

# CHAPTER 1

**T**he alley between the old two story buildings smelled of dirt, garbage, and excrement. It seemed appropriate, because that's what the killer thought of the two men he was hunting. They were dirt, garbage, excrement. He had waited a long time for this, and he was ready.

Dressed from head to toe in black, he was a shadow in the shadows. He carried no identification, didn't wear a watch, and all the tags were removed from his clothing. The long sleeved t-shirt, gloves, and watch cap left only his bearded face visible, but at two in the morning it wasn't an issue.

There was little activity on the dirt road between him and his targets. Watching the bar across the street, he was patient. They were in there. They would be coming out soon. Then it would be time.

The black canvas bag at his feet was already open. It held everything he needed: a loud Hawaiian shirt, a bottle of Jack Daniel's, white socks, duct tape, handcuffs, rope, and a stun gun. A black matte five inch folding tactical knife with a half serrated blade was on his belt. It shouldn't be needed until later.

He touched it for reassurance, as he did a quick recon of the alley behind him. About twenty feet wide, it was unlit, littered with garbage and abandoned junk. A dirty, rusted pickup was parked at the rear opening. There were old, rusty dumpsters at both front and back entrances, pushed against the decrepit building walls, convenient cover for surveillance.

The sound of muffled Tejano music was the only thing he heard,

drifting over from the bar. Every time the door opened the music would spill out into the street, alerting him of movement. This bar was a neighborhood watering hole, as run-down as the surroundings. It was a small place for locals only, strangers viewed with suspicion. Another forty five minutes passed before the door opened again. He watched a man and a woman stagger out, leaning on each other for balance, then walk slowly away.

False alarm.

Easing back into the shadows, the killer stayed vigilant. He was rewarded a few minutes later, when music blared through the opening door, only to be abruptly returned to a muted volume as the door slammed shut, echoing across the street.

Two men loitered outside, one of them lighting a cigarette.

It was them.

Time to go to work.

Without taking his eyes from his prey, he pulled the watch cap and gloves off and tossed them into the bag as he bent over and grabbed the Hawaiian shirt. Putting it on quickly, he knelt down, reached back in, found the stun gun, and slid it inside his belt. He unclipped the knife, and slipped it into his sock. While still on one knee, he pulled the Jack Daniel's bottle out, opened it, and took a couple of gulps, without swallowing. He did an 80 proof gargle for a few seconds, then let it dribble out of his mouth onto his shirt, hands, and pants. He poured half the bottle out, spilling some on his shoes, just in case. He wiped his hands dry on the shirt, and finally, pulled the zipper down on his fly.

Good to go.

The killer grabbed the Jack Daniel's bottle, and slowly stood up. He walked around to the front of the dumpster and set the whiskey bottle on the lid, clinking it loud enough to draw their attention. It did. He put his hand on the edge of the lid, bent over a little, and lowered his head. His legs wobbled, and it looked like he was hanging on to the dumpster to keep himself steady.

The targets had watched the scene unfold after they heard the bottle. They looked at each other and almost laughed. A gift. This was going to be easy. Checking around for witnesses and finding none, they headed across the street.

The killer knew they would.

He wasn't looking at them, but he saw them coming. Letting go of the dumpster, he straightened up, taking a quick step back to balance himself. He leaned forward again, reaching out for the bottle with his right hand. Missing it the first time, he bumped into the lid and staggered back. Going for it again, his fingers wrapped around the neck just as his victims arrived. He grabbed the zipper on his pants, then looked up and acted startled.

"Hey. . . . *amigos!*" he slurred, "*que pasa!*"

This time the targets laughed.

"Have some Jack, *amigos!*"

He pushed the bottle towards them, at the same time stumbling back, letting go of the zipper and grabbing the edge of the dumpster with his free hand so he wouldn't fall down. It was a good move, drawing them into the alley.

They both noticed that the bottle was less than half full. The smell of whiskey was all over this guy. Drunks were easy money. They looked at each other and nodded. The drunk didn't see them.

Time to go to work.

"You a *gringo*, no?"

The drunk *had* seen them and was prepared.

"*Gringo?* Me? Yes! No, *si!* *Si!*"

He set the fifth back on top of the dumpster lid, looked down and said, "Shit! I'm still open," as he reached down for his zipper, again. The stun gun was against his wrist. He was shuffling back and forth, but for every step he took forward, he subtly took two steps back, deeper into the shadows.

The targets were relaxed. They both thought this guy was an idiot. He doesn't know he's about to get robbed, and he's doing most of the work for us. We didn't even have to force him off the street, and he's playing with his zipper, not paying attention.

"Drink up, *compadres,*" the killer said, still looking down and struggling with his fly. When he looked up, one man stood directly in front of him, with the side of the dumpster at his back, and the other man stood on his right. They didn't notice the black canvas bag on

the ground just a few feet from them, in the darkness created by the dumpster.

Everyone was in position.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” the killer said, doubling over.

The man on his right grabbed his arm and straightened him back up. He didn’t notice the stun gun in the killer’s left hand. He was surprised by the rock hard, muscled arm he had a grip on. By the time the surprise registered, it was too late. The drunk had pressed the contacts against his neck, and held it there for a few seconds while 100,000 volts surged through his body. He dropped like a sack of flour.

The killer turned his attention to the man standing in front of him.

The second man had frozen just long enough, not understanding what had happened. The drunk was moving way too fast, he thought, and something was biting him under his chin. The man had a look of confusion on his face that turned to a grimace as he grunted and fell to the ground.

The killer grabbed both of them by their arms and dragged them behind the dumpster, out of sight. Pulling four sets of handcuffs out of the bag, their feet were secured first, then their hands cuffed in front of them. He began a methodical search of both men. Starting with the second man he disabled, he emptied everything out of his pockets, doing a quick inventory. There was a wallet, keys, a small role of bills, change, a knife, cigarettes, and some matches. Running his hands down the man’s legs to his feet, he found a small .22 caliber semi-automatic strapped to the inside of his ankle. Tossing it into the pile with the rest of the personal belongings, he turned his attention to the other man. The shirt and pants produced money, cigarettes, a lighter, wallet, keys, and badge case. He opened it. A *Policia Agente* gold shield was inside. A cop. Rolling him over, he found a holster inside the man’s pants, at the small of his back.

The killer pulled a .38 caliber revolver out, and looked very closely at it. It looked like the same gun. He had only seen it once before, but then he recognized a scratch on the wooden grip by the trigger, and he knew.

Checking the street for any movement, and finding none, he threw their possessions in the canvas bag, and pulled out the socks and duct tape. After stuffing the socks in their mouths and securing the gags

with duct tape, the victims got another quick jolt from the stun gun, just to be sure.

He snatched the bottle of Jack Daniel's off the dumpster lid and poured the rest out, then threw it in the bag. The bag went over his shoulder, then he reached out and grabbed the cuffs between their wrists, one in each hand, and started dragging them towards the back of the alley.

When he got to the pickup truck, he pulled back the canvas that covered the bed, and tossed the bag in. The back gate was already down. He grabbed each man by the collar and belt, and heaved them in. He pulled the rope out and tied them together, making sure they were bound tight. He took the .38 out of the bag and stuffed it into his pants, saw the stun gun, and decided to zap them one more time. He covered them with the canvas, and tied it off.

The killer hopped in the cab, started the truck, and drove towards the ocean.

While he was driving, he slid the revolver out of his pants and examined it again.

Unbelievable.

It *was* the same gun.

One year ago to the day was the last time he saw it. He was on his knees, the barrel four feet away, pointed directly at him. He remembered the muzzle flash, being hit in the chest with a sledgehammer, some laughter, and pain.

Then darkness.