

THE WAITER: CHAPTER ONE
by Dave Biscella

Dylan Henderson stood outside the old apartment building in the rain. The rain was cold as it beat down on him, and the excessive wind wasn't helping. He was cold, but still determined. It had taken him eight years to get here, and he'd be damned if he let the weather turn him away. His 24 year old determined face was lit up by the light above the building's entrance as the rain dripped off of his thin frame. That light and the moon were supplying the only illumination on a street littered with burnt out street lights. This was a meaningless building in a neighborhood that nobody gave a shit about. But Dylan did.

After more than an hour, somebody inside the building was finally approaching the door to leave. It was all happening now. Dylan was ready. He took a few steps back away from the door, then started walking towards it as the person exited. Without second thought, the person held the door open for Dylan and he entered the building. They shared silent, thankful nods with each other and then went their separate ways. They were likely off to do some grocery shopping, or perhaps headed to work, or maybe braving the rain to meet some friends for drinks. It didn't matter. They're on their way, and now Dylan was in the building and on his way to do what he had come here for.

Dylan worked his way down the long, dimly lit hallway. Making his way to the stairs. He knew exactly where he needed to be. Fifth floor. Up five flights of stairs, exit the stairwell, take a left, five doors down, on the left. Apartment 543.

Apartment 543.

543.

Those numbers stared back at Dylan as he stared at them. This was it. It took eight years to get here, but here he was. Staring at 543, realizing it was finally all coming together. Dylan took one last breath, deeper than any breath he'd ever taken before. This was it.

"2, 1," he muttered to himself under his breath, finishing the countdown the appropriately numbered apartment door unintentionally started for him. Raising a fist to the door, two knocks. Not just any knocks. He'd never knocked on a door harder in his life. These knocks have been building up for eight years. He was using that energy, putting that hate and aggression behind two knocks.

"Who is it?" a rough voice yelled from the other side of the door.

"Mr. Steward, we need to talk," Dylan answered loudly, firmly.

"About what? It's almost 10pm. Come back tomorrow," the voice on the other side of the door argued.

"I apologize for the late hour, Mr. Steward," Dylan fought back, "but I'm here to discuss a financial matter with you. I represent the city and it appears you have been accidentally overbilled for water for the last eight months. We'd like to set this straight."

There was a moment of silence as the voice on the other side of the door did not respond. The silence was suddenly broken by heavy footsteps approaching the door. As the footsteps grew closer, they stopped. Dylan looked down to see the doorknob shake as it was grabbed forcefully from the other side of the door. It opened slowly before being stopped by the chain that was holding it shut. An old pair of eyes attached to a grizzled face appeared in the small opening.

"What do you mean? You want to give me back money I've overpaid?" the voice asks, now coming from a face, but just as strong and forceful as it sounded through the door.

“Absolutely. It was our mistake and we’d love to make it right,” Dylan answered with a smile. “We just need to take a look over a few bills and compare and we can go from there.”

The door shut, followed by the sound of the chain falling against it. It slowly opened as the man walked away from it. He was a big man, at least 6 and a half feet tall, maybe more. And heavy. Not overweight heavy, but the kind of build that looks like it was sculpted from bricks. Wide, broad, heavy.

Dylan entered the apartment and shut the door behind him. The man pulled up a chair and sat down at the table in the makeshift dining room in this tiny apartment. This didn’t look like a home. The building was a piece of shit on the outside, inside this apartment was even worse. It wasn’t filthy, just run down. It was clean, just looked like whoever was living there had given up on caring about anything.

“Take a seat,” the man said, looking up from his seat at the table. “And then tell me what the fuck you’re really here for.”

Dylan pulled out the .45 he had holstered under his jacket and set it on the table as he sat down across from the man. The barrel pointing towards the man, Dylan’s hand never leaving the trigger.

“It took me a long time to get here,” Dylan said, staring the man dead in the eyes. “Eight years, to be exact.”

“A lot of people have looked for me for a lot longer than that,” the man answered, completely unphased by the gun pointing directly at him. “Congratulations.”

Dylan’s eyes were filled with hate. For eight years he’d waited for this moment. In his head, he’d gone over a million times what he’d say when he got here. But he sat there silently, staring straight into the old, beaten down eyes across the table from him. Not because he was

at a loss for words, he had plenty he knew he wanted to say. It was almost like inside him was celebrating too much to get the words out. A hate filled, revenge fueled celebration.

“Look, kid, it’s late,” the man says calmly. “Do what you gotta do or say what you need to say. I’m an old man now and it’s coming up on my bed time.”

“You’re Alexander Steward?” Dylan said forcefully.

“I am,” the man answered.

“And before that, you were Thomas Milton, Peter Stiltch, Alfred Alton, and who knows how many other names before those.”

“I was,” the man answered.

This was it. Part of Dylan still wasn’t sure he was ready for this, but here he was. He had no choice now. He’d come this far, there was no turning back. On the surface, he was staring into the eyes of an old man that has clearly given up on everything and didn’t seem to care the least bit about the gun pointed at him with a finger on the trigger. But there was still a job to be done. He was here. He had to finish what he came here for.

“A little over eight years ago, you murdered my father...” Dylan began. He had gone over this speech in his head so many times. It was an odd feeling to hear it coming out of his own mouth, but it felt so good. Eight years of work was finally paying off.

The man sighed. He had murdered many fathers back in his day. He knew deep down his sins of the past would eventually catch up to him, he had always wondered exactly which sin would be the one to do him in. He listened attentively, as he could tell there was a speech prepared. He was willing to listen to it. He’d always known there were people out there practicing to themselves what they would say to him if they ever crossed paths. The idea of those speeches always fascinated him. In some odd way, he was always kind of depressed knowing that if he’d only ever hear one of them, if any at all.

“And my mother and two little sisters,” Dylan continued.

The man’s ears, eyes, and body perked up. He shifted positions in his seat, the first he’d moved since sitting down. It was almost like hearing that ignited some sort of excitement inside him. A sort of excitement he hadn’t felt in a long time. “Henderson?” He asked, his curiosity peaking.

“What?” Dylan said, shocked. His speech he had prepared was suddenly gone. His body was overcome with fear. Did the man just say what he thought he did? If so, how?

“You’re the Henderson boy, right?” the man asked again, with more life in his voice than anything he’s said in years. “Your father, mother and sister’s died from a car bomb, right?”

Dylan didn’t need a confession. He knew he had the right man. He had done his homework. It took a lot of work, eight years of it, to get here, and he knew he was in the right place. He didn’t need to hear a first hand account of that night’s events. He knew damn well what had happened. His finger tensed up on trigger. “They did. A car bomb that you had set.”

“Yes, and I’m sorry about that,” the man said. “I definitely know why you’re here, but you should listen to me for a minute.”

“I’m not interested in an apology,” Dylan said angrily, ready to pull the trigger just to avoid hearing what was going to be said next. He didn’t come here for a dialogue. He came here to look Alexander Steward directly in the eyes and let him know that he’s dying tonight for something he did eight years ago. He came here to watch the man that murdered his family have his head explode as his brains splatter all over the wall. He came here to make that happen.

“Look, kid,” the man began. “I understand completely, I really do. I did some terrible things that I always knew would come back on me at some point. It’s just that you’re the first one to find me, and that’s impressive.”

Dylan wasn't in the mood for compliments. He lifted the gun slightly off the table, his finger wrapped around the trigger, itching.

"I was just the waiter in that scenario," the man said, looking Dylan right in the eyes.

Dylan's patience was running thin. He didn't want to hear an apology, and he sure as fuck didn't want to hear anything else. This old man seems to have lost it. For a second, Dylan was bummed out because it almost felt like killing him would be doing this old sack of shit a favor. But what the hell? May as well humor him. "What the fuck do you mean by 'just the waiter'?"

The man leaned casually against the table they were sitting at. "If you go to a restaurant and come home with food poisoning, do you get pissed off at the waiter? Sure, him doing his job of bringing you the food contributed to it, but was that the cause? Or was it the chef in the kitchen handling the food improperly? Or the owner of the restaurant for cutting corners and ordering food that's cheap and not necessarily good? Or is it the supplier of the food that's not living up to their end of the deal? It could be a number of things, and there are plenty of people to be mad at, but least of which is the waiter. Without them, you don't get the food put in front of you, but in reality they're just doing their job. Everything that happened leading up to them picking up that plate and taking it to your table is completely out of their control."

Dylan slightly chuckles. "So, you're saying that even though you're the asshole that killed my family, that I have the wrong guy?"

"No," the man answers matter of factly. "You have the right guy. I deserve every bit of hate and anger you've had pent up for the past eight years. I deserve what you have in store for me."

"But..." Dylan asks, knowing the lead up to a caveat when he hears one.

The man looks Dylan straight in the eyes. He knows Dylan owes him nothing. Nobody does. He's a monster. Dylan has every right to splatter his brains all over the wall right now without giving it a second thought. But he also realizes Dylan is a smart kid with a lot of talent.

"I don't accomplish everything you want to accomplish," the man begins to explain. "Killing me may feel good. It may give you that satisfaction you've been seeking so desperately for the past eight years. But in reality, you're only killing the waiter. You're not getting to the source."

Dylan follows along, almost confused that he's letting this old man speak as much as he is. But in an even stranger turn of events, it all makes sense. In his eight years of research leading up to this, Dylan had pieced together that Mr. Steward was a hitman. He knew he was more than likely paid to murder his family, but he never put much more thought into than that. He was intrigued. The old man made sense. "And how would I go about getting to the source?"

"That's a question I've had for the last eight years," Mr. Steward says, sitting up in his seat. His hands stay on the edge of the table, making sure to keep them in sight at all times. One wrong move and he knows Dylan would be more than happy to pull that trigger. He didn't want that to happen. Not for fear of dying, he didn't give a shit about that and had come to accept it long ago, but because Dylan was his chance to make it right. "The hit on your family ruined my life."

Dylan's curiosity instantly turned back to anger. "Oh, boo-fucking-hoo. Mine, too, asshole. I don't want a fucking sob story."

"And you're not going to get one, but let me explain. When somebody like your dad gets murdered, there's a lot of pieces at play. He was a powerful man and probably made plenty of enemies getting there. For somebody to want him dead, they need to go through a process. They call somebody, who probably knows somebody, who knows somebody else, who contacts

me. Back then, when I got hired, I was always so far from the source. I never knew who the job was for, just what needed done and how much they were willing to pay for it.”

“Why the fuck are you telling me this?” Dylan asks as his patience begins to run thin. “Do you think I care about the fucking process that killed my family?”

“No, but I do,” Mr. Steward responds. “I was set up. My only rule was always no women and children. I was assured it would only be your dad getting in that car, but they knew all along it’d be the whole family. Except for the son who had just got his license and was driving himself everywhere. By the time I realized the rest of your family was going to be there, it was already too late.”

Dylan still didn’t know why he should care about all this, but he was tired of being angry. All he wanted to do was pull that damn trigger. He didn’t want to ask ‘why?’ Anymore.

“I retired because of that hit,” Mr. Steward continues. “When I retired, everybody turned their back on me. I couldn’t find work of any kind. So eventually, I gave up on everything and went into hiding. Since then, I’ve been filled with nothing but hatred for whoever hired me to do that job.”

OK, maybe there are some ‘why?’s worth asking. “So why didn’t you go after who hired you?”

Mr. Steward sits back in his chair, hands still fully visible. “I’ve always been the brawn, never the brains. The contact that did the actual hiring wouldn’t tell me who wanted the job done. I ran out of patience and killed him out of anger. With that, I think I lost my only shot at tracing it all the way back to the source. I didn’t know where to go from there.”

“I still don’t understand why you’re telling me all this,” Dylan asked, calming down from his impatient anger. In an odd way, this conversation kind of felt good.

Mr. Steward looks at the gun pointing at him, then looks Dylan directly in the eyes.

“You’re a smart kid. I don’t know how you did it, but you found me. I was careful, covered all my tracks. I should be a ghost, but here you are. That kind of skill could help me find out who hired me to kill your family.”

“You want me to help you find out who hired you to kill my family?” Dylan asked, more confused than he’s ever been in his entire life. How did he let the conversation get this far. And how the fuck did he let it make this much sense to him.

“Let me make it right,” Mr. Steward pleaded. “Help me put together the pieces. When we find out who was responsible, I’ll kill them myself. I’ll eliminate the source. Then I’ll stand down and let you do what you came here to do tonight.”

This was insanity. There was no way Dylan could trust him. Was there? Dylan stared Mr. Steward in the eyes. The eyes of the man who murdered his entire family looked innocent and sincere as he pleaded for his help. Dylan didn’t owe this asshole anything. For him to even ask for help was lunacy. There was no way in the world that he should be listening to this. Was there?

Dylan’s finger loosened up and slid away from the trigger, leaving the gun lying there on the table.