

Chapter Three

I awake to the repeating pitter-patter of raindrops skydiving without a parachute, plummeting to their deaths. As if it needed to be said, I had a great night of sleep. That calmness is short-lived, leaving when I feel a jolt of pain tingle up my back until it reaches my neck. I open my eyes and take sight of a ceiling overhead. This isn't my ceiling, however. I am laying on a navy-blue couch. This isn't mine either.

The memories of last night's events slowly start to reenter my mind in small flashes. I can remember the attack. I can even remember the sound of bullets singing me a devil's lullaby before I fell unconscious. I look around at a room that is all but empty, even less lived in than my own.

The carpet is a faded white with muddy footprints staining it, and the walls are a sapling color with the paint peeled back and faded. It was a slumlords' wet dream. A flat-screen television stands across from me on a rusted metal stand. Beneath the television set is a shelf carrying a DVD player, and under that are tangled up wires needlessly plugged into a power strip. The whole room has a neglected quality to it, an arrangement that resembles about how my living room would look without James occupying it.

The pain recedes out of me fast, and, to my surprise, I am starting to relax while the panic lessens. Here I am, in an unfamiliar room, with faint memories of being beaten, almost to death, and I haven't much in the way of a care in the world.

I sit up with a starry eyed, light-headed dizziness, and realize I am still dressed to kill, but am no longer wearing my ski mask. This was enough to scratch past that calmness inside of me, and before long, I begin to feel almost ill. Not sick, not exactly, but something close to it. It is a numbness I can't fully describe or comprehend on my own behalf. The shock is setting it. That must be it. A warmth of sorts carries itself throughout all of my body, but it doesn't feel real. It doesn't feel natural. Whoever stopped Allen Jones and his goons from ending my life has seen me without my mask, but I am not terrified.

Something about my current disposition, something that's in me, is not capable of grasping hold of the situation. In the end, I have covered my tracks well enough. I doubt they'd be able to link me to anyone's death. All I will be found guilty of is falling off a rooftop onto a car, and getting the living hell beaten out of me all while wearing a strange getup.

It would make things more difficult though. Everything would have to change or a single mistake would have law enforcement at my doorstep, looking for answers I don't want to give. On the bright side, it wasn't like whoever kidnapped me was likely a prim and proper civilian, and I was more likely to be beheaded rather than arrested. On second thought, it was not much of a bright side.

I stand to my feet, and just like that, the room spins around me like a merry-go-round. Unable to stand, I fall to one knee, using the surviving limb as a crutch. Something is wrong with me. Is it possible the bullets that sounded off in my eardrums last night were mere coincidence, and Young has decided finishing me off isn't enough? The living arrangement certainly appears like that of a squatter, or someone ready to flee at a moment's notice. *Ain't no one wanna believe me when I said I was attacked by you. I have a feelin' they'll believe me now, if I bring you to 'em.*

Allen Young could have easily dragged my lifeless corpse to his vehicle without direction. Aside from the bartender and a handful of drunken stragglers, he would have been free to do as he pleased, specially with his colleagues acting as a wall, guarding us from view. Does that seem like something Allen Young could have done in a drunken stupor? Not really, but what else could it have been?

I try to return to my feet, and succeed, but something still feels off. I can feel my knees swaying from side to side while I attempt to move forward. I look out through a dirty, unkempt window near the doorway, and I look at a silver motorcycle parked out front. I take another step and then, drop to my knees.

"There is no need to strain yourself, you are not in any danger."

I raise my head up to see an older gentleman looming over me, a wrinkled expression on his face that carries no identifiable emotion; the face of a person that has had more than his fair share of sleepless nights. It is because of my frazzled state of mind I don't recognize them straightaway. He is the bastard that sent me to the worst beating of my life.

The elderly man should consider himself fortunate that I can't stand. Had this not been the case, I would have taken my switchblade and given his throat the old in and out with it, real save. I don't feel angry though. I feel a little bit of everything all at once, but I don't feel angry.

"I hope the morphine isn't feeding you too many aftereffects. It is the strongest I had at my disposal, along with a couple of other narcotics I had you indulge. None of it can do anything too lasting, but they might very well alleviate the pain for a couple of hours." The man spoke matter of fact, then, for a slight second, he smirked. "Although, if you start seeing a hookah-smoking caterpillar then it would be beneficial you let me know. That would be something of admitted wonder though," The man's comments were delivered dryly, sharing with me a little sense of humor. "Honestly, I did not expect for you to take nearly as big a beating as you did."

"I am sorry to disappoint you," Are the only words I can piece together in response to the man's madness.

I am having trouble keeping my eyes on the man. The room is spinning way too fast.

"You shouldn't be. You have been forced to face your own demons with neither guidance nor assistance. I am nothing but proud of how you have played the cards you've been dealt. The urges to inflict punishment, ... to cause pain. They have to have been growing inside you as the days went by. Nobody understands that more than I do. Lesser men would have ruined themselves. Lesser men would have went on a killing spree and ended up in the electric chair. Lesser man would have hanged themselves, too riddled with emotion to live. Instead, you put on a poker face for those around you, and, at the same time, discarded them. You have done nothing to disappoint me, Orion." The man walked around the room as he spoke, but he was looking me dead in the eye by the end.

"How do you know my name?" I reach down and feel for a wallet that isn't in my back pocket. It is only instinct. I don't carry identification when I am on the prowl.

"I am your father," he says nonchalantly, seeming to either not understand the magnitude of his own words or not care enough to soften them.

I feel a disturbance in the force. Something tells me the feeling is provoked by whatever narcotic the man has given me that has left me feeling so ... odd.

My father is dead.

His eyes are mirthless, but I confident he believes what he has said. It doesn't matter though, because, unfortunately for him, my father remains dead. The magical ability the man has to make the room spin like a twister will not change that.

"It is impossible for me to describe with words," The man spoke for a moment, doing it deliberately for theatrics. My loopy brain half-heartedly hopes he will describe it through song instead. "The remorse I feel about not being there for you when you clearly needed it. Especially when I discovered you were a victim of the very same addiction and evil I feel inside of me. I know it might be difficult to understand what I am saying right now, given the current state you are in, but I swear it is true. I never intended to abandon you like I did. When your mother died in a car accident, that was it for me. She was your beacon. She was the lighthouse that was meant to away from my darkness, and, in only a moment, that lighthouse was there no longer. I made the decision you were better off without me. I hoped you would not be consumed with what had devoured me at such an early age." The man stopped again for a second. I am unable to distinguish crocodile tears from actual distress in the moment. He continues, "If you want to be angry at anybody for everything you've endured, I am the one at fault," The man, my father, says.

He looks at me with a plain face and yet, his words advocate for forgiveness. My eyes continue to wander. It is obvious the impact of what has been said won't hit hard now and I can only assume these conditions were intentional. There is a ringing in my head though, like the information is rattling inside my head, but is moving too fast for me to grasp.

"You shot me in the chest," is all I say in response to him. And, for what it is worth, I think that it was a fair observation to make. He most certainly did.

"I understand our initial meeting was out of the ordinary," He began to explain, carrying a small smirk, "And I wish I could offer you a better justification for why I did what I did. But, I only wanted to get a grasp on how much you knew and how much I could teach you." His eyes fume with intensity like they are his default settings, but I feel like I can sense a sincerity as well, "There are hundreds of things you still have yet to find about yourself, and let me start off by saying you have fallen into a trance. You have let yourself believe you have to hide in shame who you are to everyone around you. You have let yourself believe you're inferior, but you're not. They are not your superiors. You don't have to feel shame and you sure as hell don't need justifying!"

His voice was fiery and paved with brimstone and his eyes were as black as charcoal. He was now carrying a viciousness in his voice, and the amount of self-righteousness and passion spewing out of him couldn't be denied. I don't know if I want to accept his words though.

"I am not ashamed of what I am," I retort with emptiness in my voice. I don't have his confidence in my inflection.

"You have made a point out of hunting only criminals. They are the bad ones to you. They are the ones that deserve it. You do it because you believe it justifies your actions, and I know you are not doing this for a reason of your own. I know you don't care about justification. You and I know this isn't about saving lives, or helping to protect the innocent. Perception might change how you behave on the outside, but, on the inside, you know that this isn't why you do what you do. We don't do what we do for justice, we do what we do because without it, we can't continue on and survive. You want

their approval, but it should be their decapitated heads resting on your wall that substitutes.”

I close my eyes as his words are spoken. My head began to hurt. He continues: “You are a hunter, but you have been blind to that. You do not care about any of these people, so do not pretend,” The man known as Cepheus finishes, once more with the same sincerity as when he started.

The sharpening stab in my head has become worse. Along with it, so too has my ability to think straight. I look up at him one more time. I take a final glance at the man who claims to be my father. The man telling me that I am living a lie. Unable to piece together a response, I drop to the floor. The prickling pain is, at last unbearable. My view fades to black. Unconscious once more.