



V
For Lack of Paper

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Chapter 1

Finally, after weeks of searching, I found my target. I stood in front of an old Victorian house, situated in a relatively busy street. It stood out compared to the neighbouring houses which had, one by one over the years, been demolished and rebuilt (with no style or character like their predecessors.)

I took my time, and took in these details in the moonlight; the old house looked like it had never been abandoned like the others. This made sense, considering my target.

I was trailing the "man" that had killed my family... I didn't care what happened now, as long as I got my vengeance. I put my hand over my pistol's handle in its holster, and opened the door.

"Welcome, come in, come in." came a deep voice from another room.

What was he playing at ?

I checked left and right for any other signs of life: it was an odd place, with antiques that looked brand new, and spotless as the outside.

I stalked through to the living room and saw him... definitely the right guy. He was of medium height, and almost looked overweight if you couldn't see the muscle underneath. Air of a typical aristocrat, or one of those mob bosses pretending to be classy.

"Good evening, Alex."

Not what I was expecting... he was sitting in one of his low leather chairs, with a glass of white wine in his hand, and a bottle of it on the coffee table next to him. I was hoping he'd defend himself, so I could kill him in hot blood; I didn't know if I could just kill him while he sat

there... .damn, I was standing open mouthed in front of this killer, looking stupid.

"Uh, hi."

"Would you like a glass ? Have a seat and we can share the bottle and our company."

I had to kill him before this went any further from what I planned... . But he was intriguing me, against my better judgement. I was fighting it, but I sat down and took the glass he poured.

"Why white wine?" I asked.

"I know, it's a bit different. But red wine is too typical, it's been done too many times by ones like myself." I had to appreciate his ambiguity, the many meanings his words could have.

"So Alex, do you believe in God?"

And another curve ball... He was still intriguing me though, against my will...

"No, definitely not."

"Why not? Something must have made this world, right?" I smiled at his baiting.

"If it was all made, it'd be much more perfect."

"But a perfect world wouldn't be any fun after a while"

I drank some of the white wine (definitely an acquired taste) and pondered a bit. No way I could kill this fascinating old man... why did I want to anyway ?

I grinned.

Chapter 2

Several hours, and a bottle of wine later, we were still talking. We'd discussed religion, history, philosophy and then moved onto lost loves and about his house, and about my past (I couldn't get his out of him.)

Sunrise was coming soon, so I figured I'd excuse myself for his sake.

"Thank you. Much more polite than the start of the evening." He said with a meaningful stare. Damn, he knew why I came here, of course. I'd thought he must have thought of me just as a random visitor. But why didn't he kill me? He could have easily, I knew that now.

"You looked like you could become much more than the man that came here to die for revenge." He answered, seemingly to my thought.

"Thanks..." I said, still hesitant. He could attack at any moment...

"Oh, stop worrying." he said, sounding slightly amused. "Promise I won't kill you, if you promise to come again tonight." he winked.

I could do that... Promise that I'd come back, then just leave town by day. "Sure thing, i promise."

He just smiled... Would it really be this easy to get away?

"OK, I'll see you tomorrow then... ."

"Call me Bob."

I snickered a little, but bit it back. "Bye Bob." I couldn't help but smile on my way out.

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I walked across the little footpath to the gate, with the events of the night on my mind. The sun was starting to rise, and it seemed so surreal. It had been years since the last one I'd seen. I walked in a bit of a daze through the streets... . It was probably the wine, but it felt like I was asleep and dreaming already.

I suddenly realised I was starving, I hadn't eaten for 12 hours... I stopped by a bakery that opened early and bought a few things to fill me up. On the way back to my hotel room I noticed a lot more around me than before. I realised this was actually a fairly nice looking town. There were a few people around this early in the morning, setting up shops, walking leisurely through the streets, or getting some early shopping in before the heat set in.

When I reached the hotel, I felt like just crashing on the couch, but I forced myself to eat at least some bread and butter, and make my way to the bed. For the little time before I fell asleep, I wondered to myself what I would do now... I'd been hell-bent on getting my revenge for months, now I knew I couldn't ever get it...

Chapter 3

I awoke at around 4 in the afternoon, feeling refreshed from a long sleep. It was getting a bit late, but I still had enough time to get some food and catch a plane or train out of here. I ate a cookie I'd bought from the bakery this morning, and headed out to get something more filling.

I walked the same streets as yesterday, but during the day it was very different. Every half decent store was full of people, and outside were shoppers going from place to place, talking amongst each other and taking their time. A few in suits were walking faster, on their way home before the 5 o'clock rush.

I was so shocked at the difference it made... now it seemed like a terrible place to live. Ah well, I thought, I'd be out of here by sunset. I made my way to the food court in a nearby mall (at least that was a bit quieter; it was too early for most to be eating dinner.

While I was eating, I thought about the situation a bit. He hadn't actually tried to kill me... .but then again, he had killed my family... but he had some indefinable quality, something that kept telling me "I'd never harm you"...

It was too much to think about, really. Might as well just leave, to be safe. I'd get the tickets after this, and take the next flight out.

"Mind if I join you ?"

I turned around, "There's a million other table- AHHH" I fell off my chair and backed up quick.

Bob just laughed at me... I eventually got back up, shaking a bit. He pulled up a chair next to me.

"I figured you'd leave... terrible manners you know ?"

I was slowly regaining my composure. "But I thought... .you said to-night... "

"I just needed my sleep," he winked "and you promised you'd come, I'm just ensuring you do."

I was still shocked by his appearance this early, I'd thought I was safe until tonight.

"Come on, finish up and we can go back to my place." well, I had no choice... .he'd kill me otherwise. I finished eating my food, trying to ignore his presence while he sat patiently waiting.

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When we reached his house, he ushered me in and then lead me to the same place as yesterday. A new bottle stood on the table, scotch this time.

"Have a seat... I have a proposition for you."

I sat down while he poured glasses for each of us... .a proposition... .sounded ominous.

He started talking again once he finished pouring, "Become my apprentice." it wasn't even a question... .he seemed so confident.

"No way am I going to become a monster like you."

"No, I agree... "he frowned and paused, "I mean, learn from me. Learn how to appreciate the things around you, and see the world in a different light."

I had to put more than a seconds thought to that... I was remembering how I felt the night before, and the pull of his personality. But how could I do it, to my wife and kids' memories ? He could see the look on my face and frowned more.

"I'm truly sorry for what happened, Alex. It's a part of my nature."

"But why them?" I burst out, nearly shouting it. A flash of my anger at it came to me.

"I couldn't control it... it would have been you too, if you were there."

I'd have to think about it; he seemed genuine, and something about him kept pulling me in...

"Please, just take a day to think about it, and come back tomorrow to let me know."

Chapter 4

"Become my apprentice."

On the way home, it was the only thing on my mind. He'd walked me to the door shortly after giving me that offer... I almost wished he'd let me stay.

I reached my room at around 7, and it felt just... wrong. I had nothing to do now. I turned on the T. V., sat and watched about 5 minutes of it, and switched it off again. Might as well just think it out now.

I felt like if I did this, I'd be betraying them, going with their killer... But I knew he couldn't control it, I'd studied it a bit before coming to get my revenge. That felt like a lifetime ago, and I knew I was a different person already; and that was because of him.

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Next thing I knew, I was waking to the blaring midday sun... I had no memory of eating or coming to the bed. What was going on with me?

I had a lunch at the hotel's restaurant and tried to put my problems off my mind. I ate slowly, savouring the food and thinking about nothing at all. But all the while, I could hear a roaring sound in my head, like a rushing river, calling for attention. I knew what it was... and knowing that, there was no way I was going to acknowledge it.

After finishing my meal, I decided to just wander around the hotel a bit, and waste some time. Falling back on old habits, I ended up at the bar a few minutes later. It wasn't too crowded, but I choose a stool next to a beautiful looking woman (more old habits). She really was something... Dressed in a black t-shirt, black pants and a dark red jacket, she sure was a striking figure, and she even pulled it off somehow.

"Hey, how you doing ?"

She turned to me, smiled and said, "Sorry, I'm taken."

"Doesn't matter." I grinned "Is he here with you?"

She looked me up and down, and leaned over to whisper in my ear, "No, he's not around," My grin grew wider, "But you've still got no chance."

She winked and started laughing, and I had to join in... damn, she got me good. When we both stopped I said, "Well, since I'm already here, OK if I stay?"

She winked again, "Sure thing stud. So what brings you to a bar at one in the afternoon?"

"Well, kind of a long story, but I only just woke up an hour ago. I've been sleeping way too long lately." She seemed to suddenly take a lot more notice of me.

"Well, I'm not broke yet, so tell me a story."

Chapter 5

"Good evening, Alex."

"Hi Bob." I felt a bit nervous, but I had no idea why.

"Come in and tell me how your day's been."

I was starting to get used to his way of being polite, and I knew he wouldn't mention his offer for a while... he was probably worse than the Queen of England! I smiled at that thought and came in to that same chair. When we were seated, I sighed a little, happily... the chair must be growing on me if I'm that comfortable just sitting down.

He poured me a glass, and I started telling him about the woman I'd met.

"Moving on already? Good for you." I had a brief flash of pain at that, but not as much as it should have been. Maybe I was moving on. "So what did she look like?"

"Fairly average height, beautiful dark hair, and she was dressed in all black, with a red jacket over it." I laughed a bit to myself, "She seemed fairly interested in my sleeping habits."

He laughed, then smiled a little tensely, like he knew the answer already, and asked "Did you tell her about me at all?"

"Yeah, just a little bit about how I'd spent the night chatting to some old fashioned, eccentric old guy. Don't worry, I didn't give her any details." He grinned and broke out in laughter, slapping his thighs. Wow, I thought, I was definitely right about the old fashioned part - who slaps their thighs in laughter anymore? I joined in, laughing at his laughter.

"Haha, you got me there! I'll have to get you back for that one," He

scratched his chin, pretending to be deep in thought, "I'll have to follow next time you go and pretend to be your dad."

"Nooooo, anything but that!" I laughed more, "I'll take them out for pizza and buy lots of garlic bread !"

He made a cross sign at me and said, "Noooo, I'm melting!" and laughed at my shocked expression, "Oh come on, you don't really believe that, do you ?"

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We spent the rest of the night just taking - a bit like the first night, but with some joking around as well as discussing and debating things.

Towards sunrise, he finally got to asking about the offer. "So Alex, have you decided about becoming my apprentice?"

"Yes, and I'll do it. I've felt more alive in these past few days than ever before. I feel like I'm slowly waking from a dream."

He smiled at me, "I'm glad you made that decision. I know I can help you see the world as I do." He rose and held out his hand, so I stood up and clasped it, shaking on a deal I had no real idea about.

Chapter 6

"So, what do you think?"

We were at a small art gallery nearby, and Bob was showing me around, asking what I thought of the art works. It was for really small time artists, and was actually a converted house.

"It's really bright, even the blacks look bright thanks to the colours around it!" I'd only ever been to an art gallery once, and I'd decided I'd keep it that way. This time though, the paintings seemed so alive, and I could really see the beauty in them. Not to mention, I was having fun walking around with Bob and discussing them all - he always seemed to find some sort of hidden meaning, but I figured they just wanted to make something that looked nice.

"And what about the message it sends?"

"Well... I think he's a bit hungry" I said jokingly, pointing to the thief pictured. He just laughed at me.

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Bob showed me around so many different places over the next week. Some of it seemed to me to be very random, and I couldn't see the point (like going to the library to sit around on comfortable seats and chat. I figured we could've just done that at his house anyway).

We went to a festival that seemed to only exist in this town, as I'd never heard of it before. The townspeople were very enthusiastic about celebrating it, with many different games and competitions being played, and even fireworks that people had chipped in to buy. We went around a bit and checked out everything going on, joined in some dye-filled balloon fights (all yellow dye, as the colour yellow seemed to be one of the main

themes of it all.) Bob was surprisingly still lithe on his feet, and got me and everyone else around him at least three times...

He disappeared from my side after we bumped into a nice looking woman on the way to the fireworks, and I guessed I knew his motive. I felt a little anger at that... he was trying to decide for me... then I just smiled. Screw it, I thought, I'll go for it anyway. I invited her to come with me and watch some fireworks.

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The next morning, I awoke feeling warm, lazy and happy, and I felt her warmth beside me. I lay there for a while, and eventually slipped out from under her arm to make some breakfast. I left a plate on the table for her, and went to wake her with a kiss.

"Good morning, beautiful." She opened her eyes slowly.

"Good morning yourself..mmm, what smells so good?"

"Bacon, scrambled eggs and toast! I left some for you, but I've got to go. Ever feel like doing something with me, my number's on your phone." I winked and grinned.

She smiled back, "Sure will, and you too!" She pulled me in by the collar and gave me a kiss. Maybe I'll call her again tonight...

I made my way through the town to Bob's place again, and knocked on the hardwood door.

"Come on in, Alex."

I came in to find him sitting in his leather chair, sipping from a glass. I checked the bottle on the table: coke... I had to laugh at that.

"Coke, very classy."

"Please, Alex, do you think I'm that cheap?" He paused a second and grinned, "I poured some pepsi into the bottle." His grin cracked into a laugh and I joined in: typical Bob joke.

After we both regained our composure, I asked, "So we're staying in today? It's been a while since we spent our hours chatting here."

"Yes, we'll have to stay in today - I'm expecting someone actually."

And right on cue, there was a knocking at the door.

"Could you get that, Alex? I'm much too comfortable here."

As I walked to the door, I wondered a bit about who it could be. Bob never introduced me to anyone he'd known, and I'd figured he wasn't close to many people.

I reached the door, and opened it a bit, peering around curiously. It was the woman from the bar, still dressed in her red and black! I grinned and opened the door all the way, "Hey there. How do you know Bob?"

"Oh, I've known him a while. Can I come in?" I stepped aside to let her in.

She rushed past me, sprinting through the house. "Wait!" I yelled out in reflex, and chased after her. What was she doing?

I caught up to her as she reached the living room. Bob turned in his chair to look at her, still smiling. "Hi Emmaline."

She flinched a second at that, then smiled tightly, and ran towards him and seemed to fall down onto him, fast. Then she slowly stood back up and took a couple of steps back... I hadn't even seen the knife, but there was a gaping wound in his chest.

"NO!" I launched myself at her and started attacking her, punching with all my strength. She was dodging everything with ease.

"I have no quarrel with you, minion." And she sprinted back out of the front door.

I gave up chasing her, and checked Bob... Dead... Damn...

I couldn't believe it... I was numb, but I could feel pain around the edges of my heart.

I spent the next few days split in two, swinging between acute depression, and burning rage. I left the hotel room, and stayed at Bob's house, to feel closer to him.

I was just moping around most days... I couldn't believe he could be gone like that, so quickly and without a fight.

I read through a few of his book collection, especially the ones that mentioned minions. I still didn't understand why she'd called me that - the definition read, "A loyal servant, bound by shared blood." But that wasn't me at all, I'd never done that.

I gave up on that, and steeled myself for what I knew had to come next - Vengeance. I went through Bob's house, and searched for all the weapons I could carry. I found some personal diaries of his, and decided to bring those with me.

Time to start the chase.

Finally, after a week of searching, I found my target. A small ground-floor apartment, with bland grass in the front yard, and a footpath leading to the door.

I loosened the gun holster on one side, and put my hand on the dagger on the other side. I slowly walked along the footpath, thinking about what brought me here... Bob.

He'd taught me so much, and she'd taken it away, so I could never spend a night talking with him again, or see new things with him... .and then it hit me. I'd thrown it all away without a second thought, I was back on the road of revenge! I paused on the footpath, thinking on this. As I did, I could see Emmaline staring from a gap in the curtains at me.

If I went in there, she'd kill me within a heartbeat. I'd die for the honour of my closest friend. But I didn't have to do that: I could live like he

taught me, make the most of life.

She closed the curtain, and I turned and walked away, smiling.

The End

Author's Note: I hope you enjoyed it! If you want to read more of my works, visit my blog at <http://forlackofpaper.blogspot.com>

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