

Chapter Two

A year has left me since my first kill. Kills have come since then, and several more are yet to come. The number of lives I have taken isn't the only thing that has grown since then. I have grown as well, ... not as a person, but as a killer. Almost getting caught after my first kill made me understand how careless I had been. That was a mistake I knew I couldn't afford to repeat. That moment forward, I began to develop restrictions and guidelines to protect myself during my nighttime escapades.

Days later, I was informed the man I killed was a man named Alfonso Alvarez. After evading arrest over manslaughter charges in Jalint, Alfonso fled the city and relocated to Acera; helping to form a criminal gang in Acera called Maher. The woman in the vehicle's name was a young woman named Abigail Fitzgerald, a journalist investigating the illegal narcotic trade distribution happening in the underbellies of Acera.

Alfonso Alvarez was not a likable man, but in spite of that, he did have a number of followers backing him. The gang composed itself of individuals who would die for him, or, according to Abigail's articles, already had as a form of initiation. Her claim was that conducted a ritual that resulted in pledges being deemed legally dead before resuscitation. Crazy bastards, to say the least.

According to newspaper reports, I was mere moments away from being caught in the act, with Abigail having set contingencies with law enforcement tracking her cellphone. They discovered Alfonso's body mere minutes after I arrived home. I may have been careless that night, but I was lucky enough that I didn't leave any evidence in my direction.

Police chalked it up to a gang-related mishap, with no substantive lead on what happened. In other words, they had nothing. Absolutely nothing.

After Alfonso's death, I felt an inner peace and comfort like nothing I had ever felt, the brick-wall demanding I continue on, and I accepted. My actions accomplished more than relieving a little bit of anger, they worked as a real treatment to how I felt. It made me feel in control of myself.

Things didn't have to work out the way they did for me that night, and things likely would not work out that well again. From there, I began to develop more methodology to what I did. I learned more about the people I hunted. I learned what made them tick. I researched and studied them, and decided whether they met my requirements. And, for the times I didn't, I at least made certain they deserved it.

I was a little fish in a big pond, and that meant I needed to pick my battles wisely and slowly build onto larger targets. You have to crawl before you can run. And, one of the biggest tools at my disposal is reputation. I am no longer merely a vigilante sporting a sweatshirt and a ski mask. I am something different. I am something that brings fear and intimidation.

The small dose of fame and notoriety I achieved led me to develop a distinct look. I could have blended in. A level of discretion might have been the right call in the long run, but I went against it. Perhaps arrogantly, I wanted credit for my work, even if it was given to an idea or illusion. I wanted for people to have some idea what they had fear toward. By raiding the pockets of my victims, I was able to solve a lot of my financial situation. As it turns out, criminals oftentimes have a substantive amount of money on them. Who'd of thought?

I used the money to create myself a unique ensemble. One that was not only meant to instill intimidation, but provide protection. I dressed myself in a dark body suit with yellow streaks on the leggings and on the right side of the chest, with yellow gloves to match. Over a yellow hood, I wear the black ski mask from my first kill. Something of sentiment, I guess. A switch-blade was hardly fit for a fight, and thus, I crafted two retractable metal rods. And, when I say I crafted them, I really mean that I bought them for what was a very reasonable bit of coin. They aren't deadly, unless I use enough force to make them so, but they get the job done. Even if that wasn't true, I also carry the switchblade in my back pocket, just in case.

There has also been several other changes about my routine as well over the year. Before, I ignorantly waltzed around trying to find evildoers with a switch blade in my hand and a ski mask on my face, hoping to prevent detection. Since then, I have evolved and I have grown more discreet. On the rooftops is where I garner the edge over my prey, where I lurk in the darkness, and where I calculate every move I make. I follow them. I stalk them. And once I find them in a desolate location, that is when I strike down on them. A snake sinking his teeth into his prey and injecting them, that is what I am. This is why no one has ever escaped from my clutches.

None expect for one, Allen Young.

After avoiding persecution for an arson he absolutely committed, Allen attempted to subtract his wife from the population. It was a failed attempt. After what was, in the grand scheme, a slap on the wrist for domestic abuse, Allen was released and discovered his wife had filed a restraining order against him. It did more than protect her from him, it kept him from coming within one-hundred and fifty feet of his ex-wife, but also kept him from getting anywhere near his daughter.

This did not sit well with him.

This was something he could not move on from or accept, and his frustration never receded. Young soon began his search, trying to find his wife and daughter. It wasn't long before he found them and set out on accomplishing what he failed to do five years prior, and, this time, he succeeded.

There were sirens going off, blinding lights reflecting off everything in sight, and a gathering of people in horror. The grisly scene was all there was to keep the small child company that day as the medics attempted to resuscitate her mother. The mother was first choked out of consciousness, and was then bashed repeatedly over the head with a crowbar. Still alive for a moment or two, she inevitably died in spite of best efforts. The little girl, the child who lost her mother, currently resides in a psychiatric hospital, unable to interpret or process what she witnessed that day.

As for her father, I am looking down at him from a rooftop, waiting impatiently for him to leave the bar he now inhabits.

Waiting.

I am waiting to kill him.

He spends his days chugging alcohol out from a glass, disguising the bartender and the other customers as something more than what they are, lying to himself that it is acceptance. I can see the resemblance he has to me. Both of us indulging ourselves for an addiction because we are afraid to face life without it.

Justice has not been served and it never will be. I can't bring back a child's mother, nor can I make sense out of the pain

she faces. What I can do is give her father what he deserves. I can't erase the writings, but I can kill the author. Allen Young managed to escape imprisonment for his crime by distancing himself entirely from the life he left behind. He fled to a new city, changed his name, and began life anew. He wadded up Allen Young and threw him in the trash before digging Brandon Cutler out from the garbage instead.

Two birds with one stone, I will kill both of them. Unfortunately, there's a catch. Since Brandon Cutler is the only individual that has escaped from one of my executions, he knows I am after him. Cutler desperately tried to make his peers believe he had been attacked by a masked man carrying two sticks, but it was to no avail.

He preached and preached about this masked man, while drinking the stuff, he referred to him as Poison, and swore he was after him. Everyone chalked it off to a drunkard's misremembering of whatever actually happened, but it did become a topic of gossip, nevertheless. Someone killing off criminals was logical, after all, considering the number of murders occurring over the last year. Most of the news media chalked it up to gang-related violence, but the pattern was starting to become more apparent. Although I would like to say I tried to keep as tight a lid as possible on my existence, I didn't. The truth I have found is that I can't live without the credit. It is part of the ritual.

Regardless of the fact he is an unemployed alcoholic, Allen still had contacts, ones that helped him scrape enough money to get some form of protection. It is what brought me here, on the rooftops, lurking in the darkness, staring down at the bar where Branden has found salvation.

He is accompanied by a trio of prodigious thugs, each one more gargantuan than the next. I am not intimidated by them, for lack of better judgment, but they are enough to stop me. I don't these men nor do I have any reason they deserve their end to be brought to them any faster than it will already come.

The last time I attacked Allen Young, it was while he was walking to the deserted house he is currently squatting in. He managed to escape from death's grasp by the skin of his teeth, but I won't allow that to happen again. I can only pray my prey will send his bodyguards elsewhere after a false of security reels in its head. That could very well happen after the liquid courage enters his system. This is, of course, assuming he even actually leaves the bar tonight, and allows for my wipers to take him off my window.

As the minutes bleed to hours, I find myself repeatedly checking a watch I am not wearing, feeling that my greatest fear might have been realized. Allen won't leave the bar until the sun rises. If this is right, then I wasted an irreplaceable night, one that could have been dedicated elsewhere. One that I could have spent ridding the world of somebody else. I let out a sigh. Maybe if I follow him home he'll lead to an abandoned house. If it's isolated, I could kill him there.

I turn, ready to go on my merry way and see a man standing on the opposite side of the rooftop looking back at me. A man is looking back at me. On the rooftop. He stands. Calm. The grim look on his face and his diabolical stare are enough to pierce through me.

The aged man wears a tired expression. He has a face that could tell many stories if one were willing listen, the face of a man that has seen a lot in his years. Unfortunately, I am not willing to listen. Thick, dark hair runs from the top of his head and almost to his shoulders. While his hair isn't receding, it shows noticeable graying, with a thick beard to match. He is dressed in casual attire: brown boots, faded jeans, a worn white shirt, and a leather jacket that finds itself lost in the

night. Although he is too far away to say for certain, for some reason, I feel confident he smells like a chimney.

I was surprised by him, but I am not panicked. Something about this particular person seems oddly familiar. It could have been someone at the bar. He certainly looks the type. Who is this man? I begin to back away, not taking my eyes off of him while doing so. The feeling is faint, but persistent. I have seen him before. I've seen him before, but where?

"Hmm, ... I don't know if I would have went with the costume," the man of such vague familiarity utters.

The man's voice is deep and without much in the way of emotion. He looks at me as if he is trying to figure out exactly what he is dealing with. I look back at him trying to do the same. If he had been aware of the lives I have concluded, he would rip his eyes out and offer them to me as tribute, or, at the very least, he would be a little more cautious with what he said. The little intrigue I have for the man begins to fade, however.

If Allen Jones wants to spend his night on a drinking binge then there is no reason for me to stay. It is too late for me to squeeze a kill in, but there is still time to scrape together what is left of the night. I walk away. The man is not a threat. That is, until he reveals a gun, once hidden beneath his jacket, and fires off a few bullets in my direction. I stumble backward, nearly taken off my feet. The bulletproof ensemble shields me, but the shock sends waves throughout my body.

Who the hell is this man!? Is this another one of Allen Young's hired help? If so, how did he know I would be hiding on the rooftops?

"At least you got that part right," The man praised with a cadence to his voice that doesn't sound very impressed at all.

He walks forward.

If it had not been clear before then it was now obvious he is not of, or intimidated by me. I am not in-control. I am met with the brick-wall. Always. Not in-control. He is looking for a fight and I want to give him one. I walk toward him. I had hoped for better game, and it looks like my wish is this old man's command. Maybe my next wish will be granted and I will be given some lighter fluid to set him on fire with. Maybe I can borrow some from Allen Young?

I have my weapons readied and I am determined. I run forward. Focused. I attempt driving one of the rods to his chest, but, instead, the man grabs the weapon from my clutches and flings me to the floor. I land harshly to the ground and slide some, feeling the concrete scrape at me. I come within feet of sliding off the edge of the roof, but manage to keep my disposition and prologue my death.

I stare down at the gathering of vehicles in the parking lot as the wind blows my hood forward and a downpour of rain comes crashing down. I look back at the old man, not allowing myself to lose focus.

I am impressed with Allen Young's choice of henchman.

"You fuel yourself entirely on anger. If the right person catches onto that, they could bring you to an end. Calm yourself," the man in the leather jacket speaks. "It is also ill mannered and impolite for you to not share your weaponry with someone that hasn't a proper weapon to fight you with."

I climb to my feet with a smirk on my face. I am not angry for being bested, but instead, I rejoice in the fact I have found more than a worthy foe.

I found someone that offers me more than Allen Young ever could. I have been offered competition. I swipe toward him, hoping to redeem myself, but the man moves out of the way before my attack can land. The reaction time is not only good

for someone his age, but almost impossible. It is like he knew I was going to deliver attack before even I did.

He retrieves the metal rod I had dropped and swings it toward my head. I duck beneath it and attempt a strike at his feet, the old man jumps over it. The old man moves better than he should.

Without hesitation, he tosses one of my staffs off of the rooftop. I hear the sound of it hitting one of the cars below us with a clanking sound. As my mind tries to wrap is taken my the act, the man clubs me over the back of the head with his handgun.

Everything slows down and, for some reason, I don't feel any pain. I feel disconnected to everything that is happening as it happens, like he knocked me out of my own body.

His next act is even more drastic, throwing me off the rooftop some twenty feet. I actually have enough time to contemplate the act before impact, falling directly onto the hood of a car with a violent thud.

Everything returns to normal now, and my body feels tight. I don't think I can move. I avoided hitting the windshield, through no intentional effort, but slam down against the hood. Trickle of blood pour out from my mask. I rest my head back on the car, looking upside at the bar's bright neon lights. I see Allen Young, along with his goons, looking at me with looks of both surprise and something close to happiness.

Whoever the hired help was, he earned his paycheck.

"Ain't no one wanna believe me when I said I was attacked by you. I have a feelin' they'll believe me down if I bring you to 'em. They'll believe that Poison son of a bitch exists," Branden says with a look of joy on his face, maybe because he knows I hate that name, or maybe because he isn't completely insane.

I try to hold my stare as his bodyguards move toward me, both with vile intentions on their mind. I am absolutely helpless to defend myself.

Allen pushes past them like an obnoxious kid that wants to have the first turn on the slide, picking up one of my weapons. He looks at it. It is one of the very same weapons I once tried to kill him with. Then, he yells out with a drunken and dimwitted grin on his face from ear to ear. He pulls back with the stick over his shoulder and whips into my chest. I lay lifeless and defenseless on the hood of the car. Unable to muster a yell, guttural grunts leave me as my consciousness begins to fleet.

The sound it makes as it meets my chest is loud. I think I can almost hear my ribs break in two after each time the weapon lands, but I can only feel the pressure of it.

The gusts of wind deplete out from me and I can feel the feelings of defeat slither in. Blood starts to gush out of my mouth, muffling my weak groans of agony. It will not be long now before it is over. The curtain has come up only to go back down again. The show is over and, in flickers, I can see the brick-wall look out in-front of me.

Allen Young continues a moment longer and then ceases, he isn't satisfied by merely brutalizing me with one of my own weapons. He grabs me by the arm and yanks me from the hood of the car. I fall, tumbling down on the asphalt. I lay there, cringing in pain. There is nothing I can do now. I don't know what would be worse, if he killed me or if someone stopped him and my identity was revealed.

"I wanna know who tried to get rid of me, stand your ass up!"

I think about that for a moment, trying to comprehend what he said, but having some trouble. At last, I muster the strength to at least begin the ascend to a vertical position. As I stand one foot, it buckles under the pressure of my weight. I stand the other and feel it wobble as well. At last I am able to stand to my feet, but it won't be for long. The credits will be rolling soon.

Branden stares at me with an irritating grin on his face. It alone is enough to give me a second wind, at least for a moment. I throw a directionless punch at him I don't think even connects. Still, he drunkenly spirals until falling to the ground. One of the bodyguards cuts me off with a boot to the chest before I can build momentum, I drop to a seated position.

I rest helpless and vulnerable, with my head against the headlight of Branden's car, once again ready for the beating to end. I have gone out swinging, that much is for certain.

Branden charges toward me with fire in his eyes, the same kind of fire that drove him to take a little girl's mother away from her. He drives the heel of his boot to the side of my skull. My head crashes through the headlight. I lose consciousness.

The string has been pulled. The light is out.

The last thing I hear is four bullets fired.