

Chapter One

If you ask someone their most beloved memory, you can expect a lot of different answer. Whether it is catching the bouquet at a wedding or catching your kill and muffling their screams, I have always found that everything comes down to the first time.

The beginning.

The first steps to a journey are the ones to cherish most. They are the hardest, after all. People covet firsts like trophies. Their first date, their first kiss, or their first time having sex, for example. Tonight, I will penetrate the flesh of my prey. As absurd as it may sound, it is difficult to hide how giddy I am. Tonight is an important night.

Tonight is the first night I haunt the depths of my little sector of the world, and hopefully, tonight is my first kill.

I have kept myself from peace for so long, but for the first time it is all I feel. I feel ... at home in a way. I feel comfortable. No poking or prodding at my mind to speak of.

The feelings I had of restlessness and frustration, they are not replaced by anxiety of what's to come. For this, I am thankful. No one I meet tonight will cut me any slack because I am new at this. I must be perfect.

Even if I was afraid, I can't back down now. I can't allow myself cold feet. I can't continue to bide my time and waste away. If I do nothing, then what has crawled within me will only become more unstable. I can't let it win. I can't let it control me forever. This is something that has to happen. I beg for it to happen. I seek salvation. There is nothing that can change will will happen. This is my beginning.

An abrupt knock on the door is all it took to break me out of the trance I was in. I had assumed James' night-out would last until far after my project. I must have been mistaken. A part of my feels inept as I leave my bedroom. Something about this day has made the concept of human-interaction feel foreign. I hadn't exactly planned for any of it today, except the activity I had circled on the calendar, but, of course, there wasn't anything too human about that. I detach the chain lock from the door and it swings open. Wallah!

As I assumed, it's James.

"Good morning," James hollers before stifling across the room. He is intoxicated. His movements seem without motive. He falls onto the couch, one of the few pieces of furniture we have to bring out our empty living room. The term "living room" is ironic given how little living occurs, with me so often kept to my bedroom, and James often out.

James lays his head face down against the armrest, hugging the beige-colored couch like it's a long-lost lover. My eyes might have been deceiving me, but I could swear I even see a hint of saliva dribbling down the side of his cheek. This is not one of his finer moments, and certainly isn't the way I would have chosen to introduce him in hindsight.

Other days, James would come off well. He has the looks and the charm, the dimple on his cheek and the face without even the slightest blemish, whereas I do not. James' dirty blond hair is cut short, whereas my dark-brown hair falls freely in-front of my eyes. His cocky attitude and natural charisma is the antithesis to my standoffish and introverted nature. His teeth are pearly white, and I, well, I hope to kill somebody soon.

"What the hell, James!? It is nearly one in the morning!" I utter with both frustration and astonishment in my voice,

neither truly directed at James' late night escapades. "You called earlier saying you were staying a hotel for the night."

Before James can even begin to fathom a response, thanks in-part to his strong indulgence of the dog that bit him, he is out like a light. Like I said, this isn't exactly the most pleasant of introductions he could have had. His head still driven in the armrest of the couch, in all likelihood, he will be out for the rest of the night.

I don't care though. I don't want for James to be here. It isn't perfect. The reason I chose tonight of all nights is because I knew he would be in Italina. His mother called days prior and said she had whipped up an audition for him. He's an actor, by the way.

A silver lining to his early arrival, or, rather, his inebriation, is that he isn't his usual levelheaded self, bombarding me with questions about where I am headed, instead he lays unconscious on the couch.

I retrieve the ski mask from off the living room counter, a lousy disguise for what I am about to do, but it will do. I take one final look at James. I don't feel afraid. I don't feel the way I should be feeling. The way I think a person should feel.

I haven't rehearsed or come up with a scheme for what I have in mind, but I know I have all the time I need. Likewise, I will need all the time I am afforded. I have no reason to rush myself or become impatient. I smile to myself as my silhouette ensemble is brought out by the light of a lamppost overhead. I don black boots and jeans, leather gloves and a black hooded sweatshirt, while the ski mask is stowed away in my back pocket. As far as lines of defense, I carry nothing more than a mere switchblade.

I have no handguns or other weaponry to speak of, only the switchblade. An ordinary knife with ordinary capabilities. I will not bite off more than I can chew. I may be built well, but I have no intention on facing off against a group of thugs in my first round.

No.

All I plan for is a leisurely stroll across the city as I search for my first kill.

The air is chilly, but not freezing, and the sky is darkening, but not black. A lot has fallen from vision, all except for what the moon and the streetlamps bring to light. As I walk between buildings, I can only vaguely make out the figures that stand around me. The walls. Brick walls. They surround me. I feel at home in this atmosphere. This is the atmosphere I need.

I know there will not be thieves and rapists leaking out every possible alleyway like water from a faucet, but I also know I will spend the entire night until I find what I need. I walk down a graffiti coated alleyway, but can only vaguely infer what it depicts, mostly tags and bubbled lettering. It is a leisurely stroll across the city, who should I kill?

The city of Acera has among the smallest crime rates in Maharris, but there is an underbelly if you look for it. Marian is among the downtrodden and beaten slums of Acera; an area where even a bus won't dare venture. It is a pity to the ones that have to live here without choice, but it is a buffet for a hunter of scumbags. I turn the corner and begin my way down the next alleyway, one in-particular that I recognize well. This is Death Alley, a name given after a young-girl was dragged to the alleyway and shot. Whether it was out of fear or out of apathy, no one reported the gunshots and it wasn't until that morning the body was even reported.

For years, it served as a dwelling for the foulest Acera had to offer; a hot spot for pedophiles, rapists, murders, and all of

my other playmates. As the name started to lose its shine, its prestige as a criminal hangout went as well. Now, it has instead become a place occupied by drug dealers and stoners.

I walk through the alleyway, coming across little to nothing to speak of. The alley is big, and yet seems empty. I continue walking, on-guard, my eyes look at the dumpsters lining the right side of the building, as well as the rusty fire escape on the left. The dumpsters overflow with garbage and offer a rancid odor to set the mood. I meet the alleyway's end.

That's it?

Is it wishful thinking that bad men would present their throats on a silver platter for me to slice with my switchblade? I shake my head in disbelief of myself. *Patience*, I say to myself. I can't become discouraged. I must learn to cherish the hunt.

As the minutes becomes hours, at last, something becomes blatant; a noise. My ears prick. What I hear illuminates the night inside of me. It could have been anything. Someone could have dropped a plate of food as far as I knew, and yet, clearer than ever, the blindfold in-front of my eyes has fallen. I run forth, trying to pinpoint the whereabouts of the scream.

Have the years of searching come to an end? Have I found my purpose?

Soon, I find where the scream came, ... from the trunk of a blue mustang. The vehicle has a smashed fender with other noticeable signs of wear, parked awkwardly on the side of the road. Whoever parked the vehicle was in a hurry. I smile to myself for a reason I didn't understand. No one that lives by Death Alley goes out at night unless they are up to no good.

I walk forward toward the rear of the vehicle, hearing muffled whimpers pierce through the trunk and meet my ears. The murmurs are that of a frightened woman. I can hear the desperation as it flows from her voice. I hear the sound of toppled trash cans hitting the pavement and I see a man fleeing the scene.

Is it the man responsible for this woman's predicament? How much did I honestly care? I dress the ski mask over my face and dash toward him. I don't know all the facts and I don't mind much.

I have my prey and I will not let him escape from me. I follow him down Death Alley as he turns to look my way. There is a level of fear in his eyes as he becomes more frantic. I like that.

I start to close in on him as he begins up the rickety fire-escape, purposely knocking over another assortment of trash cans, further littering the filthy streets. Is this meant to stop me? Trash cans? I didn't expect my enemies to be so quick at discovering my secret weakness!

I leap over them, my adrenaline masking the shock-wave as I land, and I continue my pursuit, until, at last, he turns around and makes a last ditch effort at an attack. I hear his guttural grunt as he flails his arm and I duck beneath his fist, flinging him over my shoulders. The man falls off of the fire escape and down against the concrete pavement. The unpleasant sound of his back falling against the ground is loud and apparent, but he does not let out a cry of agony. Hopefully that wasn't enough to kill him. I would hate for my first time to end so prematurely.

I stand over the rail and look down at my fallen adversary. I reach for the switchblade in my back pocket and I walk down the steps to meet him. I flick open the blade and I drop to one knee beside him. I am not satisfied. Not yet. The

blood on the man's body paints the pavement like a canvas, and soaked his shirt. He doesn't look very happy. I bring the thirteen inch blade to his throat. That doesn't cheer him up any.

"Please just tell me what you want, do you want money? I can get you money!?! Drugs!?! Women!?! Please, I don't fucking care what it is, I will get it, man. I don't want to die, who the fuck even are you? I know people that will fuck you up!" His words shift from hopeless to faux attempts at intimidation, but it is his eyes I take a liking to.

His eyes illustrate the maddening panic he feels. He is sweating bad and it glistens off his face in the moonlight. He is terrified, and he has every right to be. The man has a black toque that hugs his head, a gray beard, and a psychopath standing over him.

"You don't want to die," I say, "Neither does the woman that is probably still screaming in the trunk of your car. Who is she?" I reply. But it's strange. There is a voice I don't recognize. Is it a more confident inflection than my own? There is more to it than that.

"She is just some broad, man. Why do you care!?"

"You're not helping yourself."

"Just tell me what you want and I can get it for you!" The man begs once more.

He doesn't understand. I don't sense a man that holds regret for his actions, I sense someone that hope to swindle his way out of this in any way possible. I don't care one way or the other. "I want you dead," I conclude with a stare that cuts through the troubled eyes of my victim and a switchblade that does the same to his throat. My first time.

I savor every moment of it. The blood pours out of his neck as he gags. It's beautiful. Then, he stops. Everything feels like it has come to a halt. A man was here and now he is not. Shaking.

I am shaking.

I lift myself back to my feet with a smirk on my face it would take a lot to wipe off. I move down the alley with a feeling I can't describe.

I am overcome with something, is it happiness? I did what I set out to do. The restlessness is gone, and it has been replaced with something different. I am happy? Is this what it feels like? In the process of taking a life, I feel reborn. It feels like only seconds before I return to my apartment, still with a smile across my face from ear to ear. I can't believe I did it. I actually did it. That fucker's dead, and it's because of me!

At last, I return to my bedroom. I don't even look at James on my way, and in what feels like no time at all, I fall down onto my bed. The emotions that overcame me all these years have been silenced and the curtain blocking me from the show has risen. The weight of the world is off my shoulders.

And yet, I can't help but feel I have forgotten something.