

~PROLOGUE~

It was long past midnight in St. Wainluk and the streets of the town were practically deserted as most of the reasonable citizens were fast asleep in their comfy beds. However, a lot of citizens were also out partying up the clubs and having a crazy time in the town's wild nightlife.

Amanda Holcheck, a young, polite, well-liked Kindergarten teacher by day and a wild drug-addicted partier by night, had been one such person and was now stumbling down the lonely sidewalk of Main Street, obviously way passed the point of safe intoxication. Under her opened jacket, which the light cool breeze of the night often blew open, she wore a shining red dress - her party clothes for the night, which had found itself on the floor of a stranger's bedroom just an hour before.

She stumbled and tripped over her own feet, but caught herself on the side of a building, giggling noisily to herself. She straightened herself up to the best of her intoxicated abilities and continued walking, or rather stumbling, down the sidewalk. Soon she reached a long pitch black alley and walked passed it without giving it any second thought. A sober person however, would know better then to pass so haphazardly past such an area so late at night.

Seconds after she passed by, multiple voices of laughter echoed from deep inside the alley.

The laughter got a bit louder and continued to rise in volume as three shapes wearing long trench coats walked out from the alley, snickering quietly to each other, as if they were all in on some kind of inside joke. One of the people had dyed-green hair with a circular golden medallion hanging around his neck, which had a mystic green jewel in the middle and runes running along the outer edge. This twenty-six year-old man wasn't well known at all among the general citizens of St. Wainluk, however the underworld of crime in St. Wainluk knew of him as Todd Godwin.

On one side of him was Johner, who was a bit on the short side and a tad chubby, but his physical strength made up for that. His black hair was spiked up in long thick points, that were stuck up taller then any person should allow their hair to stick up. On the other side

of Todd was Brad, a taller man that also had his black hair spiked up, but not nearly as dynamically as Johner did.

All three of them carried baseball bats, and Brad also wore a pair of metal knuckle rings on one hand.

The trio began to follow Amanda from a distance, but quickly closed the gap between them and her. She leaned against a wall to catch her balance once more and Todd took that moment to rush and stand in front of her, blocking her path. She turned to move around him, but Brad then stepped in her way. She turned around to face the way she came from, but Johner moved to block that path as well.

They had her surrounded.

“Let me by!” Amanda slurred, still quite heavily under the influence of large amounts of alcohol. Her drunken body formed a playful smile as she tried to push by.

“Oh come now, sweet thing, surly you aren’t ready to go home quite yet,” Todd sneared. His voice lowered to a whisper as he went on, “You know, we can have our own party right here, ain’t nobody around to see.” He leaned in and slowly licked Amanda’s cheek. She tried to cower in disgust, but couldn’t move far.

“Leave me alone...” she pleaded.

“Oh come on!” Todd shouted, contrasting against his previous whisper. “We’re pretty good partiers, if I do say so myself.”

He leaned in to her again, but Amanda slammed her foot forward, nailing Todd in the shin. He let out a yell and bent down to rub his shin. The girl cowered away from her screaming attacker, only to have Johner grab her by the hair and tilt her head back hard. She began to cry as Todd stood up.

“Hold her still, Johner,” he ordered. “Time we teach this bitch how to respect us.”

With Todd’s signal, Brad stepped closer to the girl, raising his glistening chrome bat high in the air. Just as it reached the pinnacle of it’s height and Brad was about to swing it down, a gloved hand flew out of the darkness from behind him and grabbed the back of the bat. The hand jerked the bat back, causing Brad to step back as well, not expecting the pull of force. The bat was yanked from Brad’s hands and flung, clattering to the ground and rolling away.

The three punks turned their heads away from the pathetic drunk girl to look at the newcomer. The figure was dressed in black from head to toe. He wore a black baseball cap with a giant ‘N’ stenciled in white on it. Below that, the figure wore a pair of

sunglasses and covering his mouth and nose was a black handkerchief bandage. Whatever parts of his face were still visible, were painted black with facepaint. The figure wore a black trenchcoat, opened up to reveal a dark gray shirt under that. Further down his body, he wore a pair of black jeans, topped off with a pair of black boots. On his hands was a pair of black bicycle gloves that covered simply his palm and the back of his hand, leaving his thumb and fingers free. *(Author's note: Look at the end of the document for a rough picture)

"I highly suggest you let the girl go," the figure spoke in a low voice.

Todd, Johner, and Brad looked at each other and smiled. Things were about to get very interesting.

Johner let his grip on the girl go. "Sure, whatever you say." The three turned to face the figure, smiling in evil delight. Sure, they'd let the girl go, but it'd be worth it to teach this freak a lesson. Plus the girl was drunk as hell. If they were still in the mood for her after they were done with this guy, they could easily catch up.

Brad took out a switchblade, popping it open. "You shouldn't have taken my bat, asshole."

Johner and Brad rushed the figure, Brad jabbing his blade forward while Johner swiped his bat. The figure jumped in the air, flipped over their heads, and landed in a crouch behind Amanda. He stood and turned, grabbing the girl from behind. He twirled around, causing them both to turn. After they had turned, the figure let go and continued turning, so he was now facing the punks again with Amanda safe behind him.

The figure jumped straight up in the air, swinging his foot out and kicking Brad right in the bottom of the chin. Brad's head snapped back as he stumbled backwards and tripped on the curb, falling hard onto his ass.

Johner ran with the bat and swung down just as the figure dodged to the side and slammed his elbow to the back of Johner's head, causing him to stumble forward. Then the figure half-turned in the opposite direction from before, and elbowed the punk in the face. He swung his foot around the back of Johner's foot in a hook, tripping him up and making him fall.

Amanda, finally slightly more sober after her frightening encounter, couldn't decide if the mystery figure would attack her as well. Realizing that she really didn't want to take any chances by sticking around to find out, she turned and ran away down the street.

The figure raised his foot up and slammed it down on Johner's chest as hard as he could. Johner yelled in pain and let go of the bat. The Figure

kicked the bat away and glared back down at him. "Get lost and make sure I never see you again," he warned.

Todd Godwin, who had smartly stayed out of the duel, took a step towards the figure, slightly amused by his display and skill. "Who are you?"

The figure paused for a few seconds before replying in a near-whisper, "I'm Nightshade."

Nightshade turned and ran off into the darkness. As Brad and Johner picked themselves up, Todd stared into the darkness where Nightshade ran off into, realizing that there was now a new player on the field.

Things were about to get very interesting indeed...

~CHAPTER 1~

Early in the morning, however not nearly early enough, 17-Year-Old Scott Short ran across the damp main lawn of St. Wainluk High School, a light drizzle falling from the grey sky above. An overly-heavy bookbag jammed with thick textbooks was slung over his shoulders, while the heavy purple bags under his eyes were easily visible for all to see. He stopped and looked at the giant digital clock on the billboard of the school.

Oh no! I'm late!

Scott took off running again, rushing in between a couple that was about to kiss. "Watch it!" the male shouted to him.

Scott ignored the comment and rushed up the steps, two at a time, and then inside the building. He rushed down the near-empty shining floor as he turned a corner, almost barreling into a group of chattering friends. He ignored rude comments that included a few words his mother would definitely not approve of, and he continued to run as fast as he could.

After a couple minutes of running and dodging various students and teachers, Scott heaved a sigh of relief as he approached his first class. He stopped before entering, to straighten out his clothes and brush his hair back. He breathed in and opened the door.

"And that's why the DNA in the..." his Science teacher was in the process of explaining something to the class when he stopped and looked over at Scott.

Oh great, Scott thought to himself gloomily as he slowly walked down an aisle of seats and sat down next to his best friend, Curtis Coates. He was really regretting sleeping in that morning.

As Curtis glanced a disapproving look at his friend, the teacher picked up his speech from where he left off, many of the students taking notes. Scott took out his notebook and sighed, rubbing sleep from his eyes. He may have slept in, but he still hadn't slept as much as he would have liked.

He felt a tap on his arm, and Scott turned to looked at Curtis. "Slept in?" Curtis mouthed silently. Scott nodded his head and turned back around, not wishing to get in even more trouble.

After class ended and all the students were piling out into the hall, Scott told Curtis to go on ahead and approached the teacher at the front of the room, nervous about what he was going to say.

“Mr. Park, I just wanted to apologize,” Scott began.

Mr. Park brushed his thick bushy hair back as he turned and looked at him. “You’re a bright kid, Mr. Short. However you constantly show up late and very often only half-finish assignments.”

“I know, and I am trying really hard, but I also have a very demanding job that I’m keeping in balance with school and...”

Mr. Park cut him off. “You’re in school to be educated and learn to eventually get a job that you enjoy. Whatever job you have now, that’s only for just now. Jobs like that’ll come and go in your life. But *this* – School - this is important. This will determine your life, Mr. Short. I can’t tell you how many students drop out of high school only to be living under an underpass because they didn’t want to finish. They didn’t want to find out what they wanted in life.”

“It’s a little bit more complicated than that...” Scott trailed off.

“How is that, Mr. Short?” Mr. Park wasn’t trying to be rude. He was generally interested. His students’ well-being was always important to him and if he was able to help out with any of their problems in any way, he tried to. It was his nature, not his obligation.

“It’s kind of hard to explain.”

“Look, I’ll give you a chance to make some extra credit to catch up, but you have to promise to show up.”

Scott was overjoyed with that news! He was expecting some kind of verbal lashing or to be in some kind of trouble. But instead his teacher actually let it all slide and was trying to help him!

“After the weekend,” Mr. Park explained. “I’ll give you a test on all the recent material. Study as much as you can in preparation for that test, and if you get eighty percent or above, I will give you some extra credit. I know this will be sketchy for you, but be there.”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Park, you can count on it.”

“I hope so,” Mr. Park turned, picking up his bag, and started walking away only to turn back around, “And may I suggest an earlier bedtime, Mr. Short? Your eyes give away your obvious lack of sleep.” And with that, the teacher went on his way.

During the transition between classes, the hallways of St. Wainluk High School were packed with students of all ages going about their business. Some were at their lockers, others were talking with friends, some were heading to classes, and others were aimlessly walking.

Scott walked into the main hallway from his previous class, and he yawned as he walked down the hall, heading in the direction of his locker. Since he had rushed to class in such a hurry, he hadn't had time before, to stop by his locker.

Scott turned around when he suddenly heard his name get called out above the noise of chatter and saw Ashleigh MacDonald walking up to him as she pushed through a sea of moving bodies. "Hey, Ashleigh," Scott greeted back. Ashleigh was a year younger than Scott, and in Grade 10, which was the year below him. Scott had met her through a mutual friend that they had at the time. He and Ashleigh began to get close to each other the year before, and just when Scott gathered up the nerve to tell her about his feelings for her and ask her out, another student did first and Ashleigh began dating him. Scott retracted a bit, wanting to remove his feelings for Ashleigh. However even though they stopped hanging out as much as they originally did, he never did manage to remove those feelings.

When Ashleigh got closer, she noticed the deep coloring of purple under Scott's eyes. "Wow, you look horrible."

"Gee, thanks," Scott replied sarcastically as they continued down the hall.

"Late night last night?"

"Yeah, kind of," Scott stayed vague on purpose. Of course he couldn't tell her the full reason, obviously. "Couldn't sleep."

"Well you know you can always call me on my cell, even late at night," Ashleigh offered as she lightly bit her lower lip. "I don't mind waking up and talking to you."

"Thanks, but I think I'll pass," Scott replied, completely oblivious to Ashleigh's secret feelings for him. Even though his feelings for her were so strong he could hardly stand it, he had given up on her having feelings for him a long time ago, and would not spend time entertaining the notion. "Unless you're really boring on the phone and can put me to sleep," he added jokingly.

They both laughed for a minute, but stopped when Ashleigh waved to a group of her friends who had sighted her. "I'll catch you later," she said as she rubbed Scott's shoulder with one hand. "Hope you sleep better tonight."

“See you around,” Scott replied as Ashleigh went and joined her friends. Scott stared after her as she and her friends disappeared around the corner. A hand fell on Scott’s shoulder and he turned to see Curtis standing there.

“You should make your move,” Curtis sighed. “Don’t be a pussy. You missed your chance before, but now you have another one.”

“What do you mean?” Scott asked, his interest piqued.

“Oh, you didn’t hear? Her and Rob broke up last night.”

Scott’s mind began to race. What Ashleigh had said earlier about calling her if he ever needed to talk, had she actually been making a move when she had said that? Scott normally wouldn’t entertain the notion but under the circumstances, he couldn’t help it. “She just got out of a bad relationship,” Scott started to say, realizing that Ashleigh probably wasn’t in the mood for another relationship quite yet. “I don’t think she would want...”

“Now would be the perfect time,” Curtis interrupted, cutting his friend off. “She’s hurt and needs a rock to lean against. You like her, obviously, and she seems to dig you too, so I say go for it.” The two stand in silence for a minute, only the chatter from other students in the hall keeping the area from going quiet. Then Curtis widened his eyes and hit himself in the head. “Oh by the way, Happy Birthday!” He couldn’t believe that he had almost forgot. He and Scott had been friends for a few years and he had never forgotten before.

“Thanks,” Scott replied without much enthusiasm. He hadn’t been excited about his birthday for a couple years now, and people rarely ever gave him a reason to change his mind. He walked away, wanting to get to his locker and get to class. The last thing he wanted was to be late again.

Curtis kept pace with him and noticed Scott’s sleep-deprived eyes for the first time. “Wow you look...”

“Shut up,” Scott cut his friend off, already knowing the end of that sentence. They pushed through the crowds as they made their way down the hall. One of the many people they passed was one of the nerdiest kids to ever walk the halls of St. Wainluk High School: Mark Abbott. Curtis stopped to talk to him, so Scott stopped as well, trying not to smile. He was slightly amused with what was about to happen, as it was almost a daily ritual for Curtis to pick on Mark, yet Mark never seemed to learn.

“Hey Mark, I’ve got a trick for you,” Curtis spoke as if he and Mark were long-time buddies.

Mark turned and smiled, oblivious up the fact that Curtis had never been nice to him before and would probably not be this time either. “What

is it?" Mark loved tricks. Growing up, he had attended more magic shows than he could count.

Curtis took a seemingly normal quarter out from his pocket. "I bet you five bucks that you can't roll this quarter from the top of your forehead down to your chin, without it leaving your face."

"That's easy!" Mark shouted with joy in his high-pitched nasal-influenced voice, thinking that it would be the easiest five bucks of his life.

"I don't know," Curtis went on, voice oozing with sarcasm. "I tried it last night and I couldn't do. It was really frustrating." He gave the quarter to Mark, who put it on its side at the top of his forehead and rolled it down his face to the bottom of his chin. However, Mark was unaware that minutes before, when Curtis had been bored in class, he ran a pencil over the edge of the quarter and it was currently leaving a pencil-lead line right down the middle of his face.

When he finished, Mark proudly beamed. "See? I told you it was easy!"

"Gee Mark, you sure showed me," Curtis tried his best not to laugh. He took his quarter back from Mark and walked away, Scott giving up on the blues and finally breaking a smile as he followed after his friend.

"Hey, where's my money?" Mark asked as he was left standing alone in the hall.

"We never shook on it," Curtis called back to him as they walked further away. As they neared Scott's locker, Curtis took out a pencil and ran the lead over the side of the quarter once again.

"I wonder why that kid doesn't have any friends," Scott said, more thinking out loud than starting an actual conversation with Curtis. "I mean, I know why we aren't friends with him, but why isn't he friends with the other nerds and geeks?"

"I was told it was because he lied to them a lot," Curtis answered, thinking that Scott had been talking to him and was expecting an answer. "Made up stories about himself so he would come across as better than he really is. They found out." Then as an after-thought, Curtis added on, "Mark has always been a loser. Born that way I think."

Scott and Curtis both chuckled as they reached Scott's locker.

In St. Wainluk there was a special club. One that only people in the underworld of crime knew existed. To anyone else, it was mere urban legend and nobody actually thought it was real. However, if it wasn't real,

then why was 'Truth' by Nerd playing loudly throughout the 'imaginary' building, causing the speakers to boom with base?

This specific club, known as 'The Snake Pit' to those who knew about its existence, was a kind of hidden refuge for thugs, street punks, thieves, and other criminals of all kinds and all ages. Throughout the room were even some 'dirty' cops mingling within the crowd. Heavy cigar and cigarette smoke clung around the room. There were dozens of tables set up, some used for various card games, others used for dealing drugs, and there were booth seats for just sitting and having conversations in. There were no windows or any way for outside light to shine through into the criminals' personal club. There was a bar set up at one end of the room and nude dancers dancing in cages with neon bars of all colors. Strobe and neon lights flashed all over the room.

A chubby but muscular man, a man famous to both the underworld and law enforcement, a man named Jonas Becker, sat on the red leather of one of the booth seats, two beautiful topless young women on either side of him, cuddling up against him.

Todd Godwin walked over and slid into the seat opposite Jonas. Jonas stretched out his hand, offering Todd a cigarette. Todd took one out of the crumpled pack and put it in his mouth, using his own metal Zippo to light it. He leaned back as he breathed in and then out on the smoke, putting his Zippo away again.

"I hear you got some news on this little boy playing hero that's disrupting a lot of my business," Jonas stated.

"That's right Mr. Becker, I..."

The Crimelord cut Todd off, "Please, call me Jonas."

Todd continued from where he was cut off, "I had a run-in with him last night. Me and my crew. The little son of a bitch took both of them out in just a couple minutes, and you know how tuff they are."

"Indeed," Jonas' interested was brought up a few notches. Todd's gang was indeed one of the toughest around. "Is it true what they say? About him being just some kid?"

"He certainly looked and sounded like he was no older than eighteen at the most."

Jonas shrugged, no longer as interested as he had been seconds before. "Then it's just a fad. Some pimply comic book fanboy geek that wants to feel like one of his great pathetic idols. It'll pass as soon as his fad ends. Next he'll probably be a huge anime fan and staple his eyes wide open." He paused, planning on ending his say there, but thought about

something else and decided to continue. "Until then, he could pose a bit of trouble. He's already a minor nuisance. Does the bugger have a name?"

Todd breathed in and then out on the cigarette before replying with, "He calls himself Nightshade."

Jonas nodded his head, thinking things over. "Judging from reports of the fucker, it would seem he only comes out at night. I want you to recruit more members into your gang. Hell, I'll even supply you with some. Then I want you to go looking for him. It shouldn't be too hard. Just cause some kind of ruckus and I'm sure he'll come straight to you like a moth to a flame."

Jonas stopped and turned to pay more attention to the two naked girls beside him, however Todd opened his mouth to speak. Jonas however, had a feeling as to what he would say and turned back to him, cutting him off before he had the chance to speak. "And you don't need to worry about the pigs. I have most of them under my payroll, so they won't get in the way." Jonas paused before continuing on. "Once you have him, crush him. He's only a boy after all. He may be strong, but he can't be that smart."

"Yes sir. He'll be as good as ours," Todd nodded his head as he slammed his fist on the table.

"Make sure that he is. Now, can I buy you a dance?" Jonas raised his hand and snapped his fingers as Todd smiled crookedly. Within seconds a nude dancer, seemingly slightly older than the two Jonas had with him, walked over and sat on Todd's lap, working into the beginnings of an exotic lap dance.

Jonas turned and began making out with the two women on his sides.

~CHAPTER 2~

After school ended for the day, Scott and Ashleigh walked down a sidewalk together, the school far behind them. The bright sun shone down on their bodies, the light having long-since chased away the dreariness of the day.

“You don’t have to walk me home you know,” Ashleigh smiled, amused at Scott’s recent boost of confidence.

“I know, but I have to walk past your house on my way home anyway,” Scott replied, trying his best to cover up his feelings for her. As far as he knew, Ashleigh didn’t know about those feelings and he didn’t want her to until the right time. Of course in reality she was able to see right through him like a clear puddle of water. “And I like talking to you,” he added, deciding to make a slight little move on her. “I can talk to you about things that I can’t with anyone else about, not even Curtis.”

Ashleigh’s smile grew as they continued down the street. “So what do you do for fun?” She asked, probing Scott for more information about himself. They hadn’t really hung out in about a year, and she realized earlier that day that she didn’t really know much about him.

“Oh you know, this and that. Dressing up as a superhero and saving the day mostly.” Despite his overly-sarcastic tone, Scott was in fact, not quite lying. As he expected, Ashleigh laughed, picking up on Scott’s sarcasm. Scott smiled at her laughter.

Ashleigh bit her lower lip and decided to take the next step and make her own move on Scott. “Well you know, if you ever want to get together and do something sometime, just give me a call or come on over. I’m usually home.” she paused, and then added on as a joke to go with, what she thought was, Scott’s joke. “Besides, I could probably use a dose of ‘saving the day’ to spice up my social life after Rob and I broke up.”

Scott suddenly turned solemn and proceeded with caution, not sure if the subject was a touchy one for Ashleigh. “Yeah, I’m sorry to hear about that.”

“Don’t be,” Ashleigh replied to Scott’s surprise. “Rob was a controlling dushbag bastard. I’m happier now that I’m not with him.” By this point they were in front of Ashleigh’s two-story house and they had come to a stop. “Well this is my house,” Ashleigh stated, changing the topic. “I guess I’ll talk to you later on.”

“Yeah, definitely,” Scott said back. Ashleigh headed inside her house. As the door closed, cutting her off from his view, Scott sighed, wishing he had said more instead of just standing there like an idiot.

He turned and continued on to his own house, putting his hands into his pockets.

Fifteen minutes later Scott neared his own home, watching some little kids that were playing in the front yard of the house next to his, running through a water sprinkler. Scott remembered those days when he was that age and kept trying to drag his father by the hand through the water. Oh, how he missed the simpler days when the worst thing he had to worry about was if he could snatch a free cookie before supper or not.

He turned the corner and walked on a pathway cutting through the grassy lawn, leading to his house. He walked through the main door and removed his shoes in the front porch. “I’m home!” he called out as he entered the hall.

Raptor, Scott’s small black mixed-breed dog, came running instantly and jumped at Scott. When Scott leaned down to pet Raptor, the dog licked his face as if he had never seen his master in years. Scott laughed at his pet’s playful greeting. “Ok boy, down,” he chuckled.

When Raptor allowed Scott to continue into the house, he walked into the kitchen with Raptor following close behind him, and sighted his parents sitting at the family dining table. They turned to look at him as he neared.

“Oh Scott, you’re home!” his mother exclaimed happily.

“Happy Birthday, son,” his father greeted. Scott thanked him with as much enthusiasm as he could muster. Truth be told, his birthday didn’t really excite him anymore, and it didn’t help that he hadn’t gotten many presents, or anything good anyway, for years now.

“How was school?” his mother asked as she did every day when he came home. He doubted if she actually meant it anymore, or if it was just habit for her to ask now.

“The usual,” he replied, shrugging. “Got a little bit of homework to do tonight.”

“We only got you one present this year,” Scott’s father announced. Scott probably would have been disappointed by that news if he hadn’t already given up all hope for future birthdays. His father continued, “However I think it’s something you’ll really like.”

“Wicked,” Scott replied, again with fake enthusiasm. As much as he could just hardly wait to see what it was they got him, he first had something he needed to take care of. “Just let me use the bathroom first. I’ve really been needing to go for the longest time.” Scott dropped his bookbag onto the floor and went down the hall to the bathroom.

Once the door was closed, he leaned close to the mirror and checked his eyes, sighing with frustration. The purple bags under his eyes looked even heavier and darker than earlier. His parents were sure to notice if he didn’t do something about it soon. He knew he had to get some sleep that night, but still hadn’t quite figured out how he would manage that.

He opened the door and headed back out, not being able to wait to get his birthday over and done with. He returned to the kitchen and found his parents standing and smiling. God, those smiles really creeped the bejesus out of him. He knew his parents meant well, but why on God’s green Earth did they have to be cursed with the scariest smiles known to man?

“Your mother and I knew how much you wanted one ever since Uncle James taught you how to use one,” his father spoke up. “Luckily my dealership got a supply of them in just the other day.”

Scott looked at his parents, a huge genuine smile forming on his face. His father was the proud owner of a vehicle dealership in town, one of two actually. If his present was what he was thinking it was, then this was going to turn out to actually be his best birthday ever. There was only one vehicle he was ever taught how to ride by his favorite uncle.

His face radiated with uncontrollable joy. “Is it what I think it is?” Scott asked, nearly hopping up and down.

“Go check for yourself,” his father beamed with pride and joy. “In the garage.” He knew how disappointed his son had been with previous birthdays, and vowed the year before to make up for it this year. He specifically ordered the present in from Japan himself.

Scott turned and rushed to the garage door, his parents close behind him. He opened the door and walked into the room, flicking on the dim light. A white sheet covered something big in the middle of the room, that had not been there last time Scott had been in the garage.

Mr. Short moved past his son and went to stand beside the object. His wife made a corny fake drum roll noise, causing Scott to embarrassingly roll his eyes, as Mr. Short reached and pulled back the sheet, revealing a brand new shining black motorcycle underneath.

Scott’s eyes lit up as if he was the inventor of the very first light bulb, and discovered that it actually worked. “Wow,” was all he was able to

muster. Scott's father reached down to the floor and pulled up a black helmet. He wiped a speck of dirt off and tossed it to Scott, who easily caught it in his hands.

"Take it for a spin."

A large smile broke across Scott's face.

Ashleigh sat at her small desk in her bedroom, doing homework. She sighed and squirmed in her seat, stuck on a particular question. Chemistry usually had been a pretty decent subject for her. She wasn't great in it, but she was never bad in it either. Up until their newest chapter however. It had become her hardest subject and she couldn't wait to be through with it.

After a few seconds, she yelled to let out some frustration and threw her pen across the room. She had no idea if Scott was good at it, but he did do it the year before so she was thinking about giving him a call and finding out, when her thoughts were interrupted by the doorbell ringing.

"Can you get that, dear?" her mother called out to her from her sewing room down the hall.

Ashleigh got up and made her way downstairs and to the front door as three knocks sounded throughout the lower floor of the house. She opened the door and was surprised to see Scott standing there with a helmet in his hands.

"Let's go for a ride," he smiled, confident in himself.

"A ride?" Ashleigh was confused and Scott noticed that in her eyes. "I didn't know you had a car."

Scott moved to the side. His face lit up with joy once more when he saw Ashleigh's expression when she saw the motorcycle. She was speechless. "I got it as a birthday present," he explained.

"It's your birthday?" Ashleigh asked. Scott nodded and she was shocked that she never knew. She immediately felt bad for not having wished him a happy birthday earlier. "Happy Birthday. Sorry," She apologized. "If I had known I would have gotten you something."

Scott didn't care about that kind of stuff. There was only one thing he wanted from her at that moment, and he already asked her for it. "Don't worry about it. So you want go for a ride?" he repeated.

Ashleigh smiled. "Sure, just let me get my jacket." She disappeared inside for a few seconds and then re-appeared wearing a short black leather jacket with brown fur lining the collar, and which ended right below

her ribcage. They walked to the motorcycle and Ashleigh climbed on behind Scott and tightly wrapped her arms around his waist.

Scott grinned to himself as he closed his visor and started the bike up. Maybe if things kept going as good as they had been lately, he'd soon move on to asking her out on a date. Scott pushed the thought out of his mind for the time being as they zoomed off and he brought her around the town on his motorcycle.

They zoomed past the high school and down dozens of streets, passing by houses and an assortment of other buildings. Along the way, Scott sped up once in awhile, causing Ashleigh to scream in excitement, but then also sometimes had to slow down due to heavy traffic. They even had to come to a stop at a gas station once so Scott could refuel the motorcycle.

By the time that late afternoon turned into late evening and the two of them had ridden through most of the town, Scott brought Ashleigh back to her house, safe and sound. Scott removed his helmet as Ashleigh stepped off the bike.

"That was fun," Ashleigh ran her hands through her hair, still smiling with excitement and adrenaline.

"I had a great time," Scott smiled back.

"Me too," Ashleigh replied.

Scott planned on waiting awhile before asking his next question, which was why he was just as shocked as Ashleigh was when he actually said, "Go out with me."

"What?"

Scott fought to control what came out next. He couldn't back down now, so his only option was to continue on. "Tomorrow night. Go with me to the movies." He waited for what felt like an eternity to hear her answer.

Ashleigh chuckled to herself, knowing right away what her answer would be. She just wanted to wait a few seconds to torture Scott. "Ok," her smile grew even wider. "I have gymnastics right after school though."

"Yeah, that's ok," Scott replied, relived and thrilled with the answer he got. This was his best birthday ever! "I have Tae-Kwon-Do right after school too. We'll go to the late showing."

"We should go for another ride too," Ashleigh suggested.

"Definitely."

The two stared at each other in silence. Scott thought about kissing her, but realized it was probably too soon. Ashleigh however, wanted Scott to kiss her, but also wanted him to do it when he was ready. When she

realized that time was not now, she finally broke the silence by saying, "Good-Night, Scott."

" 'Night, Ashleigh," Scott said back. When Ashleigh turned and went inside her house, Scott put his helmet on and drove off back to his house. He was even happier now than when he had first left, which at the time, he thought would have been impossible.

~CHAPTER 3~

Long after Scott's parents were in a deep sleep, the only light source in the house came from the computer monitor in Scott's bedroom. Scott sat at his computer, noisily printing a sheet of paper off. He hoped the loud printing noise would not wake his parents up. He would certainly have a hard time explaining things to them.

To put his ease at rest, Scott stood up and moved quietly out into the hall and over to his parents room. He slowly and carefully opened their door slightly, peering in. His mother and father were both still sleeping, one of them snoring loud enough to scare off a bear. Scott slowly closed the door and headed back to his room.

He opened the door to his closet and on a hanger was a dark gray shirt hung up under a black jacket, with a pair of black jeans hanging from the bottom and the hook of the hanger going through the back of a black cap. On the top shelf of the closet was a black handkerchief bandage, which was laid and smoothed out. Next to it was a pair of black biker gloves, a small tub of facepaint, and four sets of black sunglasses. On the floor was a pair of black boots.

Scott reached in.

Nightshade opened the door to the garage slowly, careful to not make a single creek. He turned on the light and closed the door behind him. He went over to his new motorcycle and bent down, peeling a shape off the sheet of paper he had printed off. He put it on the side of his bike and pressed hard on it to keep it there, running his fingers over its shape. He stepped back to look at his new handiwork. There was now a giant white 'N' on the side of the bike. Pleased with himself, he went over and did the same thing on the other side of the motorcycle and then he walked to a shelf and took down his black helmet and put a white 'N' on the front of that as well.

Nightshade folded the beak of his cap up as he slid the helmet on overtop of it, lowering the black visor. He sat on the comfy seat of the motorcycle and started it up, pressing a button on a remote that he held in his hands, to open the garage doors. He put the remote into his jacket and

zoomed out of the garage and into the night, the doors closing again behind him.

A lone street thug dressed in a ski mask and thick winter jacket, hauled a brick through the frail window of a closed store. An alarm blared loudly as the glass shattered and the man quickly rushed inside, stepping over the broken glass. It wasn't long before he had his sack filled to the brim, bulging, and he returned back outside.

He took a nervous look around to see if there had been any witnesses, and was content when he discovered that there were none. However he suddenly heard the sound of an approaching engine getting nearer. He paused and waited a few seconds, like a deer caught in headlights. After a few seconds, he came out of it when he realized that judging by the distance of the sound, the vehicle should have been in view by now, yet he still couldn't see the source anywhere.

He squinted his eyes and finally saw the outline of something moving towards him. As it got closer, he picked out a pitch black motorcycle with no lights shining, almost on top of him, however it appeared to be driving by itself as it headed straight towards the robber.

As it got even closer, he spotted the figure riding it, his dark clothes having camouflaged him from a distance, much like with what happened with the motorcycle. As the motorcycle neared, the confused robber didn't know what to do. Panicking, he turned to run but Nightshade caught up easily and passed him as he zoomed by.

Nightshade slammed on the breaks as he turned the motorcycle to the side, blocking the robber's path as it began to skid to a stop. The robber didn't have time to stop and slammed right into the motorcycle, flipping over it and landing painfully on the other side. The motorcycle continued on and came to a complete stop a few yards away.

Nightshade got off the motorcycle, still wearing his helmet, and ran towards the robber, picking up speed. The man slowly stood up, but finally reached full height again just as Nightshade reached him. The vigilante did a back flip but as he did, he slammed his leg out so he ended up kicking the robber as he flipped back. The robber flipped back in the other direction.

Nightshade landed on his feet gracefully and walked over to the robber, leaning down and punching him only once, directly in the face, to

knock him out. Sirens could be heard approaching in the distance, diverting Nightshade's attention.

He hastily returned to his bike and started it up, driving off and quickly fading into the darkness. He drove around the corner just as a group of police cruisers arrived from another street and piled into the area, their red and blue flashing lights illuminating the street.

Two people leaned against the back wall of a building, hidden in its shadow. One of them wore a white tank top and had a cigarette hanging out of his mouth while the other wore a jacket. The latter handed some money to the former, and in return he got a bag of dope placed in his palm.

"Nice doing business with you," Jacket sneered. "If this shit is as good as I'm told, we'll be seeing more of each other."

"My shit is always good," Tank Top shot back, slightly insulted. "You have a problem with my shit, you have a problem with me, and I don't like problems."

"Of course," Jacket put in a quick save. "I have no doubt I'll enjoy this bag."

"Just remember who deals the best shit for the lowest prices and we'll do fine in the future." Tank Top kept a serious face, but Jacket smiled.

"Hi-ya, fellas," a voice interrupted. The two dealers whipped their heads to see Nightshade walking out of the darkness towards them. Nightshade was no longer wearing his helmet and had his cap on.

"Steve, is that you?" Tank Top asked.

"Far from him," Nightshade snarled as he walked closer.

Tank Top took out a gun and pointed it at Nightshade. Nightshade stopped walking towards the couple. "Who are you?"

"They call me Nightshade."

"What do you want?" Tank Top questioned.

"Well a Bic Mac would be nice, but I doubt I'll be getting that off you." Nightshade joked in a serious-toned voice.

"If you want some of my shit, I can set up a meeting for another time," Tank Top replied, thinking that the man was after some of his drugs.

"Why would I want some of your shit?" Nightshade asked. "That's just plain gross. Next you'll be asking if I want your piss too."

"Wise-ass motherfucker." Tank Top fired, but Nightshade predicted that and moved a few seconds sooner. However Jacket saw him move and slammed his leg out, catching Nightshade in the gut. He doubled over and

spit on the ground. Jacket went to kick him again, but Nightshade grabbed his leg and pulled up as he stood. Jacket's leg went up in the air and he fell down on his back.

Tank Top turned to point the gun at Nightshade again, but Nightshade grabbed the gun barrel with his hand and pointed it away from himself just as Tank Top fired. Tank Top used his other hand and punched Nightshade in the side of the head. Nightshade let go of the gun and stumbled to the side, moaning slightly. Tank Top aimed the gun and fired again, but there was only a click.

"Fuck," he swore as he put the gun away and quickly did a sloppy uppercut to Nightshade, catching him square in the face. Nightshade let out a yell and stumbled backwards. Jacket was now on his feet again and moved in to punch Nightshade as well, but Nightshade blocked and punched his attacker in the face. Then he swung his foot sideways and caught Jacket in the chest, slamming him up against the wall. Jacket's head hit against the wall with a loud *thunk* and he fell to the ground, unconscious.

Tank Top ran towards Nightshade, his arm pulled back to punch. Nightshade went to duck, but instead of punching, Tank Top slammed his knee up, catching Nightshade in the chin. He slammed his elbow down on the back of Nightshade's head, knocking him to the ground.

Nightshade didn't move. Tank Top brought his foot up and slammed it down. Nightshade quickly rolled over onto his back and caught the foot in his hands a split second before it connected with his body. He shoved up, toppling Tank Top back, causing him to fall onto his ass. Nightshade stood, but wobbled slightly. He turned away from Tank Top and slammed his foot to the side, slamming it into Tank Top's face. He fell back, also unconscious.

Nightshade held a hand to his head as he walked to Jacket's body and bent down, taking the bag of dope from him.

Motherfuckers... That hurt, Nightshade thought painfully to himself as he went to a nearby manhole cover and lifted it up. He dropped the dope into the rushing sewage below and closed the cover.

Once he returned home later that night, Scott immediately went to the bathroom and closed the door. He was still dressed in his Nightshade attire, except he had his cap, sunglasses, and handkerchief bandage on

the counter beside him, and most of the facepaint had been badly washed off with sweat, and was running down his face and dripping into the sink.

Under the fading facepaint, Scott's face was bruised and bloody. He inspected himself in the mirror and reached for a can of some kind of cream, and began applying it to his cuts and bruises.

~CHAPTER 4~

Bright and early Friday morning - far too early as far as many of the younger people who had to go to school that day were concerned - Scott's parents were already sitting at the kitchen table when Scott walked into the room, yawning. Most of his cuts and bruises were masked by the cream he had put on the night before.

Mr. Short took a sip of his coffee and laid down the newspaper that he was reading onto the table. He looked up at Scott with a stern look. "Where were you last night?"

Scott's heart raced, wondering how his father knew that he had left. He decided he'd tried to cover it up the best he could and play it cool. "What do you mean? I was sleeping."

His father sighed, "I woke up in the middle of the night to get a drink and saw that the bike was gone. I checked in on you and you were also gone. Now I repeat, where were you last night?"

Scott knew he couldn't continue on with that lie, but telling his parents the truth was also not an option. "I couldn't sleep so I went for a ride, is that so bad?" He realized right away that he probably shouldn't have snapped at the end.

"It is when it's at night. You know how bad this town is. I don't want you riding after dark anymore."

Scott couldn't believe it! The motorcycle helped him out so much at night! He didn't have to walk everywhere and he could intercept so many more people in such a shorter amount of time. The motorcycle was the sole reason he was able to get home at an earlier time and actually get some sleep last night! "But that's not fair!" Scott shouted, prepared to fight his father on the matter. "Mom, back me up here."

"I'm sorry Scott, but your dad has a point." The last thing Mrs. Short wanted, was to see her son get in trouble with the wrong crowd and hurt, or even worse, killed. She had been against the idea of giving him a motorcycle at all, and it was the basis for more than a few arguments between her and her husband.

"I can't believe this!" Scott turned and stormed off, leaving the room in anger.

"Where are you going?" his father called out after him.

"To school. Or do you have a problem with that too?" Scott snapped, no longer caring if he sounded mean.

“Hey, don’t take that...” Mr. Short was cut off as Scott slammed the garage door. His father sighed and turned back to face his wife. “Did I do the right thing?”

“You did fine, dear. You’re only protecting him and he’ll see that soon enough. Don’t worry, he still loves you. You’re a great father.”

Mr. Short smiled, glad to have the woman he loved more than anything else in the world, around to back him up. He went back to his morning newspaper, glancing at the clock for an instant first to see how much longer he had before he had to be at work.

Scott stormed across the garage’s stone floor to his motorcycle, which no longer had the Nightshade symbols on it. He grabbed the helmet, which also no longer had the symbols on it, and slid it on over his head. He then jumped on his motorcycle, revving it up. He pressed a button on the remote that he held the night before and the garage door opened for him.

He zoomed out of the garage, purposely leaving the door opened behind him. If his father wanted it closed, he could do it himself as far as Scott was concerned.

Scott pulled up to a stop at the front of St. Wainluk High School. Various heads turned to look at the motorcycle as Scott climbed off and removed his helmet. Curtis pushed through a crowd and approached him with a smile.

“Awesome wheels, man. Get it for your Birthday?” Curtis asked.

“Yeah,” Scott smiled. “Took Ashleigh out for a spin on it last night.” They started walking towards the school’s entrance as Scott brought Curtis up to speed on the Ashleigh situation.

“Great! See, told you it wasn’t too soon to make your move,” Curtis exclaimed.

“I don’t know what it is. I can never stop thinking about her,” Scott openly confessed. “When she was going out with Rob, I kind of got over her, because I knew it was pointless to pursue it, but now that she’s single again, all these old feelings keep coming back.”

Curtis patted Scott on the back as they walked into the school and down a hall. “You’ll do good. She’ll be yours before you know it.”

“I hope so. I don’t know how much longer I can stand to be ‘just friends’.”

“Give it time, my friend. Give it time.” They reached their lockers and turned the combination locks to the right combinations and opened their doors. They started emptying out their bookbags.

“What do we have first?” Scott asked, not having anything more to say to Curtis about Ashleigh.

“Gym,” Curtis replied as he removed a pair of sweat pants from his locker.

Scott closed his own locker and turned to see Mark walking down the hall, his head hung down, looking at something in his hands. He was holding some kind of round device, inspecting it. “I don’t get it. I just don’t get it,” Mark mumbled to himself as he continued on down the hall, accidentally bumping into people, and eventually getting out of sight.

“What’s up with him today?” Scott asked, motioning to Mark with a head movement.

“He’s in my Industrial Arts class,” Curtis explained. “He’s always making stupid pointless inventions. Come on, let’s get to class. You’re actually at school on time today; don’t want to mess with that.”

Scott chuckled as he and Curtis walked down the hall, heading to the school gymnasium.

Later on that day, when classes were still in session and the halls were empty and void of other people, Scott stood at a water fountain, taking a much-needed drink. He heard footsteps approaching and, more out of reaction than anything, he looked up and noticed Mark walking down the hall further ahead.

Scott wiped water from his mouth and jogged to catch up. “Mark!” he shouted out.

Mark stopped and turned to look at Scott. “What do you want?” he asked in an annoyed voice. He was in a hurry because he hated missing class, and as far as he was concerned, Scott hated him, so this couldn’t be too good.

“You don’t have any friends, right?” Scott asked

Mark hesitated, wondering why Scott was curious. “Why do you want to know?”

“Oh come on Mark, you can tell me,” Scott pushed. “I heard all about your habit of lying. Seems to have costed you a lot.”

Mark heard enough. He was sick of people teasing him. "How about you leave me alone?" He started walking away down the hall, but Scott caught up and moved in front of him, blocking his path.

"I also hear you're good at inventions."

"So?" Mark asked, getting even more annoyed and wanting to return to class.

Scott took out a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket and ripped a piece off, and wrote an address on it. "Come to this address at Six PM."

Before Mark was able to say no, Scott turned and walked away back to his class. Mark looked down at the piece of paper, his mind racing.

When school ended that afternoon, Scott went to the town gym dressed in his tae-kwon-do uniform and with a black belt tied around his waist. Other people in a variety of colored belts also occupied the giant room around him.

After the hour-long warm-up exercises at the beginning of the lesson, the class moved on to a sparring match. Each person paired up with another of the same rank and belt color.

Scott sparred with the only other black belt in the class, other than the teacher, who was a guy named Wes. Scott easily blocked a punch from his opponent, and then he blocked a kick. A series of various kicks and punches followed, all of which Scott blocked and dodged, except one. He fell onto his back, coughing. Wes reached a hand down and helped Scott to his feet.

They bowed and went back to their fighting stances. The two people engaged in a spectacular show of honorable martial arts, which moved them both across the room. The battle lasted for several minutes, during which, everyone else in the class slowly noticed how spectacular and fluent the battle was and crowded around to watch and began cheering them on.

When it was time for the battle to end, Scott had lost the battle, but just barely. He bowed to Wes and they shook hands, both sweating profusely.

"Spectacular display, gentleman!" the teacher complimented as the room cheered and clapped. "You have both come a long way."

After his Tae-Kwon-Do class that evening, Scott arrived home and walked into his house, still dressed in his white martial arts uniform.

“I’m home,” he called out, but got no answer in return. He threw his bookbag to the floor and walked through the house and into the kitchen, which was empty of his parents. He saw a small red light blinking on the answering machine so he went over and pressed ‘Play’.

“Hey Scott,” his father’s voice filled the air. “Your mother and I are gone out for dinner. Our anniversary is tonight. We’re going out dancing after supper, so we won’t be home until late. Do any homework you have, and remember, don’t take the bike out after dark.” And with that, the message ended with a high-pitched beep.

“I’ll take the bike out whenever I want to,” Scott said nastily to the machine as he walked away. “It is mine after all, old man.” He arrived at the fridge and just as he opened it, the doorbell rang. Scott closed the fridge with a sigh, wondering who it could be. Tae-Kwon-Do lessons always had him starving after and he was anxious to get something to eat.

He walked to the front door and opened it to discover Mark standing there. Scott shook his head, putting himself in a completely different frame of mind, and put on a smile. He had temporarily forgotten about his invitation to Mark earlier, but was now finally on the same page. “Come in.” He stepped out of the way and allowed Mark to walk into the house. He closed the door behind him.

“So what did you want me to come here for?” Mark asked, getting right to the point. As far as he was concerned, this was all some kind of prank and he wanted it over as fast as possible so he could get home before Star Trek came on.

Scott on the other hand, couldn’t believe that he was about to tell Mark his secret. He knew he could go on without the need to tell anyone, but Mark had abilities that could be extremely useful to Scott, not to mention that even if he did decide to try to tell people, nobody would believe him anyway. Mark was a Godsend.

“Mark, I’m about to give you the opportunity of a life time,” Scott began. Mark scoffed, but Scott ignored him and continued. “I’m going to tell you the biggest secret in the world, but you can’t tell anyone, because if you do, I’ll have to kill you.”

Mark chuckled a bit, thinking that Scott was joking around. After he noticed that Scott’s serious expression wasn’t changing, he began to slightly doubt that Scott was actually joking. “No one would believe me anyway,” he finally said.

“I know. That’s what I’m counting on,” Scott stated. “That’s also part of the reason why I chose you to tell this to.” He took a short pause, still trying to grasp the idea of telling someone. He took a breath and made the plunge. “Have you heard of a vigilante that stalks the streets at night and takes out criminals?”

Mark nodded. “I’ve heard a bit here and there. Mostly rumors. Saw an artist’s rendition on the news once.”

Scott looked Mark deep in the eyes for a few long seconds and then confessed, “That’s me.”

Mark bursted out laughing so hard, tears flowed from his eyes. “You’re a bigger fibber then I’ve ever been!”

“Stay here,” Scott sighed, knowing that there was only one way to prove it to the nerd. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.” He turned and disappeared deeper into his house while Mark continued to laugh. Now he *knew* that he had been called to Scott’s house for a joke, but it was actually a joke that he enjoyed for once.

Down the street a few blocks and around a couple corners, Ashleigh walked into her bedroom, still dressed in her gymnastics clothes. She dropped her bag to the floor and looked at the clock.

Shit, she thought to herself. *I better hurry if I want to be ready for when Scott gets here.* She ran to the small bathroom that was attached to her room and turned on the shower as she ran back out and over to her closet, choosing what to wear.

Back in Scott’s house, Mark’s laughing died down to a slight giggle as he waited patiently for Scott to return with whatever it was he planned on coming back with. Probably a camera to capture what was supposed to be Mark’s surprised look, but Mark knew better than to fall for that.

Suddenly Nightshade walked into the porch from around the corner in the hall. Mark looked him over, inspecting the costume, and instantly stopped laughing. “Either you’re extremely messed up in the head to go through such lengths to trick me,” Mark said, eyes wide with shock. “Or you really are the guy that’s trying to stop all the crime.”

“I was getting sick and tired of the way this town is,” Nightshade explained. “Crime rate has been going up and the cops hardly do anything

about it. I have a theory that they're being paid to ignore most of what happens. I decided that I could either sit around and bitch and moan about it, or actually try to make a difference. Apparently I've been doing quite good at the latter."

"Why me?" Mark asked. "I mean, I understand why you chose me above other people, but why anyone? You didn't have to tell anyone about this."

"I need help," Nightshade confessed. "Last night I was almost beaten by a couple of petty stoners. I need weapons to help, and I heard about how you like making inventions. So now that you know the secret, I ask you: Will you help me?"

Mark thought to himself about it for a few minutes. He still wasn't quite convinced that it wasn't a prank, however he was definitely coming around. For the sake of argument, assuming that Scott was telling the truth and was the real Nightshade, Mark knew that even if he wanted to tell someone, no one would listen to him. Even though he wasn't good at keeping secrets usually, that would really help him with keeping this secret. "I never get picked for anything," Mark finally said, giving into the idea that it was actually real. "It's a great honor to me, to be in on one of the greatest secrets."

"Good," Nightshade exhaled, having been nervous by what Mark's answer may have been. "I need some kind of weapon as soon as possible. My body can only go so far as a weapon."

"That shouldn't be a problem. Give me an hour and I'll be back with some stuff."

"Good. See you in a few hours then."

Mark turned and exited Scott's house, leaving Nightshade to smile to himself under his handkerchief bandage.

As the sun finished fading away, giving way to the night's blackness, Todd, Johner, and Brad were among a group of dozens of people, all thugs and gang members that were standing around in the middle of a lonely deserted street. Jonas had combined many of his gangs together and had commanded them to listen to Todd Godwin. He then gave Todd the location where they would be massing and so Todd, along with his own trio, arrived and was surprised to see the large number of people he was now in command of.

“Alright, listen up!” Todd shouted to the giant group, hiding his nervousness under an exterior of tuff badassness. Although his fingers betrayed him by nervously playing the with golden medallion that hung around his neck. “Mr. Becker put me in charge of all you, so if any of you have a problem with that, you can take it up with him after. In the meantime, I want you all to listen to me and listen good,” he paused, scanning the crowd. Most of the faces belong to people he didn’t know, but there were a few familiar people in there. Some he had seen only in The Snake Pitt while passing through, others he had personally done business with.

He continued, “We are going to do everything we can to draw this motherfucker out. Break into stores and homes, steal, deal drugs to kids in the open, kidnap drunk party girl, whatever you want, just as long as it draws him out. We have insurance, so the pigs won’t be making any busts on us tonight. If they do show, it’ll be to help us. Anyone sights this...Nightshade, as he calls himself...you contact me over the radio. He’s mine. Any questions?” He paused to let his new crew voice any concerns they may have had, but no one said a word. “Good. Now let’s get to work.”

The group cheered as they split up, some going solo while others went off in groups of all sizes.

Hell had finally come to St. Wainluk that night...

~CHAPTER 5~

Rushing down a street lined with stores, Mark's bookbag hit hard against his back with every pounding step. He turned down a Cul-De-Sac and slowed to a walk to catch his breath as he neared a store named 'Abbott's Guns'.

Breathing heavy, he grasped the door handle and leaned against it until he composed himself a bit more. Finally Mark turned the handle and opened the door, walking inside the brightly lit room.

All the walls were lined with so many guns of all shapes and sizes, there was barely an inch where you could see the actual wall. In addition to that, there was a glass case below the counter, which held a few smaller guns that were mostly for display.

Mark walked across the room as the clerk behind the desk looked up at him and his eyes grew wide with excitement. "Marcus!" he shouted and walked out from behind the counter. "How's my favorite nephew doing tonight?"

"I'm your only nephew..." Mark forced himself to grin at the age-old joke that his Uncle Albert said every single time he saw him.

Uncle Albert let out a deep bellow of laughter and patted Mark on the back. "Originally I was just going to deal with it, but since you're here I have a favor to ask," Uncle Albert said as his laughter died down.

"Actually, I'm in kind of a hurry and..."

"The bank closes in a couple minutes and I need to pay a bill ASAP," Uncle Albert cut Mark off. "You can take care of the store for twenty minutes or so, can't you? It's been a slow night and I doubt you've forgotten *everything* that you learned when you worked here last summer."

As Uncle Albert grabbed his jacket and rushed across the store, Mark spoke up, "I really can't tonight, I'm..." but he was once again cut off by the sound of the door closing behind his uncle as he rushed out of the store.

"Shit," Mark mumbled as he looked around the empty store.

Ashleigh MacDonald glanced up at the clock that hung above the stairwell in her house. She eagerly paced the hallway and living room, waiting for Scott to arrive. The movie started in five minutes and he was

running late. With every second passing, she continued to worry more about if he'd show up or not.

She had known all along that she had feelings for Scott, but never really admitted it to herself until recently, when one of her friends told her about how much Scott liked her. She had really been looking forward to their first date and had thought that Scott was too. She knew he wouldn't blow it off.

Would he? Ashleigh looked up at the clock again. Sighing heavily with disappointment, she finally hung her head low.

He would.

Scott, now dressed back in his regular clothes, led the newly-arrived Mark to his room. "So what did you manage to rig up?" Scott asked him.

Mark opened up his bookbag and pulled out a pair of 9MM guns. Scott's eyes lit up. "I was able to sneak those out of my Uncle's gun store," Mark explained. "I went over to try to talk him into giving them to me, but he got me watch over the store while he went out to run some errands and I kind of snuck them into my bookbag instead."

Scott picked them up and tested their handling and weight in his hands. He used to spend quality time with his father at the shooting range, and his father, who had been in a gun club growing up, was often surprised by Scott's natural hand-eye coordination in regards to aiming.

Mark reached into the bookbag again. "There's more?" Scott asked joyfully. "This is like Christmas."

Mark pulled out a circular device the size of his palm. Located on the side of it was a round red button. Scott laid the guns down on his bed as Mark passed him the device and explained it to him. "It's an old invention of mine. Press the button on the side."

Scott did so and a small near invisible strip of some kind of paper came out. Mark reached over and ripped it off. "All you have to do is stick this on something and apply pressure," Mark said, "And the strip will explode a few seconds later."

Scott looked the device over quickly and then laid it down as Mark reached into the bookbag again and took something else out. "A watch?" Scott asked. "Sorry Mark, but I already got one."

"It's not an ordinary watch. Sure it does tell the time, but it also has a small built-in laser and a recorder. Oh, and it also tells the temperature." Mark handed it to Scott, who looked it over.

“Tells the temperature?” Scott asked, not quite sure what to make of that little detail. “Really?”

“I was bored,” Mark explained.

Scott pushed a couple buttons on the watch, getting a feel for what buttons did what. When he was done, he laid the watch in the pile of other new items Mark had brought for him. “Great work, Mark. Get to work on some new inventions, as soon as you can. These are great and will really help.”

Mark smiled with proudness, feeling that he finally fit in and belonged someplace for the first time in his life.

~CHAPTER 6~

Charlene Yetman, a single mother of two, had been watching TV when she heard her two-year-old twin boys crying from their room down the hall. They had only just recently entered their 'Terrible Two's', but it was already getting close to the edge of Charlene's nerves. She had no idea how she'd be able to put up with it for a full year.

However all those thoughts swooped away from her head as soon as she entered the room and gasped in fright. There were two bulky men and one female with more facial peircings then should be allowed to any one person, climbing out of the opened window with Charlene's two children in their arms.

"Hey!" Charlene screamed at them as she tore across the room. They ignored her and by the time she reached the window and began climbing out, they were already half-way down the street. Their voices drifted through the air back to her, and she picked up on talk of selling her kids to some Child Slave ring and making hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The primal need to protect her children took over and she leaped out of the window and charged down the street towards them. The female who's face looked like a robot due to the peircings turned around at the sound of approaching feet and slugged Charlene in the side of the head, knocking her to the ground.

"Please," Charlene cried as she looked up at them. "Give me back my children..." The only response she got was laughter from the criminals and crying from her sons.

One of the men turned and unexpectedly kicked her in the ribcage. She moaned as she spat blood onto the ground and rolled over onto her back, heaving for air. She let the tears flow freely as she already knew that she had lost and she would never see her sons again.

Just as the trio of filth began to walk away, laughing at the mother's misfortune, a booming gunshot sounded out and blood splattered the ground as the metal girl's kneecap blew out, causing her to scream bloody murder.

The two men whipped around and spotted a figure leaning up against the wall of a nearby building, one foot up against it. He had a gun pointed out at them.

"Put the children down," Nightshade ordered.

The men looked at each other and did so, but then turned back to Nightshade and took out their own guns. Nightshade fired two more shots before they could even blink. One of them fell to the ground, a gunshot wound in his chest. The other bullet had went wild.

The one last standing punk fired at Nightshade and he dodged, the bullet embedding into the wall where he had been seconds before. He fired his own gun and knicked the punk in the arm, forcing him to drop his gun and cover his arm with his good hand to stop the flowing blood.

Without hesitation, Nightshade fired again, just as he took out his second gun and crossed it ovetop of his other arm, firing at the other male punk. Both their heads got the nice addition of a bullet.

Nightshade uncrossed his arms and walked over to the fallen female punk, who was crying her eyes out. "Don't shoot," she begged him. Nightshade put his guns back inside his jacket as he turned away and she sighed with relief. Then he suddenly turned back just long enough to kick her in the head, knocking her unconscious.

He turned to retrieve the two children, but Charlene had already done that and was running back to her house with them in her arms, screaming.

Her immediate plan was to call the police and inform them of what happened to her and that some kind of gang war was going on, but in order to do that she needed to get away from the new thug as quickly as possible. He had no trouble killing those other people, and she feared that he wouldn't have any trouble killing her if she had stuck around.

On an empty street not too far from Charlene's neighborhood, Todd, Johner, and Brad, along with a small group of others, were breaking into all the cars parked along that street. They smashed windows, dented the bodywork, removed hubcaps, and stealing anything of value from inside.

Johner lit the oiled rag of a Molotov Cocktail and threw it through the smashed window of the closest car, causing the car to quickly light up in a bright blaze. He laughed as he began work on creating a second bomb.

All of a sudden a motorcycle zoomed around the corner. Nightshade let go of the handlebars and balanced on the bike, as he took out his two 9MM's from inside his jacket. He began firing, hitting the street near the thugs' feet, hoping to scare them off.

One shot ricocheted off the gravel and broke Johner's newly made Molotov, splattering the booze all over him. The burning rag touched his hand and ignited the spilled alcohol, lighting Johner ablaze. He ran around,

screaming until he threw off his leather jacket, dropped, and started rolling around.

Todd turned when he heard the commotion and smiled in amusement as he looked at Nightshade.

Nightshade put the guns away as he grabbed the handlebars again and zoomed right into the midst of the gang. He slammed on the breaks and lifted the back tire up in the air, turning the bike around as he did so. The tire slammed into the heads of a few of the thugs, knocking them down. The tire landed back on the ground and Nightshade had turned in a 180 degree circle.

He put the kickstand down and removed his helmet. He jumped in the air and away from his bike. He landed and started firing, making the thugs scatter and take cover. Todd however, stayed rooted to on his spot, holding his smile as if he was watching something amusing on his stolen TV.

After firing for a bit, Nightshade whipped around and trained his guns on Todd. "I thought I told you I never wanted to see you again," the vigilante growled in a low voice.

"It should be *you* that listens to your *elders*, boy, not the other way around," Todd said, still not breaking his smile. With that Nightshade fired at him, but instead of the sound of a bullet firing, which he had grown accustomed to, he heard a very loud and noticeable *click*. He looked down at his empty guns, surprised, and then back up quickly, placing the guns back in their holsters inside his jacket.

Todd snapped his fingers and the thugs came out from behind the cars and benches and other hiding places that they had dodged to for cover, and rushed Nightshade.

The hero stretched his leg back, kicking one and sending him falling backwards. He swung the same leg out in front of himself, kicking another. Then he ducked to avoid a punch and while he was ducking, he rammed both his fists forward into the chest of his attacker. Another person swung his foot out in a sweeping arc, but Nightshade performed a backflip and landed behind yet another thug. He bashed him in the back of the head, knocking him down, and then went in to jump-kick the person that had swiped his foot out.

Before Nightshade reached him though, another thug elbowed him in mid-air, causing him to fall to the side. Nightshade started to stand, but Brad was next to him with a baseball bat. He slammed it down on Nightshade's back, forcing him to buckle under the pain and fall back to the ground again. He raised the bat once more but Nightshade shot his hand out and grabbed Brad by the ankle. He yanked back, slamming Brad

against the ground. Nightshade shot to his feet, grabbed the fallen bat, and swung it around as he turned.

It connected to someone's head, a loud crack being heard as the body fell down. Nightshade swung the bat at the two nearest people, hitting one in the leg, causing him to fall, and hitting the other in the chest. He brought it back and swung again at the same person when they didn't go down. The person tried to dodge, but still managed to get hit in the side.

Nightshade turned once again, but was met with a fist to the face and stumbled backwards. He raised the bat, but got punched in the head from behind, and then in the gut from the front. He dropped the bat as he fell to his knees.

The man behind him wrapped his arms around him in a huge bear hug as he lifted Nightshade back to his feet. The man in front took out a switchblade, laughing insanely. Nightshade leaned back, swinging his feet out and up, kicking the blade from the man's hand. Then he swung his feet back, kicking the person behind him, in the chest. The person stumbled back, letting go of Nightshade. Nightshade landed back on his feet and did a roundhouse kick to the guy in front of him.

Out of breath and breathing heavily, Nightshade turned to face Todd and resumed a strong fighting stance, even though in his head, he knew he would not last much longer unless a miracle happened.

Todd just merely smiled back, unimpressed with the stance. "Goodbye 'Boy of the Streets'." He pulled a hand out from behind his back, revealing a loaded gun. He pointed it at Nightshade and fired.

The bullet sailed through the air and embedded itself into Nightshade's chest. Nightshade screamed in pain as he stumbled back and fell to the ground. Todd walked over and knelt, pointing the gun right up against Nightshade's head.

"Well you did put up a good fight, but alas, all things must have an end. But first, I want to know who's under all this." Todd reached down and removed the handkerchief cloth covering Nightshade's mouth. Blood ran freely from his nose, streaking down the side of his bruised face. Before Todd could remove anything else though, he saw Nightshade manage a weak smile.

"Why are *you* smiling?" Todd asked, laughing. "You welcome your death that much?"

On the ground right in front of Nightshade, his thumb pressed down on something that he had just placed there. It wasn't visible to anyone, as it was only a slight movement, but Nightshade smiled, knowing that his

miracle was about to happen in the form of Mark's explosive strip of tape or whatever it was.

Nightshade quickly rolled away, putting the cloth back up around his mouth. Todd's smile faded as he fired, but the bullet hit the ground an inch away from Nightshade. Todd aimed his gun once again. He got Nightshade directly in his sights, but before he could fire the ground in front of him exploded, showering him with scorching gravel. Todd screamed in pain and covered his face with both hands.

Roaring with rage, Todd kept his face covered with one hand while he tried to aim his gun on Nightshade with his other. However Nightshade had already reached his motorcycle, got his helmet on, and was driving away as he slumped over the handlebars.

Todd screamed in both anger and pain as he threw his gun to the ground in frustration.

Nightshade zoomed down a street, driving with one hand while the other hand covered the wound on his chest. He swerved his bike in a zig-zag matter to avoid and rush past the slower-moving cars that were on the same road.

His attention was diverted to a connecting street as he passed by it and noticed flashes of red and blue lights and heard a siren come on. He looked back and saw several police cars barreling out onto his current road, in pursuit.

"Shit." He made an incredibly sharp last-second turn and swerved his motorcycle into a back alley, hoping to loose the pursuing cops. He glanced behind him and saw them driving past, continuing on down the main road and not even slowing down.

Nightshade continued down the back alley for a minute, relieved that he lost them. However just as he was about to exit onto another street, one of the cops cars appeared and screeched to a stop, blocking the end of the alley. Nightshade slammed on the breaks, trying to turn back around, but there hadn't been enough time and side of the bike slammed up against the front of the cop car.

He took off again, deciding to go out through the very limited space between the side of the cop car and the end of the alley, just as the cop leaned out the window and fired a shot off at him. Nightshade used the motorcycle to swerve away from the bullet and continued down the road, gunning the engine to its maximum speed.

The cop car reversed and started the chase again. Nightshade noticed that three other cruisers were heading towards him from the other end of the road. He decided to keep driving straight, playing chicken with the lead car. At the last second, he realized the cop wasn't going to give in and swerved away an inch before being hit. The cop driving the car had a victorious smile show on his face, but only for a second. After that second, he saw the car that had been chasing Nightshade from behind and the two cop cars barreled into each other, head-on.

The other two cop cars veered away in opposite directions to avoid the crash and then drove around in a semi-circle to continue the pursuit. Nightshade was far enough ahead however, that he was able to turn and take off down another back alley, this one a bumpy dirt road. He quickly slowed the bike down to a stop as he drove off the dirt road and into someone's grassy back yard and hid himself and his motorcycle in a thick patch of plants and bushes.

He moved his hand and looked down at his blood-soaked shirt, feeling a wave of dizziness hit. He knew he needed to end this chase and get some help as soon as possible, or he was going to die.

The occupant of the house, a short old lady, glanced out her back window to inspect her backyard after hearing an engine near it a minute earlier, and Nightshade cowered deeper into the dark shadows, not wanting to be seen. He exhaled in relief when the old lady disappeared back inside her house, moving the curtain back over the window.

Nightshade took a small quick glance back at the main street he had come in from, and saw that the two cop cars had stopped at the front of the dirt alley and that the four police that occupied the cars had gotten out and were carefully walking down the ally, shining flashlights around as they inspected every inch of the dirt road.

The back door of the house swung open and the old lady from before stepped out. "Officers!" she called out to them. "He's here, in my backyard!" The old lady pointed to the spot where Nightshade was currently hiding.

Nightshade stood up and jumped back on his motorcycle. He started it up and zoomed down onto the dirt road and took off down the alley, heading away from the cops.

Over the noise of his engine, he could hear a few gun shots go off but nothing hit him as he skidded out onto the street and zoomed off around the corner.

Once he was sure that he had lost the cops, Nightshade made his way across town. He passed a few more gangs wrecking things and causing havoc, but could barely keep conscious enough to ride his bike. He knew there was no way in hell he could take all them on, plus he wasn't sure how close or far away the cops were. He hated himself for it, but he had to just ignore it all for the time being.

He arrived at his planned destination and hid his bike in a small shed behind Mark Abbott's house, and then stumbled up the steps to the front door, weak from the fights, gunshot wound, and chase. He reached up weakly and pressed the doorbell.

A few minutes passed, and Nightshade felt like he was about to pass out before anyone came to the door. Just when his eyes began to flutter close, the door opened and Mark stood there in a house robe, rubbing sleep from his eyes and then slipping his glasses on.

"Who's ringing the..." he trailed off as his eyes focused and he saw who it was. "Scott? What happened?"

Nightshade moaned as he finally gave up and collapsed. Mark caught him before he hit the ground and helped him walk inside, closing the door with his foot.

Nightshade tried to speak, but was extremely weak and was fading in and out of consciousness, fighting just to explain everything. "Shot...I've been shot. Cops...after me... I knew you're father was...doctor...."

"He's on call at the hospital right now!" Mark whispered loudly, not sure how to handle the situation. "What do I do?" he asked that more to himself than to Nightshade. He looked around frantically for a few seconds, hoping for an idea to form, and that was when one hit him. His sister! She was taking a course during the days to train as a paramedic! "I'll go wake Miranda up!"

Mark helped Nightshade onto the nearby couch in the living room. "I'll be right back." He turned and took off up the stairs, taking them two at a time.

Nightshade leaned his neck back and rested his head on the back of the couch, softly moaning as he fought his hardest to stay

conscious. He needed to make sure that mark's sister didn't try to remove any of his face gear. His indentity still had to stay a secret.

A minute later Mark was tugging his older sister down the stairs. Miranda looked extremely groggy and tired, and she was hoping that she was only have a dream, as she wanted to still be sleeping.

"Marcus, what's going on?" she asked as her mouth opened wide in a yawn. When she finished yawning and opened her eyes, she spotted Nightshade on the couch. She had heard stories about him, but up until just then thought that's all they were. "Oh my..."

"Miranda, this is Nightshade," Mark explained. "He was..." he paused as he thought of a story. He wasn't dumb enough to tell her the truth of what happened. He knew that she'd side with the cops. Why wouldn't she after all? As far as she knew, the cops were the good guys. Mark was suddenly very glad that his lying abilities actually came in handy for a change. "...assisting...the police and he was shot in a chase."

"Why doesn't he just go to the hospital?" Miranda probed, suspecting that something was up.

"They'll want his Identification, and he wants that to remain a secret," Mark explained, this time not having to lie. "If people ever found out who he was..."

"No, I understand," Miranda cut her brother off, having already decided to help. "Ok, go to the back room and get the First Aid kit. I'll go boil some water."

An hour later and one bullet less, Nightshade had his jacket off and his shirt lifted up, and his bare chest was tightly covered in a white bandage. He lowered his shirt down over it, and then slowly slipped his arms back into his jacket sleeves.

"There, all fixed up," Miranda smiled. She had been awfully tempted to take a peek under all that material covering Nightshade's face, but she respected him enough not to do that.

"Now just get some rest," she said. She didn't have to tell Nightshade twice. His head had already slumped to the side, having passed out even before he had his jacket fully on again.

~CHAPTER 7~

When the sun rose the following morning and the light broke through the living room blinds, Nightshade's head slowly straightened up. He yawned as he gently sat up, massive pain still coursing through his body. He took his time standing up and lowered the handkerchief cloth from around his mouth. Using the wall as support, he made his way to the downstairs bathroom and closed the door behind him.

Taking off his cap and cracked sunglasses, Scott turned on the sink's cold water. He let it pool into his cupped hands and then splashed some over his face, causing some of the facepaint to run. He grabbed a nearby cloth, stuck under the running tap to wet it, and started wiping the rest of the facepaint off. As he removed more of the blackness, he quickly discovered that he had a fairly large black eye and there was dried blood around his nose and a slight cut on his lip.

When he was done cleaning up, he removed his jacket and lifted his shirt to check the bandage. There was a small dried bloodstain where it covered the wound, but apart from that the bandage was still pretty good and secured tightly.

He threw his broken sunglasses in the garbage and bundled his cap and handkerchief cloth into his jacket and walked out of the bathroom. Mark was just walking down the stairs as Scott walked around the corner.

"Hey Mark," Scott called out. "Do you have a bag or something I can put this stuff in?"

"Sure, hang on." Mark turned and went back up the stairs. Scott sighed as he relaxed on the couch again. A few minutes later Mark returned with a bookbag. "Here"

Scott took the bag and put the bundle into it, zipping it up and slipping it over his shoulder as he stood once more. "Thanks for everything," Scott said honestly. "I'll see you in school on Monday."

"Always glad to help," Mark replied. "Just as long as you're ok, that's what matters."

"I am now, thanks to your sister." Scott and Mark said their goodbyes to each other and Scott left the house, going to the shed to

retrieve his motorcycle. He removed the 'N' symbols from it and the helmet, and started the bike up as he slipped on his helmet.

He roared out of the shed and off down the street.

When Scott arrived at his own house and walked into the kitchen sporting the black eye and cut lip, his father looked up from the paper and his mother, who had been making coffee at the counter, looked over.

"Scott, I'm very disappointed," Mr. Short said sternly. "You directly disobeyed me."

Scott once again tried to cover it up by lying. "I don't know what..."

"Don't lie to me, son!" Scott's father shouted as he interrupted. He was sick and tired of his son's recent trend of lying to him, and he wasn't going to allow it any longer. "I know you went out last night. I checked. And not only that, but you've had your mother and I up all night, worried sick about you. You're just getting back now! Where the hell have you been all night?"

"I went out for a ride and decided to end up sleeping at a friend's house," Scott explained half-truthfully. No matter how much he wanted to tell his parents the full truth, he knew they wouldn't understand and he'd get in even bigger trouble than he was already in. "I don't have school today, so I don't know what the problem is." He snapped out after a slight pause.

"The problem is taking the bike out at night, after I told you not to!" Mr. Short continued to argue in a raised voice. "And not informing us of the fact that you were sleeping over at a friend's house! What the hell are we supposed to think when you just disappear and come back looking like this?"

"The bike tipped over when I was on it," Scott lied once more. "I won't do it again."

"Damn right. Because I'm taking the bike back to work and re-selling it."

"No, you can't!" Scott shouted. That motorcycle helped him out so much! He was able to travel throughout the entire town in one night, which was something he couldn't do when he had to walk, and he was able to intervene in four times the amount of crimes that he could if he had to go everywhere on foot. Not to mention that the only

reason he escaped the dirty cops the night before, and more importantly, the only reason he even lived, was because of that bike.

"It's not only that," Scott's mother chimed in, feeling that she needed to say her piece as well. "Your school called yesterday and left a message on the phone. Recently your marks have been dropping. A lot. As in you're failing."

"I'll work harder! Just don't take the bike away!" Scott pleaded. They had no idea how much that bike really meant to him.

"I'm sorry son," his father sighed, not lifting his stance. "Maybe you can have another one next year when you're older and more mature, and after you've gotten your grades back up."

"Fine, whatever," Scott threw his hands in the air, giving in. He had nothing left to say to them that would convince them. Even if he did tell them the truth, he knew it would just make matters even worse. He turned and stormed out of the kitchen.

On his way to his bedroom, he passed the phone that sat on a small stand in the hallway and saw a blinking red light on the answering machine. He pressed it. "I'm calling for Scott," Ashleigh's indignant voice filled the hallway. "I waited around for you all night. When you never showed up, I realized that I was being an idiot and fooling myself into thinking you actually liked me and were any different than Rob. Don't bother calling. I won't answer." And then the message ended.

"Fuck!" Scott shouted loud enough for his neighbors to hear if they had been awake. How on God's green Earth could he possibly have forgotten about his and Ashleigh's date? Of course he knew why. He had been so excited over letting someone in on his secret and getting some new toys for Nightshade, that he had forgotten about everything else.

Turning to face the stairs, he stormed up to his room, slamming the door behind him. He threw the bookbag on the floor and winced in pain when the sudden movement hurt his injury. He lifted up his shirt and slowly removed the bandage to check the wound.

His eyes glanced at the bookbag, and then to his closed door. He glanced back and forth between the two a few times over. *I can't be both*, Scott said to himself in his head. *One of me is going to have to be no more. There's not enough space for both Scott and Nightshade.*

He heard a noise from his opened window and glanced out, seeing some guy grab a woman's purse and run off down the street

as she screamed for help. Looked like the some remnants from the gangs from the night before were still out and about.

"I keep this town safe," Scott said quietly. "But the people I protect rat me out to the enemies. The cops that I help, turn on me and spend more time after me than they do on most of the criminals in this God forsaken town." Scott turned away from the window and glanced at a smiling family picture on his night stand. "I've fucked up my family, and I've hurt Ashleigh." Scott looked back down at the bookbag with the Nightshade attire in it, his mind made up. *There is no room in this town for an unwanted hero.*

Scott bent down, grabbed the bookbag, and threw it under his bed. He picked up the cordless phone that he had lying on his dresser and dialed a number. After three rings, Ashleigh answered.

"Hey Ashleigh, it's me," Scott said into the phone.

He could hear Ashleigh frustratingly sigh over the phone. "I knew I should have checked the Caller I.D.," she said. "Look Scott, I'm really busy and can't really..."

Cutting her off, Scott quickly went into an apology. "I'm so very very sorry. Words can't express how sorry I am," he said truthfully. "But my parents..." Scott hated having to lie to Ashleigh, but this would be the last time. Nightshade was no longer part of his life and he just had to cover for him one last time. "...They wouldn't let me go and when I tried to go anyway, they took my bike away. I tried to call, but they took the phone out of my room. I really am sorry."

There were several minutes of silence on the phone. Just when Scott began to wonder if Ashleigh was even still there, her voice came back to him. "Well I do believe in second chances, I guess..." she finally said softly and slowly, as if she already thought that she making a mistake by giving in.

"Great! I swear, you won't regret it!" Scott grew a giant smile.

"I better not."

"How about I make it up to you tonight?" Scott asked. He knew that Ashleigh's favorite course in school was Musical Theater and that she was absolutely in love with stage plays. Luckily there was one currently playing in town. "There's Broadway Babylon playing at the Performing Arts Theater tonight. I can't pick you up on a motorcycle or anything, but we can still go if you want."

"Sure," Ashleigh replied, slightly giving up her anger. "Walks can be even more romantic than motorcycles anyway." Scott's smile

stuck around for awhile as he was thankful that he was able to salvage at least part of his life.

That evening before his salvaged date, Scott stood in front of his mirror, looking at himself in it as he straightened up a fancy shirt, preparing for his date with Ashleigh. Normally he hated dressing up in fancy clothes, but it was an extremely special occasion and he wanted to make a great impression.

There was a knock on his bedroom door and he looked back at it for a minute, thinking that it was Ashleigh. Even though *he* was supposed to pick *her* up, she was usually filled with surprises.

"Come in," Scott called out, trying to hide his uncontrollable excitement. The door opened and Mark walked in. Scott looked at him, surprised and extremely disappointed that it wasn't Ashleigh. "What are *you* doing here?" Scott asked. It sounded a lot harsher than he actually meant, but he wasn't able to hide his disappointment.

"I have an idea for a new invention, and I wanted to run it by you first," Mark exclaimed excitedly, completely oblivious to Scott's tone.

Scott didn't quite know how to break it to him, so he decided to just come out and say it. No beating around the bush. "I'm not going to be Nightshade anymore. That part of me died last night when I was shot."

"But..." Mark tried to argue, but Scott was quick to cut him off. Nothing was going to change his mind back now.

"I'm sorry. I can't protect a town that doesn't want the protection. It's affected my life way to much. I can't be both Nightshade and Scott and seeing as how no one wants Nightshade around, it wasn't that hard of a decision. I've already salvaged my relationship with Ashleigh, and now I just have to get my school marks back up and get myself in my parents' good graces again and everything will be back to the way it was before I had this stupid idea. No, things will be even better.

"Nightshade was just an immature boy's wild imagination taken too far. Nothing more. I could have died Mark! That never really hit me before last night. And what happens then? I die and everyone I love; my family, my friends, Ashleigh, they'd all be hurt. I have to think about them too."

“What about the public?” Mark argued back. “You have to protect them or they’ll get hurt too! Only the difference is that they’ll get hurt physically!”

“That’s what the police are for,” Scott replied coldly.

“But you even said it yourself, most of them are corrupted! The few that aren’t need your help!”

“Why should I defend a public that doesn’t even want me to? I can’t help people if they don’t want to be helped.” Scott repeated, hoping that this time it would sink into Mark’s brain.

“It’s your job!” Mark continued his argument. “You have to protect them, because no one else will. If you don’t, people *will* die.”

Scott got a sad, but firm look on his face. “I’m sorry, but I’ve already made up my mind. I chose Scott over Nightshade. Nightshade is gone...” he paused, and then added in a whisper, “Forever.”

“Then I guess I’ll have to revive him!” Mark yelled. “For the good of everyone.”

“Mark,” Scott sighed, getting frustrated and fed-up. “It’s over. There’s nothing you can do or say that will change my mind. Now can you please leave? I have a date with Ashleigh.”

Mark turned and stormed out of the room without saying another word. He wasn’t quite sure if it was anger or disappointment he felt towards Scott, but either way he had to find a way to change his mind.

Jonas Becker sat alone at a table in The Snake Pit, thick cigarette smoke clinging to the musty air. ‘Bodies’ by Drowning Pool boomed over the speakers as Todd, part of his face now bandaged, found the table and sat across from Jonas.

“That fucking kid!” Todd shouted before he was even finished being seated. “Look what he did to my face! He burned Johner up real bad too.”

“Please, keep your voice down,” Jonas replied in a calmed voice. “I’m enjoying this music.” Jonas kept quiet for a minute as he tapped his left foot to the beat of the music.

Todd looked at him impatiently for a minute, before speaking again. “How the fuck can you be so calm?!” he shouted, ignoring Jonas’s request for silence. “That brat is out there, cutting us off at

every turn, and nothing we do stops him! Fuck, not even your pigs could stop him.”

Jonas’s voice kept the same calm tone, however his eyes pierced deeply into Todd. “I can stay calm, because I did not get to where I am today by loosing my cool every time something doesn’t go my way.” He paused as he listened to a new cord in the song and then continued when the chorus arrived again. “As for the brat, you need to strike when he’s at his weakest.”

“How can I do that?” Todd asked. Before he could go on, a tall and gangly man in a gigantic coat walked over and opened it up, revealing dozens of different kinds of drugs.

“Can I interest you in some...”

“Get the fuck out of here,” Todd pushed him away before he could finish his sentence. The man closed his jacket and walked off. *Fuckin’ amateur*, Todd thought. If people wanted that guy’s drugs, then they’d go to him themselves. By him going to them, it just annoyed the piss out of everyone. Todd turned back to Jonas and continued from where he left off, “We don’t know any of his weaknesses.”

“He’s just a boy,” Jonas explained. “Every boy has a weakness. You just need to find it out and exploit it the best way you can.”

~CHAPTER 8~

Scott walked up to Ashleigh's door and rang the doorbell just as night was beginning to arrive and the sun was starting to set. Ashleigh opened the door and smiled. "Hey," she greeted joyfully.

Scott was taken aback by her beauty. With her hair let down over her shoulders and the black sparkling dress she had on, she looked like an angel of the night. Of course it helped that Scott's favorite color was black, but Ashleigh didn't need the help of his favorite color to look like an angel to him. "Hey," Scott smiled back.

Ashleigh closed the door behind her as she put her jacket on over her dress. "How did you get here?"

"I walked," Scott admitted, slightly embarrassed. Last time he had hung out with Ashleigh, he brought her for a ride around town on his motorcycle. Now they were confined to walking and taking the bus. Even though he knew that didn't matter to her, he still felt bad that he couldn't offer her more.

"Good. Just what I was hoping for." Ashleigh put her arm through Scott's and leaned against him as they walked away down the street towards the bus stop a couple blocks away.

A half hour later, Scott and Ashleigh were sitting next to each other as the town bus moved through various streets, following its pre-set route. Despite the dark blue sky outside, the interior of the bus was brightly lit by internal lights throughout. The bus rattled irritatingly as it turned a corner and drove down another street.

Ashleigh had her head resting on Scott's shoulders, on the verge of falling asleep as he lightly ran his fingers through her hair. It wasn't unusual for her to have bouts of insomnia, so sleepless nights were probably the cause of her being tired, but Scott couldn't tell for sure. Was she truly happy, or were there bad thoughts floating through her mind? He certainly hoped it was the former and that she was just tired.

Scott slowly scanned the interior of the bus, watching everybody's movement. He heard the turning of pages, which caused him to turn his head and catch the headline of that day's newspaper.

The headline read '*Massive Crime Increase Over Night!*'

Scott sighed. He felt horribly bad and almost caught himself thinking - seriously thinking - about donning the costume again. But then he just thought about the constant pain in his chest and looked at Ashleigh's head resting on his shoulder and realized that it wasn't his problem. It never was his problem and he had been foolish to try to make it so.

Scott yawned and Ashleigh opened her eyes, realizing that Scott had stopped running his hands through her hair. She glanced up at him. "Is everything ok, Scott?"

Scott looked into her eyes and smiled. "Everything's perfect now. But I am starting to feel a bit tired myself."

Ashleigh smiled back. "Well you better not fall asleep during the play. You paid good money for these tickets and you know how bad off for money you are right now."

Scott continued to smile. He used to have a job at one of the local video stores, but ended up being fired due to his new alternate life as Nightshade and having to close the store early on more than one occasion. Of course he lied and told everyone he quit, but he hadn't bothered trying to get a job since. He had used the very last of his money to get the tickets for the play earlier that day.

"Don't worry. I won't fall asleep." After a short minute of silence, Scott added on as a joke, "At least not at the beginning." Ashleigh smiled an 'Ohh, why you...' type of smile and leaned in, lightly kissing him on the cheek.

The tall and lanky bald Usher opened the doors to the gigantic performing arts theater for Scott and Ashleigh. As they entered through, a long line of eager people was walking in behind them. The room was huge, with a gigantic stage at the front and literally hundreds of seats all lined up, going towards the back of the room. The floor tilted in a way so that the viewers could always see over the head of the person in front of them.

While Scott was amazed at the size of the theater, as he had never been in it before, Ashleigh was too excited and giddy to feel anything except anxiousness. She looked down at the ticket stumps and then back up.

"We're over there," she pointed to a couple of seats in the

distance. They made their way to the seats, muttering and saying 'excuse me' more times than most people scratch their nose in a lifetime.

At last they reached their seats and sat down. "Maybe we should have gotten a drink before we sat down," Scott stated as he loosened his collar and wiped some sweat from his head. "It's hot in here. Shouldn't these places have fans?"

Ashleigh replied, "I don't find it so hot. Are you nervous?"

"Yeah, a little," Scott admitted sheepishly. He felt like playing it cool and denying his nervousness, but after his whole Nightshade fiasco, it was a relief to be able to tell the truth. "Is it ok if I go get a drink?"

"No, Scott, if the show starts while you're gone, you're not allowed back in." Scott nodded his head, understanding, and then they turned their attention to the empty stage just as the lights dimmed and went out.

There was a thundering clapping coming from everyone in the room as the first actors appeared on stage and the first line of the play was spoken.

Mark Abbott walked down a dark shadow-covered street by himself. He had a bag in his hands from one of the local computer stores and was on his way home to hook up whatever computer device he had purchased.

All evening he had been running that day's events through his head, and had fumed over them far longer than he probably should have. But he just couldn't believe that Scott was just going to give up on St. Wainluk like that, especially now that the town needed him the most, with the recent increase in crime.

How can I convince Scott to come around? The town needs him more than...

His thoughts were interrupted by a chuckling noise that seemed to come out of thin air. He whipped around and Todd Godwin, half of his face still tightly wrapped in a bandage, walked out from an alley, pointing a gun at the young nerd. "Well, lookey-here. A baby out past his bedtime. Maybe if you scream loud enough, Nightshade will hear."

Thinking that this thug knew that he knew about Nightshade, Mark tried to deny it. "Who? I don't know any Night-whatever."

Todd shrugged. "It doesn't matter. I need to draw him out and I'm sure he'll show up if I kill enough people." He pulled back on the hammer, about to fire. It was time to raise the count that night to four bodies...

Mark suddenly realized that Todd knew nothing and that he had only picked Mark at random. Mark was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. He decided he could use that in his favor. Not only to save himself, but to save the entire town by making Nightshade return.

"Wait!" Mark shouted, deciding to go for it. "I do know Nightshade!"

"Sure, kid," Todd chuckled, not believing a word. Yet he hesitated on firing.

"No, I really do!" Mark confessed. "I was only lying before. His real name is Scott Short. He lives on 609 80th Ave. He has a girlfriend, Ashleigh MacDonald. I know him from school. He let me in on his secret so I could help him get weapons and stuff."

Todd replayed the last few sentence in his mind. He didn't quite believe the kid, after all he was probably just trying to save his own skin by making shit up. However, he did know that Nightshade was only a teenager, and while he could have very easily found that out someplace else, Todd couldn't really afford to be wrong. "This girlfriend of his. Where does she live?" he finally asked.

"698 on the Street next to Scott's," Mark gave Todd all the info he would need, without a single hesitation. After all, he did warn Scott that he would find a way to revive Nightshade.

"Why are you telling me this? You're betraying your friend." Todd was still quite cautious about this new information, and even though he already had his mind made up about checking it out, he still wasn't quite convinced that it was actually true.

"I'm simply doing what it takes," Mark replied through clenched teeth.

Todd shrugged, not any more convinced then he had been seconds before. "I guess I'll take that. Now get out of my face before I change my mind. You just bought yourself more time to live, nerd-boy."

Mark turned and ran down the street, away from Todd; away from his betrayal.

When the show ended and the curtains closed, everyone exited the theatre into the dimly lit town. Scott and Ashleigh walked out, hand in hand.

“I had a really good time tonight, Scott,” Ashleigh said with an innocent tone. “Did you?” She noticed during the night that Scott seemed distant, as if something was wrong or on his mind.

Scott looked at her and then put a smile on. “I was with you. How could I not have a good time?” Truth was, he could not stop thinking about Nightshade and he silently cursed himself for it. Ashleigh was the centre of his life now, not Nightshade.

Ashleigh smiled back and continued, “The play was great. What a fantastic story! The second act was brilliant!” Scott nodded his head at Ashleigh’s enthusiasm. He wasn’t a huge fan of plays - he was more of a movie person - but he also had nothing against them either. However he definitely didn’t have the enthusiasm level that Ashleigh did.

They stopped at a crosswalk, a few silent seconds passing. After some traffic passed by, they began to walk across the street, other vehicles having to stop for them. They reached the other side of the street, where no people were currently walking. It was as if they were completely by themselves.

Ashleigh continued to smile, replaying the evening over in her mind as they walked down the street. The final bus had already left for the night, so they had a long walk ahead of them.

It had been a great time, as far as Ashleigh was concerned, and right now they were having a great moment, just loving one another and being proud of it. Ashleigh, nor Scott, could ask for more at that moment.

After having walked Ashleigh home and having their first actual kiss, Scott returned to his own house to find Mark sitting on his doorstep, looking sadly at the ground.

Scott sighed, getting extremely fed-up with Mark’s constant insistence. “I already told you Mark, I made up my mind. Now please, stop pressuring me. I said no and I mean it. Nightshade is gone.”

Mark looked up, his eyes red and near tears. “He has to make another appearance,” Mark stated quietly but confidently.

“Why?” Scott asked, humoring Mark’s idea. It wasn’t going to change his mind though, as he already had it made up and was in the process of fixing his life up.

“I’m so sorry Scott,” Mark honestly said, fear and sadness both evident in his voice.

Scott realized that Mark did something extremely bad, and even though he knew he was going to regret it, he had to know what Mark was talking about. “What did you do?” Scott asked, narrowing his eyes.

Mark explained, “I was on my way home and this guy stopped me. He had green hair and this golden medallion around his neck, and part of his face was wrapped in bandages. He was going to kill me, Scott! I...” Mark paused as tears flooded his eyes. “I told him. I told him about you. About Ashleigh. About everything. And...He went after Ashleigh I think.”

Scott gasped as his heart sank down to his feet and he felt hollow inside. Mark had to be joking! He just had to be! There was no way he would have done something like that!

Mark wiped the tears from his eyes, confidence suddenly building within him. “But now you *have* to become Nightshade one last time if you want to save Ashleigh. And the thug no doubt will tell others about you. Unless you want your friends, family, and Ashleigh to continue to be in danger for the rest of their lives, you’ll have to leave all of them and if you do that, then you may as well become Nightshade and do some good.”

Scott, more furious than he had ever felt in his life, suddenly punched Mark in the face, knocking him to the ground. Everything he had done to re-build his life had been for nothing! “I knew I should have never trusted you,” he said coldly.

Knowing that he didn’t have the time to see if Mark was even conscious, Scott turned and ran off down the street. He had to get Ashleigh someplace safe before *they* got to her.

As Ashleigh walked into her darkened house, she couldn’t help but smile as she thought about Scott and the evening they had. It had been perfect and if she was to expect more nights like that one, then it could very well be the best relationship she had ever been in.

She knew better than to shout out to her parents that she was home. They would have gone to bed earlier and she didn't wish to wake them.

Instead she quietly stepped over the boards that she knew creaked, and headed towards the stairs. Right before she was about to put her foot down on the first ascending step, one of those boards she had been so careful to avoid a few seconds earlier, creaked loudly.

Ashleigh whipped around just in time to see two hands quickly grab her and shove a cloth hard against her nose and mouth. Something didn't quite smell right about that cloth, as if there was some kind of chemical on it.

She didn't have time to think about however, as she instantly fell unconscious into the mysterious arms.

Scott, breathing heavy as he attempted to catch his breath, slowed to a stop outside of Ashleigh's house and rang the doorbell. After a few minutes without an answer, he impatiently rang it again. He really wanted to believe that Mark was lying, but deep down Scott knew he had been telling the truth.

He went to ring the doorbell again, but before he got the chance to, the door opened and Ashleigh's father stepped out, looking both tired and extremely pissed off. "What the hell are you doing, ringing our doorbell in the middle of the fuckin' night?"

Scott had no time to feel intimidated. "Is Ashleigh there?" he quickly asked.

"She hasn't come home from her date yet." Scott felt his heart sink even deeper than before. He had been holding onto the thought that Mark was lying, but now he knew for a fact that he wasn't.

Her father however, didn't seem to notice Scott's depressed and fearful expression and continued, "I'm sure this could have waited until morning, young man. Decent people sleep at this time of night."

But Scott didn't hear him. He had already taken off back down the street, finding a new burst of energy to keep him going.

~CHAPTER 9~

Scott rushed into his bedroom, not caring about how much noise he made or if he woke his parents up. He only had one thing on his mind at that moment and nothing else mattered.

He reached under his bed and pulled out the bookbag with his Nightshade attire in it. He quickly changed out of his current clothes and suited up in the clothes that made up his Nightshade outfit. After all that, he grabbed a new pair of sunglasses from his closet and loaded his guns, double-checking to make sure that he had extra ammo on him. He did a few practice punches and kicks to see how well he could move and maneuver with his chest wound.

Nightshade ran downstairs to the answering machine and played the message back. "Hi," Mr. Short's voice sounded. "You've reached the home of Scott, Wendy, and Don Short at..." As the 'Don Short' name played, Nightshade pressed 'record' on his watch. The rest of the message continued to play as he went back upstairs and into the master bedroom. He stood above the bed, his parents sound asleep below him.

He was about to lean down and give them both a goodbye kiss, knowing that Mark was right and that he could never return if he wanted them to stay safe, however in the end he decided against the kiss as he was scared it would wake them up.

He turned away sadly, and went back downstairs. He reached into his father's jacket on a hanger in the porch closet, and pulled out a set of keys. He went outside and found that Mark was still sitting on the step, holding a hand up to his injured head.

"I'll deal out punishment to you later," Nightshade growled. And with that, Nightshade turned and ran down the street as fast as he could, not wanting to waste any time.

Nightshade eventually reached his father's dealership and took out the keys he stole from the jacket pocket. He unlocked the front door and walked inside the darkened building. He went over to the main computer and waited several minutes for it to boot up. Once it was ready, the computer asked for voice recognition and he played back 'Don Short' from

his watch and the computer beeped, allowing him into the vehicle database.

Nightshade did a quick search through the database for his motorcycle and located it. He went to the section of the building that the computer told him to and he spotted his motorcycle and went over to it, placing the white 'N' stickers on it.

He quickly walked over to a box on the wall that held the keys for the vehicles. It was an electric lock that required a password that he didn't know. Not wishing to take the time to try to figure the password out, Nightshade simply pushed a few buttons on his watch and used the laser feature, pointing the little thin red line into the electronic lock. After a few seconds, it short circuited as a small amount of white smoke exited from it. He popped the box open, taking out the proper key to the motorcycle.

He returned to the bike and hopped on, putting his Nightshade helmet on. He started up the bike and drove it off the ramp it was resting on, through the glass of a window, and onto the street, driving away as the broken glass showered the street behind him and an alarm rang out from the dealership.

Nightshade drove around St. Wainluk aimlessly, realizing he didn't have the slightest idea of where they would have taken Ashleigh. Knowing that they wanted him to find them, Nightshade decided to go to all the places he had ran into Todd before, but came up with nothing. He drove by the theater that he and Ashleigh had gone on their date to, but that area was empty as well.

He followed the path he and Ashleigh had taken home earlier that night, just in case she had escaped their clutches, but he ended up reaching his own house once more, without having spotted anything out of the ordinary along the way. When he reached his house however, he found Mark finally gone from his doorstep, but there was a note stuck to the front door.

Jumping off his bike, Nightshade grabbed the note, nearly ripping it in half as he detached it from the door.

I have Ashleigh, the note read. She is being kept at the abandoned warehouse just outside of St. Wainluk. If Scott does not appear within two hours, I will kill her. The time that the note was written, was scribbled at the bottom of the note.

Scott is dead. Nightshade growled in a low voice as he crumpled the note. He turned around, hopped back on the motorcycle, and took off once again.

Inside of the abandoned warehouse, various gangsters mingled around, carrying various types of guns as they waited patiently for the appearance of Nightshade. All of a sudden the wooden door shattered as a motorcycle slammed through it and Hell was unleashed.

Right away Nightshade started firing, bringing a couple of men down. The other men raised their guns and fired just as Nightshade tipped the bike to its side, allowing it to slide/skid down the length of the floor, using it as a shield. The bullets hit against the bike, some bouncing away while others embedded deep into the cheap metal.

Nightshade let go of the bike and ran away as it exploded. He ducked behind a pillar that went straight up from the floor and into the roof, just as a piece of burning metal flew past. He threw his helmet off, growling, and took his cap out of his jacket pocket and put it on.

Nightshade turned around long enough to fire a few shots and then went back behind the pillar just as some bullets embedded into it and others continued on past him. He heard the rushing of feet and looked up, viewing a bunch of men emerging onto a landing that went all the way around the length of the warehouse, located about half way up to the roof. He aimed both his guns up and started firing as the men emerged single-file through the narrow door and onto the landing. He didn't let his fingers up off the triggers until all of the men were dead or injured.

He moved out from behind the pillar and fired both his guns at a few of the thugs that had stayed on the main floor, killing some, and going behind the pillar again just as shots hit the edge of it where he used to be.

A few men walked around the corner of the pillar and Nightshade discovered that his guns were empty by the clicking noise they made when he went to fire them. He dropped them to the concrete floor and dodged the few shots that were fired at him as he slowly got closer to his attackers. He hit one of their guns away with his arm, and then knocked the other person's gun away with a back kick. He followed up with various combinations of punches, blocking, and kicks. Soon enough those two men, and one other that had

shown up to help, were unconscious on the floor. Nightshade went back behind the pillar just as more shots hit where he used to be. He picked up his guns and reloaded them.

He looked and saw some men carrying baseball bats and thick metal chains coming out from a room that was located on his side of the pillar. He opened fire, killing them one-by-one as they exited the room.

Taking out a bit of the explosive strip, Nightshade placed it on the pillar and pressed against it. He ran out from behind the pillar just as it exploded, sending rock and stone outward towards the criminals, causing smoke to obscure Nightshade from view. He fired as he ran sideways, going into the room that he just killed the thugs coming out of.

Once he was safely in the room with the door slammed closed, Nightshade took more ammo from his pockets and reloaded his guns once more. He heard a shuffling sound outside the door and saw a shadow on the other side by looking under the creak between the door and the floor. He shot a hole through the door and heard a thump from the other side. When he looked down, he saw a puddle of blood seeping in under the door from the other side.

Nightshade opened the door, seeing another dead body on the floor. He side-kicked the closest man and sent him flying away. Then he kned another in the groin and followed through with a punch to the head, knocking him out.

Nightshade fired at the last man. Two shots, one from each gun, went straight into his head, splattering blood out. Nightshade panted low on breath. "Piece of cake," he whispered to himself sarcastically as his hand clutched the earlier wound located his chest, pain searing through it.

All of a sudden he could hear clapping and he turned to look at Todd Godwin walking out from another room. He no longer had a bandage over his face and the new scare was plainly visible. Jonas Becker was with him and he was the person that was clapping.

"Imagine," Jonas spoke up. "I go from a boring lowly truck driver, to the most respected crime lord in this town, and now every single one of my most trusted men are dead, all because of a little brat that can't stop playing House. It's almost funny in its own sick way."

"Such a shame," Nightshade replied coldly. "Where's Ashleigh?"

"Follow me." Todd walked across the floor, towards another door. Nightshade followed him cautiously, knowing full-weel that he was walking into a trap, but having no other choise. They walked out

the door to the backyard of the warehouse, leaving Jonas alone inside.

The outside yard was filled with boxes and crates of all sizes, and was cut off from the rest of the world by a high electrical fence. Ashleigh was tied and gagged to a chair in the middle of the maze of crates, which Todd led Nightshade through.

“Don’t worry. I didn’t tell her your secret,” Todd sneered. “Although I was awfully tempted to. Lucky for you, Mr. Becker has some kind of twisted respect for you.” Todd himself couldn’t understand how Mr. Becker could respect this little fucker in any way at all, but it wasn’t his job to think about such things. It was just his job to do what he was told.

Nightshade raised his guns to Todd. “Untie the girl.” Todd laughed, which was followed by a shot that rang out. A bullet hit the ground right in front of Nightshade, missing him by a mere centimeter. He raised his head with surprise and saw Jonas on a ledge above, aiming a sniper gun down at him.

Nightshade turned and ran sideways as he fired up at Jonas, but Jonas ducked back inside the building and Nightshade quickly ran out of bullets. He jumped out of the way when gunfire was returned from inside the building where Jonas’ had gone into, and he ran behind a crate, keeping low to the ground.

He dropped his guns and moved through the maze of crates and boxes, making sure to always keep low and hidden behind them. As he cautiously moved, he reached into his pocket and took out the device that made the explosive tape. He ripped a piece off as he reached the edge of the crate maze and he took off running straight ahead. Todd and Jonas spotted him and both turned to fire, but Nightshade used a crate as a lift, and jumped up from the small crate, grabbing the edge of the ledge where Jonas was standing. He flipped over the ledge, landing in front of the crime lord.

Nightshade punched Jonas with one hand. While Jonas stumbled back, Nightshade took Jonas’ gun from his hand and pressed his thumb against the crime lord’s head. He immediately turned and jumped off the ledge, landing in a crouch on the ground below.

Jonas bellowed with laughter. “Was that touch actually supposed to hurt? I’ll show you how to really deal out pai...” he was cut off as his head suddenly exploded in a gory display, splattering the area with buckets of blood, bone, and brain matter.

Nightshade returned to his full height and pointed the sniper gun at Todd. In the blink of an eye, Todd had moved his gun from pointing at Nightshade, to pointing at Ashleigh's head. "You didn't save the day this time, hero-brat," he spat.

Ashleigh squeezed her eyes shut, knowing that her end was near. Nightshade shot his gun without looking through the scope, expecting to hit Todd, but missed by inches. Todd turned his gun again and fired at Nightshade, but Nightshade dropped the sniper gun and dodged to the side as he ran at Todd and did a jump side-kick, nailing Todd in the head and knocking him to the ground.

Nightshade bent down and picked up Todd's gun, his anger flaring. "You've caused both me and this girl a lot of pain."

Todd raised one of his hands in defense. "Please, don't shoot," he begged. Nightshade ignored him and was about to shoot, but Todd swung his foot out at the last second and tripped Nightshade. The shot went wild, missing Todd by a mile. Once Nightshade landed on his back, Todd jumped on top of him and started to choke him, making sure to knock the gun out of his hand first.

Nightshade began to slip away from consciousness as blackness crept in from the sides of his vision and his face started turning blue, despite the dark shade of black already covering it. With his last burst of strength, Nightshade slammed the back of his foot down onto Todd's back, causing him to lose his balance and get knocked over onto his side.

Gasping for air, Nightshade rolled over on top of Todd as he began to get his vision back. He punched him in the face repeatedly until Todd pushed Nightshade off, sending him flying back and knocking several crates over.

"I'll be sure to make you suffer before I kill you, boy." Todd picked up the sniper gun, aiming it at Ashleigh once more.

Nightshade reached the Todd's fallen gun and fired two consecutive shots, one knocking the sniper gun from Todd's hands just as he fired, causing the shot to miss Ashleigh by a fraction of a hair, the second planting deep into Todd's neck.

Blood gushed out freely and Todd's breath slowed as he tried to plug the hole with his hands. Within seconds however, he was dead.

Nightshade breathed heavy to catch his breath and lightly moaned in pain as he slowly walked, or more like stumbled, towards

Ashleigh. He bent down behind her and untied her hands. He helped her get the rest of the ropes untied.

Once she was free, Ashleigh stood up and turned to face the vigilante. "Who are you?" she asked, wishing to know the name of her rescuer.

"Nightshade. Boy of the Streets," Nightshade replied through clenched teeth, hoping to keep the obvious pain from showing in his voice

"But *who* are you?" Ashleigh pressed, wanting to know his real name and not his alias.

Nightshade simply ignored her, not wishing to tell her who he really was. After all, Scott was dead now anyway. "There are several cars parked out front," he explained. "Their last owners won't be needing them anymore. Take one and drive yourself home. Go straight home, ok?"

"But..." Ashleigh wondered if she should first go to the police, but before she could finish, Nightshade turned and ran off. Ashleigh was left standing alone in the night, looking out after him as he disappeared into the darkness.

~EPILOGUE~

Over the next couple days, Mark packed up as much stuff as he could afford to and stole his parent's car. He had to leave town, and he knew he had to do it as soon as humanly possible. He believed every word of Nightshade when he had warned Mark that he would deal out his punishment later, and so Mark wanted to get away from St. Wainluk and have it be near impossible for Nightshade to track him down. This of course, meant not telling his family.

In the stolen car, Mark drove out of town under the cover of night. He had laid low until he was fully packed and ready to go, leaving his house only when it was absolutely essential. Scott was going to be furious with him, and he couldn't risk stick around to see what he would do to him.

One of his tires blew out unexpectedly, making him skid all over the road until he flew off and into a deep ditch. Mark's head hit off the steering wheel hard as the car came to a sudden halt. He moaned as he lifted his head up, a small bleeding cut now running across it.

Wondering what happened and hoping to flag down a passing car, he stepped out of his crashed car, legs weak and wobbly, and stumbled up to the road. He spotted a small spike strip going across one side of the street and looked around frantically, searching in fear for the person that he knew had planted it. Realization dawned on Mark when he realized that he tried leaving town one day too late.

Nightshade slowly walked out of the darkness from the nearby forest. Mark whipped around to face him when he heard a twig snap. When he saw the vigilante he immediately began to back up. "You...You're par...parents..." he stumbled over the words, knowing that Nightshade may try to do something drastic to him. He had heard about the Warehouse massacre from a couple days earlier, and that was what had helped him reach the decision to leave.

He now knew what Nightshade was truly capable of.

Mark almost tripped over a rock as he took another step back, but caught himself before he fell. "They think..." he continued, praying and hoping against hope that he would be left alone. "They think that you ran away. They blame themselves for being...too hard on you. They know you stole the bike from the dealership, but...but they think that you ran away on it. Everything's covered."

Mark stopped backing up as his back bumped into a tree. Nightshade moved in closer, like a shadow of death.

Luckily for Nightshade, there had been no one near enough to the area to hear Mark Abbott's dying screams.

Scott Short's parents moved away soon after he disappeared. They blamed themselves for his 'running away' and couldn't bare to live in that town anymore. It was too hard for them.

Nightshade wished more then anything that he could have told them the truth and spared them the pain, but he knew it was better that way. Safer for them that way. Ashleigh was extremely upset over Scott's running away as well, and took it just as hard as his parents did. Even as months passed by, she still did not get the least bit over it.

However, the crime rate of the town began to reduce greatly as Nightshade was still around, watching over and protecting St. Wainluk from those that wanted to do it harm...

THE END

*



Nightshade