbot had been away, as he said, at a charity event, and I had to wait for him to get back, sadly, it turned out to be now.”

“Chief, we learned that you had several officers waiting here for him since mid-day, is that correct?”

“That is correct.”

“Does this have anything to do with the mysterious murder at Glennon Park?”

“What made you say that?”

The reporter grimaced. “The head of your homicide unit said earlier that he would get to the bottom of the murder no matter whose ox was gored and now I find him right there beside you, I’m wondering if there is a connection.”

Like a boxer who had collected a battery of blows, Grove was unsteady on his feet. He stared into the camera and made an unsuccessful attempt to smile. “Mr. Talbot and I are going to discuss a different matter altogether, we haven’t got much time, so if you’ll excuse me, gentlemen, I want to speak privately with him.” He moved away from the spotlight.

The reporters shuffled around the room, exchanging telling glances, but none of them left the attic, to Talbot’s utter satisfaction.

“Damn it,” Grove muttered in a fit of pique, convinced now that his pronouncements and actions at this shady hour would be weighed with remarkable suspicion. He looked up, conscious that his presence here at this hour was nothing short of an unwelcome presage of a media firestorm in the morning.

Awaiting his next move, the hovering reporters gripped their recording devices eagerly, satisfied that they hadn’t missed their sleep for a hoax. Having already got their story, they were now waiting for details of the encounter—a sort of icing on their already delicious cake. They trained their cameras and recorders at the police chief with unfeigned elation while he planted himself in front of the mobster, flanked by two uniformed officers. They clicked away with enthusiasm as he gestured toward Talbot, who was shielded by his husky lawyer.

“Why are you hiding, Frank? Talk to me, damn it,” he roared at the mobster, who tried not to smirk when he noticed that the Chief’s embarrassment had become obvious even to his own officers.

“I have a lawyer, sir; he speaks for me,” Talbot said gallantly, staring at the cameras, not at the Chief.

“A straight question deserves a straight answer, doesn’t it?” Grove gestured, his face distorted by rage.

The mobster’s lawyer, who was still blocking his path, pouted. “So, what’s the question?”

Like one who’d bitten into a sour candy, Grove’s face puckered. “Where were you on Saturday night, Frank, between 8:30 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.?”

“Good Lord!” The lawyer affixed a bogus frown to his placid face. “So this is what it’s all about, the Glennon Park murder?” He sat down and crossed one fat leg over another, gesturing suavely to candy up the reporters for the presentation of his rock solid alibi. “On Saturday night, between 8.00 p.m. and 11.00 p.m., Talbot was at a dinner event in Beverly Hills, hosted in his honor by the board of the L.A. Youth Project, in recognition of his financial contributions to the organization.” The frown on his face deepened as he gazed from Grove to the reporters. “Of course, for an event as important as that, his family, his bodyguards, his workers and business associates, were with him.” He spread his hands in an exaggerated show of surprise. “Is that so difficult for the police to verify?”

“Damn it!” Eason Grove, surprised by the new development, stared incredulously at the lawyer. “This is not over,” he spat.

And then, weary with anger and frustration, he turned abruptly and stormed out of *The Black Paradise*. The racket that characterized his advent a few minutes ago contrasted with the sobriety that now marked his exit.

The press, to Talbot’s delight, did not leave with him.

“What can I say, gentlemen?” the mobster sat upright, gloating over the police’s inability to link him to the murder. As the waves crashed below, he fielded questions from reporters, telling them what the police chief had held back.

“Obviously, it was the Glennon Park mystery that brought him out here. I have no idea what it is about this strange murder that’s getting them excited,” he laughed. “It has nothing to do with me, gentlemen. I’m not their man.”

Calm and collected, he looked away from the cameras, sipped his Cognac and puffed on his fat cigar, ignoring everyone else in the room as if they had all suddenly become invisible. All subsequent questions bounced off him like rubber balls off the wall, neither acknowledged nor answered. The reporters, familiar with his antics, stifled their laughter. When the last of them had gone, the mobster jettisoned his indifference and summoned a meeting of his inner circle.

And the only item on the agenda was Glennon Park.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Augustine Sam is mainly recognized as a journalist. He is also a bilingual writer & an award-winning poet. A member of the U.K. Chartered Institute of Journalists and the Alliance of Independent Authors, he was formerly Special Desk editor at *THISDAY* newspapers, an influential *Third World* daily first published in collaboration with the *Financial Times of London*. He later became a correspondent for Central Europe.

He was the winner of the **Editors' Choice Award** in the *North America Open Poetry contest*, sponsored by the National Library of Poetry, and was invited to be inducted into the International Society of Poets. He won the Merit Award from this society, as well as having his poems published in two international anthologies: *Measures of the Heart & Sounds of Silence*.

Augustine's collection of poems, *Flashes of Emotion*, now listed on **BookAwards.com**, was the 2015 Finalist in the International Book Award Contest. His debut novel, *Take Back the Memory*, a thought-provoking women's fiction, and this mystery/thriller, *The Conspiracy of Silence*, was awarded the prestigious **Readers' Favorite** 5-star seals.

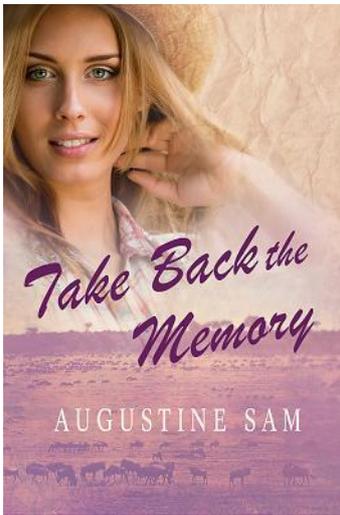
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[TAKE BACK THE MEMORY](#)



“An emotional look into a broken mind; Augustine Sam has a great deal of talent in building up a suspenseful story before an excellent resolution.”

- **Katelyn Hensel** | *Readers' Favorite*

“What makes this erotically charged tale an outstanding debut... is the ease, fluidity, the economy, and tight structure, as well as the precision of Sam’s prose, which has a deft accuracy in its tone and execution. I would surmise that his outstanding poetic skills had a great deal to do with his ability to effortlessly spin quite a yarn.”

- **Norm Goldman** | *The Montreal Examiner*

“I loved the surprising twist at the end.”

Stephanie Lasley | *The Kindle Book Review*

“Sam reaches moments of greatness - mixing a fine writing style with exciting plot points. The greatest strength of the book is its author’s writing. Sam’s penmanship is downright gorgeous. It’s not hard for the reader to guess that he has a poetic background. His story has occasions where the reader yearns to flip the pages and find out what happens next.”

- **Meehan_Connor** | *Online Book Club*

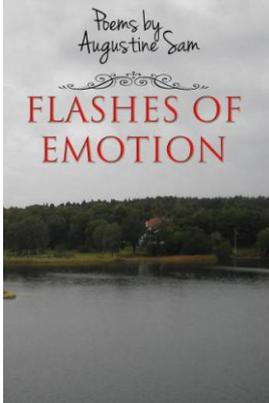
“Often in the prologues of fine novels, the author introduces not only pertinent subject matter but also offers an aperitif of writing style that acts as an overture to the music that will follow. Such is the case with Augustine’s Prologue - pay attention to the language... Poet and storyteller blend seamlessly in a drama that explores the human psyche and that thin line between living and experiencing life. Highly recommended.”

- **Grady Harp** | *Hall of Fame | Vine Voice*

Also from Augustine Sam

Flashes of Emotion

(2015 International Book Award Finalist)



From the Back cover

“*Flashes of Emotion* by Augustine Sam has a classical edge, yet feels current in its raw energy. Poetry, simply put, is not like this anymore, which makes it altogether unique and refreshing. I enjoyed the deep description and rhythm as they are quite different from my own writing. You won’t find words or thoughts like these at slams, or online, therefore it is well worth your time.”

- **Ben Ditmars**, *Author of Night Poems & Haiku in the Night*

“*Fifty-two poems, intellectual and emotional* – Sam’s vocabulary is large, as is his geography. You will find imagery, as in ‘*Italian Cemetery*.’ You will find relationship galore here, for example in ‘*Gestures & Allusions*.’ If you are looking for a sad love poem, turn to ‘*The Greatest Gift*.’ Sam’s style may take a bit of getting used to, but that voice produced several favorites in my notes. Five stars it is, and extremely recommended.”

- **Jim Bennett**, *The Kindle Book Review*

“*Masculine, Effective & Pristine* - In Augustine Sam’s *Flashes of Emotion*, the use of language and allusions to cultural norms is masterful, while his tone plays the chasing dawn of a morning sun we’re unwilling to wait and see. This collection affected me... those poems Augustine Sam rocked were outstanding. I recommend *Flashes of Emotion* to every poetry lover who wants love songs and outside angles from a tender, masculine perspective.”

- **Melissa Ratel**, *Vraeyda Media – Canada*

“Creative, intriguing, and impressive.”

- **Gwen Dickerson**, *Poet & writer*

“Sam knows how to put across emotions and thoughts, and they resonate from every poem.”

- **Lit Amri**, *Readers’ Favorite*

“Gems in an elegant setting.”

- **John Zimmerman**, *Poet*



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