

A dark SUV slipped through the late night fog and came to a stop. It was quiet, almost silent.

Three men and a woman, black wrinkled denim coveralls slung over their shoulders, slid out of their car carrying gray fiberglass shovels. Hunched over and silent, they made their way along the west wall toward an overgrowth of tall shrubs steeped in fog.

In front, Jean St-Pierre raised a hand to his eyes, shielding them from the streetlights, and scanned the cemetery in the direction of a marble mausoleum. Ahead, rows of chiseled headstones stood erect like an army of dead soldiers at attention. His stomach was full, but he was fighting another kind of hunger. He was used to eating the dead while robbing graves, not stealing their secrets.

Built with round, smooth stones, the wall was almost five feet tall. Streetlights along the cemetery's road illuminated the white and gray marble grave markers. They all knew no grave robbing could take place until they evaded the security patrols and dealt with the guard dogs eager to pounce.

The outdoor lights were still shining on the perimeter buildings, but very little funeral work took place this early in the morning. The main section of the cemetery, with its smoke-stained crematorium set against a well-lit two-story house and pristine landscaping, were to the east, close to the road and empty.

The rest of the property, across the driveway on the other side of the house, was lined with aisles of dead people, each with its sweet, fragrant flowers and hastily clipped cover of grass. There were four sections dividing the cemetery, and the assignment was in one of these.

St-Pierre turned his head, lowered his hands and looked at the gray mist covering the moon. His watch said three thirteen. He sniffed the air with two quick motions. Turned his head, listened for a sound, human or not, that might indicate trouble. San Francisco PD and hired security guards kept watch on the cemetery preventing anyone from stealing from the dead, but tonight it was quiet.

In just over fifteen minutes, a disturbance would take place on the east side of the cemetery, but they had to cross the main driveway before it happened. That would allow them time to reach section four, but they had to get by two vicious rottweilers, standing guard and trained to attack.

Reaching for his holster under his vest, St-Pierre pulled out a Glock 21 .45 ACP caliber pistol. It felt comfortable in his hand, one of the most important factors for him. Plus, he liked to put the bullet where it needed to be. With the Glock, he could do that. It was simple to operate, which he also liked. He headed toward the driveway, keeping the main house in sight, his team following behind in silence.

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Commented [WS1]: It's not likely they would all have them slung over their shoulders. For example, a woman is more likely to drape them over her arm.

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Commented [WS2]: I changed this because an odd time is more likely than a round figure and because seventeen minutes later would make the disturbance happen at 3:30, a likely time. No need for "a.m." You've told your readers it's early morning.

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After crossing the road, he signaled to his men to get down. They crawled like a cunning pack of wolves hunting prey. If anyone were watching, they would have been startled to see four people moving like animals, on all fours, fangs displayed, and eyes red, until they were in the cemetery and out of the light. They were here to steal from the dead, not join them.

Commented [WS3]: What about the woman?

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Three minutes later, they huddled against the fence surrounding section four, the parcel containing the Black Testament. The flat grass lawn they were on gave way to a slight hill to their right and protected their cover with a cluster of trees.

Commented [WS4]: Can you have them partially shape-shift here? Their fangs are out. Instead of looking like animals, they could subtly turn part animal. Just a thought.

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Now, it was 4:27. In three minutes, the dogs would be distracted.

Jean St-Pierre took the shovel and overalls off his back, slipped them over his clothes and without speaking, his team did the same. He adjusted his eyes to the dark until he saw the sharp-etched lettering on a headstone thirty feet away. His mouth watered as he realized the future that lay ahead for him. The plan was perfect, no noise, police or security, it was well thought out. The briefing and maps they had reviewed had paid off and got them to the site undetected.

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Now the final stages of the mission depended on his team's training.

Someone lobbed a raw slab of meat into the air: it slapped hard on the pavement. On the other side of the driveway, beyond the main house, the dogs came alive. The slab of raw meat sent the fragrance of bitter copper to the canine's eager nostrils.

Commented [WS5]: I've rewritten many of your passive sentences for clarity and brevity. In some cases, I've lengthened the passages as well, to fit better with the timeframe.

The team members strained to listen. They could hear the slight tinkle of dog tags as the rottweilers ran toward sound and scent. Then they heard the dogs' powerful teeth ripping into raw meat.

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St-Pierre looked over and signaled, He raised his hand in the air and made a circular motion to move quickly. The final phase of the plan meant teamwork, communication and speed if they were going to pull it off. The lure of meat diverted the dogs' attention away from the graves, and the drugs that had been injected inside made certain the dogs would make no more trouble tonight.

Commented [WS6]: I would use an exact figure or something less than a round figure.

In two minutes and forty-five seconds...

or

In less than three minutes...

It was working. St-Pierre crawled toward a headstone with his men following and with deliberate action, they began digging.

In less than two minutes and forty-five seconds, they had the topsoil gone and were lifting the casket out of the ground. It was cold and damp. They could smell the earth.

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St-Pierre fell to his knees, and with the fiberglass shovel in hand, adjusted his sight. Brushing dirt away from the casket, he felt the edge with his fingertips. Finding a small opening, he rammed the shovel tip against the edge. It bounced back. He lined the tip up to the seam, and hit it again. Then forced the shovel in and pried the lid off. He looked left then right. Nobody. Darkness. Lonely.

Commented [WS7]: Why lonely? He's with three people he knows.