

# Shadow Hunter

By Lupa

Submitted: September 17, 2005

Updated: September 17, 2005

*A Series of strange disappearances forces the FBI to call in a master detective from retirement. But who can catch a kidnapper who releases all the kids that he takes? No one is talking and nothing is as it seems.*

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/Lupa/20474/Shadow-Hunter>

**Chapter 1 - Beginings**

**2**

# 1 - Beginings

Come. Sit. Make yourself comfortable; I want to tell you a story. This story does not begin with once upon a time, nor do the events unfold in some far off place. I find the best stories, the ones worth the time to tell, happen closer to home.

## Chapter 1

The bell rang, signaling the end of classes for the day. The anticipated sound was joined by cries of joy from the assembled students. The classroom soon emptied in a rush of feet, the scrapping of desks, and the rise and fall of many voices. The small groups of all of the classrooms up and down the corridor spilled out into the hall, seeming to simulate the sea and its tides in it's movements, with the one minded force of a stampede. The overwhelming crowd soon died down to a more manageable size and friends were collecting at lockers to get books and talk about their days.

He hit the ground with a slamming force, knocking the air from his lungs. He gasped, struggling to breathe, his head swam as his assailant descended on him, fists flying. The older boy pulled his victim onto his back and pulled him up onto his feet, only to raise his left fist and drive it into the other boys face, sending him sprawling. The crowd of students raised their voices in one cry for more. Athens's coliseums had for a slit moment been recreated in the center of a seething mass of adolescence. Blood splattered on the grass, it would seem that the punch had broken the other boys nose, and it started to stream down the boys face as he tried not to cry. He shook with the effort to rise, but he didn't have it in him to get to his feet. " Sniveling coward. Get. Up. And. Fight. Me!" With each word the boy stepped in and kicked his peer.

Silence issued and then mass hysteria filled its place, like the calm before the storm. The teachers had finally figured out what was causing the disturbance and had run down to stop it. In all of the movement the assailant thought to get away unnoticed, but a firm hand grabbed him by the collar. " Mr. Jacobson, where do you think your going?" Thomas Jacobson stopped struggling, and turned as much as he could, while the teacher still had a firm grip on his shirt. Smiling, in what he hoped was an innocent look, he answered haltingly " I was just about to go looking for you Mr. Kirks." The man raised one gray

eyebrow and snorted as only a Scotsman can. “ I bet. I'll also wager that you mistaken the lad over there for a punching bag too.” Mr. Kirks was an American born and bred, but his family was all Scottish. He was the schools American History and Government teacher, and he was also one of the only people on campus that radiated an air of authority. No one in their right mind back talked back to Mr. Kirks, why? Because it was just something that people never did. He wasn't mean, in the sense that he liked to get kids in trouble, he was just one of those individuals that wouldn't take anything off of any one at any time. Now was no exception. “ Come along then Mr. Jacobson, and we'll see what we're to do with you.” Pulling the boy in front of him he stirred him towards the office.

Thomas sat hunched in room 213. Detention had started ten minutes ago and already he was bored out of his mind. ` Only fifty minutes left and I'm home free.' His elbows were on the desktop and he looked at the clock that hung on the far wall as he supported his head in his hands. His overly long brown locks fell into his eyes and he used his right hand to pull his bangs back behind his ear. Jean jacket, small hoop earring in his left ear and an assortment of chains on his cargo pants completed his punk look to perfection. Thomas's attention, and that of everyone else in the room for that matter, was turned to the loud speaker, as a voice was heard over it.

“ Thomas Jacobson, please report to the office, the Principal would like to see you. Thomas Jacobson please report to the office.”

` What did the old bird want now? ` He sighed and looked at the teacher in the front of the class. The woman didn't even look up from her book.

“ Just leave your things here dear.”

He got up and walked out of the classroom and out into the hall. The door shut behind him with a finality that echoed.

## **Chapter 2**

Rain. It fell in a light haze over the city, cleansing the world with its soft touch. People walk by, as they always do, hurrying to get someplace, only to wait in line for hours. A man walks by a dustbin and throws his newspaper in, trying to keep his umbrella up against the falling water. As he moved away the headline of the paper read.

***“ Stalker in School Strikes Again, Student Twenty Three.”***

*` Twenty-three students are now recorded missing, as of yet no evidence has been found connecting the crimes, except a strange string of messages. When asked what these messages say, Police Chief McQuarrie had no comment. The FBI has been noted to take an active roll in the attempt to find the felon; so far nothing has been concluded. Detective Joe Arpaio, age fifty-six, jokingly nicknamed Sherlock by his fellow colleges, has been brought out of retirement in the hopes that he can once again pull another mystery into the light. Can this old has been detective do what modern forensics has been unable to do? Local parents think so. Mrs. Magilacuty...*

The strongest currents run just under the surface. The scene that met Swarzig was a perfect example of this. A homely suburban high school, perfect, from it's carefully cut shrubs and it's newly raked gravel of it's landscaping to it's completely ordinary contraction. Roger Swarzig sat his car and sighed. Why was he here again? He took another look at the school and it all returned to him. How could he have forgotten that encounter with his old school buddy Ronald Stiltner? The old man had even come to his house, the nerve of the that man.

Roger had made quiet a carrier for himself when he was in the CIA, and when he retired he had been set for life. Not that he had worried too much, the CIA took care of their own, but he wanted to spend the rest of his years with his wife Beth in security and peace. The knock on the door of his house had ended it. When he had answered the door it had swung open to reveal none other then his old friend Ronald. He had been rather happy to see the man, it had been years since the academy, but the question of why he was there lingered in the back of his mind.

"Ronald old men come in! It's been along time hasn't it?" he said with relish taking the man's shoulders and stirring him inside and then turning to shut the door, with a click behind them.

" Roger dear, who is it?" Beth called from the kitchen.

" Ronald Stiltner, you remember my wife Beth of course don't you Ronald?"

Pleasantries had been exchanged and the Beth had made them comfortable in the living room. The day had been mild and the dust in the room could be seen floating in the air, illuminated by the sun that flowed calmly through the panels of glass that graced the far wall of the wooden accented room. The stone fire place with it's many assortments of tongs and pocking tools hung on the left hand side of the darkened crevasse, like a solider at attention he always liked to think. It's metal crate slid back to either side, since the winter months were not for sometime.

When they had been seated, and quiet had finally fallen between them, he spoke up.

" So Ronald, what brings you here on such short notice?"

" Roger, have you been reading the papers?"

He HAD been reading the papers and it was that very thing he had been thinking about right before his friend had showed up. What did anything in the paper have to do with him?

“Yah, I read it now and again. No luck finding the missing kids ha.” His large hands rapped around his mug of coffee, he took a sip.

“No, we haven't had much leeway in that department. Actually that's why I'm here. What would you say if I offered you the lead on this case?” Ronald Stiltner was fidgeting on the opposite couch, eyes searching his companions. By the look on Roger's face he would have to tread lightly from here on out. With a sigh, he took a sip of his coffee.

To be on a case again, to be doing what he truly loved to do again? The offer was priceless to a man who hated to be inactive, and his retirement was all that and more. The sadness, the unstoppable void in his heart could be filled and he could... Beth. No, he couldn't possibly do that to Beth. He was too old and he had promised his wife that his CIA work was behind him, forever. Forever, such a rash word to use in a mortal life time, but none the less he had promised, and a promise to his wife was written in stone.

“Ronald, I'm in retirement. Beth would never go for it. I couldn't do that to her and you know that.” His eyes were now on his coffee cup, he couldn't bare to look up at his friend.

“Rog,” he leaned in closer to his friend, whispering intimately if not urgently. “We both know that this is a once in a life time opportunity, and Beth would understand. It won't be dangerous, I just need you to look over some files for me and help the newbe's out a little.” He laughed uneasily, stopping when he saw Roger wasn't laughing with him. “No fieldwork at all if you don't want to. I'm sure she could agree with that, right?”

He hadn't answered, Ronald had asked him to think it over and with a final flourish he downed the rest of his coffee. Roger walked him to the door and watched him stride down the walk with his long legs, get in his car and with a wave drive off. He shut the door slowly, he felt suspended, detached from his surroundings and all he wanted to do was sit down. The door clicked shut and he turned the bolt. He returned to his seat in his drawing room, and that's where Beth found him sometime later, in the gloom of the shadowy afternoon light, cold coffee in hand.

They had talked, Beth and he. She had confessed to listen in on the whole thing. She had looked down at her feet when she said this, I could tell there was more she wished to say so I waited patiently. Whatever it was, was obviously hard for her to say. Finally it came out as a whisper and I had to ask her to say it again, what she said shocked me.

“I want you to except Ronald's offer,” her eye lifted to look into mine squarely.

“What? But Beth...” She held up her hand to silence me and I cut off what I was going to say.

“ Your miserable, I know you think I can't see it, but I do. If this will make you happy, if it will give those kids a better chance, then by all means take his offer.”

“ Beth, I promised you I wouldn't...”

“ Damn the promise. I want what's best for you and I can tell sitting around here isn't cutting it. Go, do what you do best, just...” She swallowed; I could tell this was tearing her apart to tell me to do this. “ Just be careful?” she finished in a whispered plea. My heart swelled with feeling and I reached for her bringing her into my arms, her head against my shoulder, and we sat there for a time, just the two of us. Two small souls in an ever-darkening room, I was more scared then I had ever been, but I could also feel the excitement bubble in my chest. There was no knowing where this would lead me, but at least I could count on Beth.

### **Chapter 3**

In Rogers opinion the FBI was a group of sorry @\$\$ individuals who couldn't find their way out of a paper bag. After talking with Ronald he had convinced him to let him use his old detective name, Joe Arpaio, instead of his civilian name. He used the name for the practical purpose of keeping his name out of the papers, and on the most part it seemed to work. Although a small victory, it was a comfort to him, which in the present circumstances was no small thing. He was looked over by security and soon sent on his way, with Ronald by his side. He felt out of place in his suit, as he looked around and saw all of the people were dressed in casual attire. ` Could things have changed so much since he was a young man?' He sighed a little, and for the first time he felt rather nervous about the whole deal. ` Time waited for no man.' He thought ruefully.

Soon the pair was standing in front of an oak door. Ronald pulled the door open.

“ After you Mr. Arpaio,”

He nodded and walked in to the conference room. His new name, he found out later was also a lot better known then he thought. When he introduced himself to the group of ragged young men in front of him, the one shaking his hand had grown silent, eyes as big as saucers and another, he couldn't see where, sounded like he had spat out his coffee. The rest of the group in hearing rang had stopped talking to gaze at him in admiration.

“ Alright boys, break it up, Mr. Arpaio and I have some things to talk about. So back to work gentlemen,” with a wave of his hand he sent them scurrying again, the man holding his hand let go with a murmured apology, but Roger never got the chance to assure him it was alright, because the man had disappeared into the throng before the words reached his lips. Shrugging he went to follow Ronald, who obviously knew where he was going, hearing whispers and feeling glances as he went. ` Great, after almost twenty years in retirement you would think that they would have forgotten me.' After catching another person

trying to turn back to his work as he saw that he was looking sighed. ` This is going to be long day. ` He thought with a grumble as he pasted though t the wooden and glass threshold into Ronald Stiltner office.

## **Chapter 4**

He watched as Joe Arpaio, walked into the room into the sea of men on the bottom floor. Standing near a balcony gave him a perfect view of the interactions of the individual he was watching. He almost laughed when his peers finally learned who he was, and smirked arrogantly. ` How Juvenal, they either look like children meeting their favorite super hero, or they act like the man has AIDS, ' chuckling silently to himself he kept his hawk like eyes on his prey. As Stiltner and Arpaio began to walk to the back office, he followed, careful to blend in. This wasn't really a very hard thing to do, since everyone in eyeshot had looked up, trying to catch a glimpse of the man. This left him with clear to do as he pleased, with out drawing too much attention. When both of the two men were in the office room, he took a cell phone out of his pocket and clicked his speed dial.

## **Chapter 5**

“ Now are we going to get to why you really asked me to come down here Ronald, because I doubt very much that you want me to be your new secretary,” He was seated in a rather impressive leather backed chair in a room, beautifully made though it was, that was made to intimidate. Books lined the walls on dark oak book cases, Ronald's desk was an impressive piece of work with eagle claws at the end of each leg in the traditional position of holding a ball in it's talons. Dim light, warm, but spotlight like in its feel, came from a lamp overhead, complete with fan and dangling metal cords. Stiltner laughed as he sat down behind his desk in the brother of the chair Roger was now occupying. Letting his breadth out, setting his clasped hands on his desk.

“ Never could fool you eh Rog?”

Swarzig didn't respond, so Stiltner continued on in a more business like manner.

“ No, Roger...”

“ Joe, Ronald, the name is Joe Arpaio.”

“ Joe. Why in heavens name. Of all of the names you could have chosen, why that one?”

“ Why am I here Ronald?”

“ You know perfectly well why you're here. I have twenty-three kids missing, and I have an amateur

group of newbe's because the FBI board says that there are other groups who have more important assignments. This should be a piece of cake they tell me, and it will give the guys some field experience. Ha!" the laugh had nothing humorous about it. Now Roger saw the real Ronald Stiltner, the one under his masks and the man was tired, down and near the brink of giving up. He had called out for help and the cry had gone unnoticed by everyone's ears but his.

"What do you have so far?"

The slumped figure behind the desk looked up startled.

"You mean you'll do it?" The stain on his friends voice was enough to convince him that he needed help, but he was careful to leave his face blank.

"I asked what you have concerning this case, Ronald, after I see it I'll tell you what I think, not before. Deal?"

"Deal. Come with me, the guys working on the project are in a separate room." Stiltner stood up and with a small skip in his step walked to the door, opened it up and walked out leaving it open for Roger, who also stood up, his walk lacking the spring, and walked after him, careful to close the door behind him.

## **Chapter 6**

"Yes, sir. Joe Arpaio is in the office right now." Silence greeted him from the other end of the line. An average sized man, in a suit of an average blue color shifted as he stood still looking at files that he had pulled down from the shelf in front of him. He had no interest in the papers he held, but he needed a cover so he could watch Arpaio's progress.

"Sir? What would you like me to do?"

"Nothing." a scratchy anonymous voice reached his ear. "Watch. Wait. I will call you if I should require anything more."

With a soft click his contact hung up.

` Damn it! I hate it when he does that! Money or no money, he wanted to know what the hell was going on. ' Putting his cell phone back into his suit's inside breast pocket, he put the files he had been holding back where he had found them. As he walked passed the many bookshelves, hands in his pockets, he noticed out of the corner of his eye, that two men were again passing through a door.

## **Chapter 7**



Green eyes glared up from a stern, but youth filled face. The nose was not too long as to seem slender, but it had a sharpness to it that showed a degree of character. Angular cheekbones and scruffy burnt hazelnut hair that some one had obviously tried, in vain, to tame finished the scene. Roger Swarzig looked the school snap shot on the case file, over one more time, before setting it down on his desk, with the multitude of other files just like it. Sighing deeply he leaned back into his chair and looked at the ceiling. " You are really trying my patience, you do know that right." He pointed his finger upward in an accusing jester. " I respect you deeply, Lord, but sometimes I wonder if you haven't totally turned your back on me." Leaning forward he set his feet once more on the ground. Sighing in aspiration he pinched the bridge of his nose between his index finger and his thumb, squeezing his eyes shut. Getting to his feet he went over to the white board where the clues linking the missing students were recorded. The snow white plain was as chaotic as Roger's thoughts, resembling back street graphite more then a case map. Three schools, twenty-three kids, four of with had returned just as mysteriously as they had disappeared. The only clues he had were a series of messages, in Latin no less, that Stiltner had given him. Not every case of disappearance had had it's own phrase, this had stumped the FBI profilers who wondered why the guy wasn't keeping a consistent pattern in his crimes. At any rate the messages had a funny way of saying a lot and not saying anything at all at the same time, and after many vain attempts at trying to figure out the unknown stalker they had given up and labeled him a mad man, who had some intelligence, but was none the less a mad man. Stiltner hadn't agreed with the synopsis and it was up to him, Roger Swarzig, to find out what this guy's motive was. " And that's hoping that who ever this is even has a motive." He whispered absentmindedly to himself. " We can only hope and pray to God that he does." The first phrase had been ` Mater atrium necessitas - necessity is the mother of invention.' It had been found when forensic teams had swept a chemistry room with a black light when the phrase, ` de integro - repeat again from the start' had been found spray painted on the sidewalk connecting the chemistry building with the gymnasium, in the sixth case of missing kids. " Then `motu proprio - of one's own initiative', written on the front of a binder." Swarzig muttered under his breath. He continued on. " And then, ` e.g. (exempli gratia) - by the grace of example' was discovered drawn in black permanent marker on a whiteboard in the English room." Chuckling slightly as he remembered how the guys working on this job had grumbled about how they should have noticed what e.g. meant. It would seem that they had spent their time working up more and more complicated interpretations of the abbreviation, until one of the woman seated at her desk had walked over and with a raised eye brow had told them that all they had to do is look in an English dictionary to find out the meaning, since it was used all the time in run of the mill text. Sighing, he pressed on " Not too long after that, ` Cum tacet clamant - when they keep silent, they cry out.'" Which was easy enough to interoperate, `they' had to be the missing kids, but the way it was used in context was still baffling the detective. Turning his attention to the last phase he frowned deeper, perplexed he read the Latin and then it's meaning" fiat lux - let there be light" What the hell could these phrases mean? He had been scrapping his mind for answers for days, with nothing. Grabbing the eraser he wiped away a portion of the board and wrote the one lined clues in a more organized manner.

*Mater atrium necessitas* - necessity is the mother of invention

*De integro* - repeat again from the start

*Motu proprio* - of one's own initiative

e.g. (*exempli gratia*) - by the grace of example

*Cum tacent clamant* - when they keep silent, they cry out

*Fiat lux* - let there be light

Finished he stepped back, carefully reading and rereading the words before him. I don't understand. What ever you're doing is necessary and you did it with out being asked, to show the example of what? Who is silent when they cry out, the missing kids? And what's with the light he speaks of? " Repeat from the start. That might be a good idea," he muttered. Stiltner said four of the missing teens had been reported found, and Roger Swarzig thought it was time he paid them a visit. He paused, taking one look over the other part of his map, skimming over one case and then another. They had missed something; he knew it, felt it in his bones. There had to be a clue, the kidnapper had to have slipped up somewhere, and Roger made a silent vow to find it. He whispered to the air, as he was about to leave his office, " Just give me time, and you won't know what hit you." It was almost as though he had the criminal in his very office. He flicked the light off and as he shut the door he almost wished the kidnapper was lurking somewhere in the darkness of his office. Almost.

## **Chapter 8**

Jennifer Lark was a slender young woman of sixteen. Her long black hair was gothic in its rich, deep color and it was obviously not her natural hair color. Roger was expecting a similar black outfit, but the girl wore, well what he would call normal cloths of girls of the age, a red tank top with a pair of light colored; low riding jeans with a patterned leather belt. The curved jaw and sloping of her forehead and cheeks were flawless, save for the small remains of acme that still showed on her white skin. At any other time she might have been smiling, but right now she was seated at the families dinning table with him and her two equally perturbed parents. He could tell this was going to be like pulling teeth, but who could blame them, they had most likely been through this a hundred times.

" First off I would like to thank you for letting me into your lovely home, Mr. And Mrs. Lark," started Roger, but he saw the identical looks of poorly concealed frustration and inpatients the three people on the other side of the table were giving him and he stopped. Sighing he started over.

" Look, I know you must have had to go through this a thousand times, and it must be very frustrating. I wouldn't ask you to do this if I didn't think the FBI had missed something important. Will you please answer my questions, or should I leave now and save myself the trouble?"

The ball was in their court now; he set his hands on his lap so that they wouldn't see how nervous their

answer was making him. The mother was the first to speak.

“ If you feel that it will help find out who took Jenny, then I for one will try and answer your questions Mr. Arpaio,” Mrs. Lark's gaze was fierce as she looked at Roger. Her small mouth set in grim determination and will. That woman must have been through hell when her daughter went missing, and now I have to make her relive that again. Man, he loved his job, but at times it was hard. He turned to look at the father for any response to his question. The man only nodded, saying nothing.

“ Well that leaves you Jennifer, how about it, one more go?” He said. Their eyes met for a moment and he thought he had seen fear and anger flash in the brown depths of her eyes, nothing showed on her face.

“ Sure, ask away. I'll only tell you what I told all of those other people, so I don't know why you're bothering.” She said in an even voice that held a hint of steel; as she sat back in her chair, mouth a grim line on her face.

“ Thank you. Now my first question is did you see your attacker, Jennifer?”

“ No,”

“ Nothing? You must have seen something, how were you abducted?”

“ What does it say in the file? All you have to do is read the file they made on me, and you'll have the entire story, word for word.”

Jennifer's mother looked reprovingly at her daughter.

“ Jenny answer the question,”

“ You did say you would Jennifer. Going back on your word are we?” Roger asked with a little silk in his voice as he tried to sweet talk her into being comfortable with his presents. Sighing, she leaned forward in her seat, putting her elbows on the table.

“ Sir, I'll tell you what I told the police. I don't remember anything. I can hardly remember that day at school. So I have no idea what he looks like or what he might sound like or any of those things. I've tried to tell everyone that, but they keep prying. I just don't know,” Done with her short speech she leaned back into the chair.

“ What do you remember about that day at school Jennifer? Just tell me that, tell me what you do remember, in as much detail as you can, don't leave anything out,” Roger took out his note pad and set it on the table with his pen in hand.

Shifting to find a better spot on her cushion, Jennifer took in a breath and looked at the ceiling as she tried to remember.

“ I don't know what to tell you, it had been a normal day. I got up, I went to school, I had lunch with my friends, and then...um, I got a notice from the office saying that my P. E teacher wanted me to come in

after school and finish the fitness exam since I had missed it the day before,” she noticed Roger was about to ask a question and stopped him with a look. “ I missed the test because I had to go to the doctor that day, so don't be jumping to any conclusions. Any way, I thought nothing of it, and showed up after school in the gym. I don't remember anything after that until about a week or so ago.”

It could have happened as she had described it, but her school files showed that she was a known school felon and had been on her way to a suspension on more than one occasion. He sensed that about her now, but he also noticed that she was, what, reserved and nervous? Something was up, but what?

“ Jennifer is there something else you would like to tell me? Something you perhaps missed the first time?”

“ I told you what happened, I have nothing else to tell you.”

“ Where was she found, Mrs. Lark?”

“ They found her in the park down the way, on a bench. When she got home she looked, dazed, distant. I never want to see that ever again.” She added in a whisper.

“ Nor should you.” Roger said in an attempt to be courteous.

He had asked questions for a little while longer, but he soon realized that he was getting nowhere, fast. On the way out of the door he caught Jennifer Lark's eyes and something in them made him suspicious. She was different from the girl from whom she had been, he was sure of that, and she was rather too happy about his departure. Dismissing the absurd ideas forming in his head he thanked them and left.

Rogers other stops were met with the same vague story as Jennifer's. They had gone to school and had missed a test or had detention or something of the sort and then they ended up in a park or on a street corner, remembering nothing of what had happened between the time they had been taken and their return. They also shared Jennifer's triumphant look when he left. Something was wrong here, but he couldn't put his finger on it.

## **Chapter 9**

Back at his office, Roger was brought out of his thoughts by the ringing of his desk phone. He looked at the machine and then finally picked it up.

“ Detective Joe Arpaio's office, “ he said in an uninterested voice.

“ Cura ut valeas, Mr. Arpaio,” came a scratchy voice over the line.

“Who is this?” Roger shot out his hand and pressed a blue button on the phone's terminal. This sent a

command to the recording and tracing department to start doing their jobs.

“ Having a hard time are we?”

“ What are you playing at? Who are you? Tell me!”

“ It's been nice chatting with you Mr. Arpaio, but I really must go,” a soft click on the other end told Roger that he had hung up.

“ Damn,” he hung up the phone and dialed the recording and tracing office. When the phone was picked up Stiltner's voice answered. “ Did we get him Ronald, tell me we know where he is.”

“ Sorry Joe, but all we have is an area code. It's a start, don't worry we'll get him.”

## **Epilogue**

The man that came to be known as the Linguist has never been found. More kids have been reported returned safely back to their homes, but more go missing everyday, so the case drags on. One man, named as one of the Linguist's web workers, was caught and brought in for questioning, only to be released on the grounds of lack of evidence. His last words to his interrogator Joe Arpaio were, “Alea iacta est - the die is cast.”

