

The First Chapters Writing Contest

PHENIX by Brooke Goodwin

(Winning Entry from 2018)



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Choosing to spare a child was Roy's first mistake as an assassin. Raising the boy was his second. But, when Roy is given an assignment from PHENIX, the organization he works for, the boy, Asher, decides to tag along. Roy wants to retire from PHENIX.

Asher wants answers. PHENIX is at war with another organization. When these circumstances collide, it becomes a race against time that could destroy everything.

Chapter 1

A small spark of light erupted from Roy's lighter as he struck it. Amidst the pouring rain that fell from the pitch-black sky, that flame burned brighter than the street lamps that dotted the dreary neighborhood. Roy lit his cigarette and checked his watch.

"Come on, Louis. We need to get this job done before police start patrolling the area. Where are you?" Roy whispered, a roll of smoke escaping from his lips.

Headlights from a passing car swept across Roy's body. He lowered his head and pulled up his collar. With the shifting of his jacket, Roy was reminded of the cold metal pressed against his skin. Roy was about to reach for the gun as a figure walked up to him.

Upon recognizing him he relaxed and turned toward the young man. "It's about time you got here. I was beginning to think I'd have to do this job alone. Where've you been, Louis?"

Louis smiled. "I was... on a job," he said, carefully pulling his jacket open. Blood splatter dotted his white shirt. "So, pretty surprising our superiors let us team up for this one, huh?"

"Well, considering who trained you, I think this is an exception."

"Must be pretty important. What's the plan?"

Roy exhaled a stream of smoke and put out his cigarette on the brick wall behind him. Dropping the butt in the sewage drain, he motioned for Louis to follow him.

"We're just going to knock on the door."

"And what? Ask them nicely if they'll hold still while we kill them? Hah! You're as cold as always, Roy."

"And you're excited as usual."

"Hey, you said I had potential in this business. Turns out you were right. You're looking at the future top agent here. All I have to do now is surpass you."

"Good luck with that, kid."

Roy and Louis walked two blocks to get to their destination. The decrepit apartment building squeezed in between a shady pawn shop and a failing Chinese restaurant was less appealing than the businesses on either side of it.

"Check out this dump. We could probably stride down the street with our guns out and no one would think twice. Then again, this is the perfect place to hide if you're on the run from someone."

"Beltran said our targets have been attacked by multiple agents from our organization but none of them have been successful," Roy said, punching in a code on the door's keypad.

"Of course not. They should've sent us from the beginning. Right?"

"Don't get ahead of yourself, Louis. You may be a great agent, but you're still a naive teenager."

"Ouch. That hurts," Louis sneered, stepping inside the building behind Roy. "Nineteen isn't that young. You were younger when you joined."

"Enough with the chit-chat. Our targets are on the fifth floor. Room 503."

Roy began to climb the stairs and Louis lazily followed. After a few steps, Louis tapped Roy on the shoulder. "So, are you seriously going to just knock on the door?"

"Yeah. PHENIX intercepted a message from the targets the other day. They're expecting to meet someone who can protect them."

"And we're those people."

"Exactly."

"This seems a little easy, don't you think? It's kind of boring."

Roy paused on the second floor. He glanced up the staircase. "You may be right. Just keep your guard up."

Roy pulled out his gun and continued on. Louis never seemed to share the same sense of danger Roy did. It was one of the things that made him a top agent, but it was also the thing that worried Roy the most. Roy would always regret what PHENIX had turned Louis into, what Roy had trained him to become. Those personal thoughts

were shoved to the side as they approached the fifth floor.

Roy stopped in front of Room 503 and turned to Louis. "You ready?"

"Are you ready, old man?" Louis teased.

Roy smiled and knocked. He touched the gun in his hand, checking for the hundredth time that he hadn't forgotten to install the silencer. The door opened.

"Can I help you?" the woman asked, eyeing both of them.

Louis leaned forward and whipped his gun out. The woman slowly raised her hands as he pointed the barrel at her head. Anger swept across the woman's face.

"We're here about that 'protection' you requested."

Louis kept his attention on the woman as he and Roy entered the apartment. Roy quietly shut the door, scanning the room. He raised his gun and stepped toward the lit bedroom.

"How many are here with you?" Roy whispered to the woman.

"Just me."

"Call for them."

"No."

Roy heard shuffling coming from the bedroom at the same time someone stepped out of the hallway into the living room. Roy pointed his gun at the man who reached for his.

"Don't move. I will shoot you," Roy threatened.

The man froze but turned his attention to the bedroom door. A boy, no more than seven or eight, shuffled into the living room. He froze as he noticed what was happening.

"Now this is a twist! I didn't know you two had a kid. So, how should we handle this now?" Louis taunted, "My buddy over there isn't sadistic enough to make the kid watch you two die. I on the other hand, don't really care either way. I'm still going to get paid."

The man moved first, but Roy's instincts were faster. He fired and the man dropped his gun, squeezing his hand tightly. He hissed in pain and glared at Roy.

Louis sighed. "Okay, now I'm bored."

"Louis, wait!"

He squeezed the trigger and the woman's head jerked back, spraying the wall with blood and brains. Then the man's body jerked twice, three times as bullets tore through him. Once they were both dead, Roy turned to Louis.

Louis shrugged. "What? It had to be done, remember?"

Roy looked at the boy. He stood in the doorway staring at his parents' bodies. Louis whistled at him.

"Hey, kid, come here," he instructed, motioning with his gun.

"Louis, don't. We don't have orders to kill anyone else."

"But the kid's a witness who's seen our faces. I mean, I know you don't like killing kids but that's why this job is supposed to be hard, right?"

The boy shuffled toward Louis. He stepped around the blood that pooled around the woman's body, keeping his eyes on the floor. The boy stopped in front of Louis.

"Louis..."

"If you don't like it, head outside, old man... Kid, look at me."

The boy looked up. His eyes flicked between the barrel of the gun pointed at his forehead and Louis's eyes. Louis's finger squeezed on the trigger.

But his gun never fired.

It clattered to the ground as Louis reached up. He gripped his neck, which spurted blood. Louis collapsed writhing and choking on the blood that slid down his throat. An eternity of seconds passed as both Roy and the boy watched Louis's life drain from his body.

Then Louis's body went limp. The only two people left alive in that tiny apartment were the boy and the strange assassin who saved him.