



GRAEME
SMITH

KISS YOUR
PASTS
GOODBYE

SHADOW
CHILD

SHADOW DANCE BOOK 2

Shadow Child
Shadow Dance, Book 2

By Graeme Smith

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Dedication:

To Sam, even if you'll never read this.
Thanks for being Maya!

Coda
Primo Movimento

1971, Washington D.C.

The White House is one of the most secure residences in the Western world. That had become even more so under Richard Milhous ('Lucy' to her friends – not that she had any) Nixon. There wasn't a door could be unlocked, never mind opened, without lights somebody was always watching starting to blink and alarms someone was always listening for starting to ring. Which didn't seem to bother the owner of the hand unlocking this one. He twisted the pick – and the lock released. Somewhere in a distant room, lights didn't blink and alarms didn't ring. He might have grinned, but he wasn't big on grins. This wasn't fun. And it wasn't just another job.

He stepped into the room, followed by the figure behind him. The sleeper was extremely well trained, her senses fine-tuned and her reactions hair-trigger. She was good. Better than good. But the man wasn't just good. He was the best there was. He stepped silently over to the sleeper's bed. His hand didn't seem to move, but now it had a gun in it. From behind him something wrapped tight round his arm, pulling it down. Or trying to. "Do we have to? There's got to be another way."

The man shrugged. "Only two, P. Only two." He waited.

The tentacle released from his arm. Not that it would have made any difference. The gun hadn't moved from its position over the sleeping woman's mouth. The second figure sighed. "You're a bastard. I hate it when you're right."

Jack Shadow's gun settled on the woman's lips.

Prologue

Sixteen with a bullet

You know how it is. New girl, new school – and the cute hunk in the third row over was giving me weird looks. I figured if I gave him so much as a smile, in ten minutes I'd be finding out how his Dad had a mysterious underground lair and was gonna take over the world. That was how it was in my last school, anyway. But the afternoon was double History, and it had been a bitch of a day. Not only that, Mom had made me memorize faces my first week. Then what the hallway scuttlebutt hadn't told me, her files did. And Cute Guy hadn't been one of the faces she gave me. Surprises like that aren't generally good news. So I made sure he was toast by lunchtime. Well, not toast so much. But he was sure history.

School Farm is great. Every school should have a compost heap.

Perhaps I should explain.

See, Mom works for – well, if I told you, I'd have to kill you. Which was mostly what she did for them, before she got kicked upstairs. Kill people, I mean. But it was OK. They're government. Well, sort of. That was why we were on our own. The wrong sort of people were always trying to find things out about Mom. That was why my most recent Dad left us. Mom found him sleeping late. Thing was, he wasn't alone. Like Mom said, she could live with him doing his secretary, just that he couldn't. It wasn't that the skirt Mom found him in bed with was his secretary so much. More that her vodka and rye was kinda short on rye, if you know what I mean. So Mom gave Dad a 357 express ticket out of town and the secretary got to show some of Mom's friends she could sing more than 'Несокрушимая и легендарная'. But there it was. Dead Dad, newspapers sniffing round. It wasn't like it was the first time. The Organisation's got a whole Department for it. So here I was, and this was me. New name, new town, new school.

Of course, that one wasn't my real Dad. Mom burned through men like an AK on full auto. Me, I was the one time some guy burned *her*. Back in the day she was on Presidential Protection. Tricky Dicky. Thing is, something smelled wrong. So she was doing what she does best, and digging. One night she wakes up, there's a gun in her mouth. Which is strange, because nobody sneaks up on Mom. The guy tells her to stop looking. Tells her she's stirring things up, and that's his job. So she smacks the gun out of his hand, and they get to fighting. That's how Mom said it started anyway. One bust room later they're sweating rivers and somehow it ain't fighting any more. Nine months later there's me. And Mom got transferred. Up. To people who think 'Rules of Engagement' are for wimps. So I asked her where Dad was, my real one, I mean. It was the only time I ever saw Mom look scared. She said she didn't know, and she didn't look. I got mad, told her I deserved to know my real Dad. She said "You don't know jack, girl." But it worked out. She got me my first Glock to make up.

So that's how it is. New girl, new school - oh, and a dead jock. Well, a girl's gotta keep in practice, right?

Chapter One

Dead hunk talking

It started out like any other day. Mom was big on homework, even over breakfast. But her idea of homework wouldn't suit most classrooms. Things like where to find an unregistered M15 in Denver. Or the best place in Cleveland for C4. I told her we'd done that stuff when I was six. She told me it wouldn't matter if the one time I forgot, I was fifty. I'd still likely be dead. She had a point. I have this weird memory thing. Important stuff, I'm OK - Mom makes damn sure. So I can field strip my Glock with my eyes closed. But other stuff I forget. Like whether it's Tuesday or Christmas. Or what I did on my birthday last year. Once I looked for a book for half an hour and it was in my damn hand all the time. That's why Mom never lets up. So every morning we do stuff again. And again. And again.

Before I left for school, we did the car check, like Mom said I had to every day. Lights, brakes – smart kids did those. But Mom made me do other stuff. Not the James Bond shit – rocket launchers and oil slick sprayers. That's for the movies. The real stuff. Nitro levels and running a glass underneath to check for things that might go bang. Most kids don't do those. But most kids aren't Mom's. Once we were done, I kissed Mom and lifted her purse. Like, there's more things than one a girl's gotta keep up on after all. As I slid in the car, she held her left hand out. Her right had the Glock that was supposed to be – I checked – in my thigh holster. I grinned, and traded her. Mom grinned too. “Bye, SWAB. Don't kill anyone I wouldn't kill.” It's a Mom joke. Not the kill thing. SWAB. ‘Sixteen – with a bullet’. Every year since I was seven, she just changed a letter.

Why seven? That was my first wet job. Mom had to do PTA and she had some unfinished business for the people she worked for. Even Mom couldn't be in two places at once. So we traded. I took out her mark – and Mom went to talk to the bitch who'd given me a Fail in Math. I got a new Math teacher after Miss Mathews left town all of a sudden.

Well, that's what people said she must have done. They sure never saw her again.

I gunned an engine that would have given a 455 Rocket things to think about if I wanted it to, but looked lemon Popsicle if anyone lifted the hood. Then I flipped a quarter. That's another of Mom's tricks. Never drive the same route. Never have a pattern. So the first few turns, I flip. And I watch. You always watch. Because the one time you don't is gonna be the one time someone's there. But that time wasn't this one, and I pulled into the school lot.

“Hey, Maya baby.” The lot was empty. I was early. But so was someone else. The mouth was Steve Logan - Quarterback of Middle-of-Nowhere-High Football. Six foot three and two twenty pounds. Most of it ego. I smiled, and walked over. I reached out, and I grabbed some bits he bragged a lot about using on every chick in town, even if Mom's files said the only tail he'd ever got was some his Dad bought him on his sixteenth birthday. “It ain't May-a. ‘Cos no, you may not. And I ain't your baby. I'm the chick with your balls in my fist, so it's My-a. As in I own your ass. Got it?” I made my smile a little sweeter, in case anyone was looking. Then I clenched a little harder, in case he wasn't listening.

“If he hasn't, it sure looks like *you* have. Got it, I mean. Or them, maybe?”

I didn't know the voice, but I sure knew the face. Mostly because I'd put a 357 hollow-point in it yesterday. I looked at Cute Hunk Guy. "Aren't you supposed to be dead?"

He grinned. I had to admit, he was pretty good at it. "I guess you missed." He grabbed the hand I wasn't using and raised it to his lips. He kissed it.

I snatched my hand back. Or I would have, if he hadn't already dropped it. "Missed? Missed? I..." But he was gone. Which was also kind of strange. Apart from him walking round all not-dead I mean. Because we were still in the parking lot and there wasn't anywhere for him to hide. He must have hid in some place that wasn't there, because he was sure gone. So I smacked a left hand that could still feel Cute Guy's kiss into Logan and dropped him flat. I probably should have let go of what I still had in my right fist first – but I figured it might let the lesson stick longer. "Like I said. M-a-y-a. My-a, jerk. So if you don't want me to do this again, somewhere your buddies can see, remember. My-a." I smiled. "Later, slick. Like, a lot later. Like, never. Got it?" I let go, and got up. I had more important things to do. Like kill a dead guy.

* * *

I don't do sports. Well, not ones that involve short skirts and jumping as high as possible so guys can see what they ain't going to get. Or shorts that would give a can of spray paint a run for its money. Skirts or shorts, they play merry hell with a thigh holster - even one like mine. And don't even talk to me about changing rooms and showers. I had to make two girls with rather more curiosity than was good for them 'leave town' just as suddenly as Mom had done with Miss Mathews. I told Mom it was a choice between me being a good school citizen and getting with the program, or me wearing hot and heavy. Mom? Mom got me a bigger Glock. And a new holster. Brand new and secret Organisation gear. Said she got it from one of the guys in their lab who thought he was cute. Mom never missed a trick, even if her tricks didn't know that was all they were. It was a combo armpit and thigh holster. Wrapped round me real close, like a best friend with great benefits. But it had different kinds of benefits. Knives wouldn't cut it. And you couldn't tell it from skin. Mom called it 'trans-dimensional chameleon skin'. She said how it wouldn't just look like me, like my own skin colour. She said it was high-tech. Opened up a space in, well, space. One my Glock would fit in real sweet. Waterproof, and only I could get it open. So no gun bulges, and my stride would still glide. She said once I put it on, nobody would ever know I was carrying. Which was the good news. The bad? Bad was, it was bio-tech. *Integrated* bio-tech. Once it went on it was never coming off. It would grow with me, but it would *be* me as well. I said, fuck bad. Anything let me wear my Glock in the shower or a swimming pool was cool. Damn cool. And how did I put it on?

But still, the type of Phys Ed Mom had on her agenda didn't come in schools. So the ones I went to got letters from big important doctors saying I had something totally invisible but I might drop dead if I saw a playing field. And the Principals got late night phone calls from untraceable numbers about whatever dirty secrets they had and how they could stay secret. The Principals mostly figured I was a good Family girl, the other kids figured I was either a wimp or a lucky bitch, depending. Me? I got to go for long walks. Like this one. Thing was, the walks were supposed to be alone. Like, it turned out, this one wasn't.

"Hi." As Cute Hunk Guys go, he had it down pat. The tree he was leaning against was just a frame for his Olympic Gold in 'cool'. But I'd spent a long time at the School-of-Mom, and Cute or otherwise, nobody follows me without me seeing them. Apart, it seemed, from this Cute. I pulled my Glock. As my skirt dropped again, he grinned. "Nice... holster." Since mine was

damn near invisible, I figured he wasn't talking about any place you could put a Glock. Not unless you made kink look straight, anyway. Oh, and it sounded like he was big on one liners. Me, I let my Glock do my talking. A clip later he raised an eyebrow. As opposed to spouting blood. Or looking surprised. Or being dead. So I swept his ankles, yanked his arm and dropped him flat. My foot on his throat held him down while I checked the tree. The splinters round the holes and the buried lead told me nobody had been messing with my clip. But 357 slugs aren't supposed to go from Glocks to trees without messing anything in between real bad. And – I looked down – Cute Guy was a lot of things, but a mess wasn't one of them. Right now what he was mostly doing was looking. Like, up. There was a small chance he was looking for the buckle on my thigh holster, but a much bigger chance he wasn't. Which was fine. There wasn't any buckle anyway, so if he wasn't going to play nice and be dead at least he could play guy and be distracted.

I moved my foot, maybe to get a better hold on his throat. But mostly to give him a better distraction. “Thing is” I ground my foot into his throat a little harder, letting my thighs ‘accidentally’ spread a bit wider “Thing is, if it was a vest, there'd be no slugs in the tree. So it ain't no vest. But if it ain't no vest you're all dead already. So what gives?”

“Well, maybe we should talk about that.” He was still grinning. And looking. Then he looked up. At me, not my skirt. “Or maybe we should do the whole small-talk thing, if we're going to get all personal. Like – do you like poetry?”

Poetry? Poetry wasn't good. Poetry could make a bad day a lot worse.

He grinned some more. “Like my favourite. I wonder if you know it? Robert Frost. ‘I must go down to the sea again...’ He waited.

Poetry. Right. Frost. Who never got closer to any lonely sea and sky than ‘Sand Dunes’. Riiight. But there was still a chance. I grinned as well. “Sure. I know that one. ‘And all I ask is a chance to see the Catcher in the Rye.’”

Now he wasn't grinning. “And a Boojum, and a Bandersnatch, and a Snark soft waiting.”

It was my turn. And it was this week's code. The Big One. The Emergency One. The one Mom made me memorise every Sunday. The gun Cute Hunk Guy hadn't had in his hand until he did said I'd better get it right, unless I knew his trick with bullets. And I didn't. So I pulled him up. Now I wasn't grinning either. “And a Walrus, and a Carpenter, and the oysters quaking.” Because dead or not, Cute or not – Cute Guy and Mom went to the same staff dances.

Chapter Two

Girl on a wire

There's something you should know about the people Mom works for. They don't exist.

I mean they really, really don't exist. Really-really, like in 'click your heels three times before you go to sleep and tell yourself they don't exist' don't exist. The ruby shoes-day thing is optional. Because if they ever think you think they *do* exist, the red isn't going to be your slippers. It's going to be your you. It's going to be your you while you bleed out and someone like Mom makes sure they were never there to start you bleeding. And there's something else to know about them. Apart from them not existing, I mean. Because while they're real busy not existing, they're everywhere. Like, when the first rocket lands on Mars, someone in a little Martian office with lousy Martian coffee and great phone lines is going to be watching and phoning home. Probably while they keep a laser sight on some dumb astronaut's ass. So when I tell you Cute Guy took me to one of their offices, which I'm not going to tell you because then I'd have to kill you, you can bet we didn't have to go far.

No. I'm not telling you where it was. Maybe it was an old abandoned farm. Or the local library, where the librarians carry silenced Magnums to reinforce that thing about being quiet. You choose. Because they don't exist, right? So Cute Guy didn't take me anywhere. But we went there anyway.

There's only two kinds of people get into the type of place Cute guy didn't take me. The ones They know are on their side, and the ones They know aren't. Well, there's a third kind. The ones in between. But still, only one kind ever comes out. After they'd taken every weapon I had on me –and gone into some very personal places to find some of them (they make stun grenades real small these days) – I was figuring I'd better be one of the first kind.

Mom had told me about this stuff. Back in the day I'd have been strapped to a chair, plugged into wires while somebody asked me if my name was Minnie Mouse. But that was the old days. It's called 'fluttering' now. The chair I was in didn't have wires – none I could see, anyway. But I'd bet the allowance Mom was always forgetting to give me it was stuffed with vibration sensors, temperature probes and mikes. The room I was in would be a mess of ultra-infra-geek-speak light and sound intended to let people know not just what I'd had for breakfast last week, but whether I was lying about the calorie count. That's why they hadn't given me my clothes back after they'd done the weapon search, though they'd left my holster on. It was all partly to keep me off balance and partly so all the tech they didn't care if I knew about got to know more about me. Me? I was trying to work out whether to be worried or pissed. Because even if every tech toy in the room was making the hot, naked chick its sole focus of attention, Cute Guy wasn't. Which either meant he was gay, or it meant I was in deep shit.

Cute Guy put down his coffee. They hadn't offered me one. Hot liquids running round inside the target screw up the tech toys. He shook his head. "You've got an interesting file, Maya." At least he got my name right. "Actually, you've got two interesting files." He raised an eyebrow and waited.

I figured if he was going to be a smart-ass, mine was smarter. I raised my own eyebrow and waited right back. I figured I had nothing to lose, so I concentrated for a moment. I smiled, while I felt my nipples turning into bullets. If that didn't distract him some...

It didn't. He picked up a clipboard, made a tick. "Ah, yes. Sven. And Maria." He shook his head, made some more ticks.

Sven. And - I'd have smiled, but I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction - and Maria. Mom had brought them home last year. Said too many jobs got screwed up by hormones. Two months of pyjama parties, without the pyjamas. I ended up sore in places I hadn't known were worth getting sore in. But by the time the two of them were done, Mom was satisfied none of *my* jobs were going to get screwed up because some cute guy - or girl - smiled at me. Or didn't. And that I was more than capable of, um, screwing anyone else up if necessary. I shrugged, and let my nipples relax. "So I guess you've been watching, huh?"

Cute Guy shrugged. "It's what we do." He paused. "Well, or part of it." He sighed. "Shall we get this over with?"

I shrugged too. Apparently it was in style this week. "Sure. Whatever." I thought for a moment. "My name is Kaitlyn. I'm fat. I worry about my math grade. I've killed six..." Cute Guy looked down at his clipboard. I sighed. "OK, I've killed eleven..." He raised an eyebrow. I shook my head. "Look, that guy in the parking lot doesn't count! He stole my space!" Cute Guy waited. I sighed. "Alright, already. I've killed *twelve* people. I like marshmallows, walking in the rain, and my Glock 357. Oh - and I want my fucking clothes back." See, that's how it's done. They have to see some lies, and some truth, so they can tell the difference. Before they get on to the real stuff. The stuff they really want to know. It's called base-lining. So I figured I'd save some time.

Cute Guy made some more checks on his board. He looked up at the wall mirror I knew was one-way glass. A light above it flashed twice. He nodded, then looked at me. "Ah, yes. Your, um, fucking clothes." He didn't sound sixteen. He sounded older. He sounded hard ass, and professional. He sounded like - like Mom. He pressed a button. The guy who came in had my clothes - and my Glock. Cute Guy nodded at them. "So, Maya. How would you feel about blowing your fucking Mom's fucking head off?"

Also by Graeme Smith, from Books We Love:

JACK SHADOW (Shadow Dance Book 1)

About the Author

This is me. Graeme Smith. Fantasy author. Mostly comic fantasy (which is fantasy intended to make you laugh, not fantasy in comics).

Having Graeme Smith as my pen name is convenient, since it also happens to be my real name. Although sometimes I think it isn't. Sometimes I think I'm just a remote set of hands for a keyboard. So maybe Graeme Smith is my keyboard's name, not mine.

When I'm not writing (well, or editing my writing. Or re-writing. Or editing my re-writing. Or... Quite. You get the picture), I'm doing other things. Maybe things involving mushrooms. And knitting needles (but the less said about my cooking the better). Maybe things like online gaming (If you know Bard Elcano, you know me. If you know a grumpy old dragon called Sephiranoth, you know me. If you know a tall, dark, handsome but brooding vampire, charming witty and brilliant - we never met. That's someone else.)

So there you are. Graeme Smith. Keyboard in disguise. Short, fat, bald and ugly (fortunately my wife has lousy taste in men). Time was, I worked on a psychiatric ward. Now I write about people who believe in magic and dragons, and who live where the crazy folk are the ones who don't.

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