

**Author's Note:** *This chapter is the beginning of the post-Fusion Ultimatum storyline. We will see some new faces and will see some old friends return too. This storyline will contain plenty of action and violence. We will see Fusion facing their toughest foes yet as they are put through their paces in their home city. As well as the violence, there will be heartache and there will be sorrow . . . there will also be death.*

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My name is Adam Stockdale and I live with my paternal cousin, Adora.

Our lives were torn apart by the brutal murder of our parents at my home, one dark and stormy night, in 2011. My cousin and I, then spent the next two and a half years of our lives in comas brought on by our injuries that were sustained during the attack. A few days before our fifteenth birthday, we both awoke into a new and scary world. We were taken in by a friend of the family, Duncan Adams and his wife, Katelyn. Both of whom had stayed at our bedsides for the preceding two years.

It was Katelyn, who had broken the news to us both that we had been orphans for the past two years of our lives. Our new lives had begun, in a very different country in a very different part of the world. Once the initial sadness and horror had passed, we had both grown angry, bitter, and spiteful towards the outside world despite the love and care that we both received in copious amounts.

Under the guidance of Duncan and Katelyn, we gained new skills which we were told might help us to come to terms with our new lives – something to vent our anger on. We had put all our efforts into bettering ourselves at school – we had two whole years to catch up on – and we held a deep-seated hatred for the people that we believed were behind the deaths of our parents and the near deaths of ourselves.

Unknown to us, we were being secretly trained by Duncan and Katelyn – they had a background of which we were completely oblivious. Our plan had been to go after those who had destroyed our lives, ourselves. However, to do that, we would need money. We had been left a large amount of money by our respective parents, however, it was all tied up in a trust fund that neither of us could access until we reached our eighteenth birthdays. When that day came, we had both vowed to start actively planning to avenge our parents.

As cousins, we were very close. Our fathers had been brothers – twins in fact. They had been born together – they had even married together – they had also died together. In a quirk of biological fate, our mothers had both gone into labour on the same day and we had both been born within a minute of one another.

Then, after three years, 2016 had finally dawned and a month later, we had turned eighteen.

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### **February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

On that day, as well as gaining access to a huge fortune, we were also given the keys to our former homes.

My family had lived to the northeast of a big city in North America while Adora's family had lived near a large lake to the north of the same city. We both returned to the United States of America with our adoptive family and we landed at Chicago O'Hare International Airport. It was only when

Adora and I arrived at my former home that a big secret was unveiled. Duncan and Katelyn had been planning and building ever since we had both regained consciousness, three years previously.

Even though we had not been able to access our trust funds to start building our future, Duncan and Katelyn had transformed more than one part of my home that I had never known had even existed. There followed three months of intensive training to get used to our new equipment. It was a bit weird, just the two of us living in a nine-bedroom mansion but it had given us the space and privacy that we had craved to figure out our new lives.

Therefore, at the beginning of May, with our new skills and our new equipment, we soon found ourselves out on the dark streets of Chicago in search of assistance for our quest of retribution.

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Despite us having worn our armoured suits before, somehow it felt different wearing them that night. We were going into harm's way, although it had been suggested to us that we try to avoid any trouble for our first few nights out on the town.

We each wore near identical suits – Adora's was black from head to toe and matched her Yamaha MT-10 motorcycle. Mine was black but it had vivid blue highlights that matched my own Yamaha MT-10 motorcycle's colour scheme. On each hip, we carried a SIG Sauer P2022 Threaded Barrel pistol and around our waists a utility belt that held communications equipment, spare magazines, medical supplies and some other equipment. On our left and right thighs, we carried three titanium throwing knives. A large combat knife lived on our left calves.

Our principal weapon was an Oneida Kestrel compound bow which we carried on a mount just forward of the motorcycle handlebars; on our backs we carried a slim quiver of arrows. The motorcycles also carried a heavier weapon in the form of a SIG Sauer MPX-K submachine gun plus several magazines.

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### ***Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> May***

We were complete unknowns in the city and unlike the pink whatever that had recently appeared on the streets of Chicago only the previous week, we wanted to keep a low profile for as long as possible. Mind you, as far as we could tell, there had been no sign of Hit Girl, nor of any of the senior members of *Fusion* for a good couple of weeks. There had, however, been some interesting news reports from Europe...

Our weapons tended to blend in with our suits in darkness which made us seem like just any other pair of youngsters out for an evening ride. We had spent some of the past weeks combing the city and learning the streets and alleyways. We knew that until we were trusted, we might actually be hunted by *Fusion*, the CPD and God only knew who else. With that in mind, we had scouted out escape routes and studied places where we could hideout if needs be.

We had trained well, but we had not seen any actual 'action', so we needed to be careful and for the moment, there were only the two of us.

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There was one other complication that I had not mentioned. Duncan and Katelyn had two kids: Paul and Rose who were eleven and nine respectively. Those two had absolutely no idea what myself and

my cousin were now doing – apparently, the two kids had no idea that their own parents had a rather violent history.

That night, our first night out in Chicago as Apollo and Artemis, Paul called me on my mobile...

“Hi, Paul.”

“Where are you? Are you out somewhere; you sound muffled?”

“I’m in Chicago with my cousin, why?”

“Just wanted to see if you wanted to come get me and we could go get a pizza...”

“Not tonight, Paul – got things to do. Gotta go, kid...”

“Bye, Adam.”

That was all I needed! I was trying to concentrate on the night’s plan but instead I was being distracted by an eleven-year-old who wanted pizza...

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Coming out of a coma had been hard, not to mention the distressing news which had followed us coming back to life.

When we had been hurt, we had both been twelve. As for the events that had taken our parents from us, we could remember very little – we were advised that the traumatic memories would come back over time; neither of us were in *any* rush to regain those memories for obvious reasons...

Suddenly awaking to find yourselves aged fifteen after going to sleep as a twelve-year-old was weird, to be honest. During our comas, both my cousin and I had sailed through puberty for one and our bodies were very different from when we had previously seen them. We had actually taken the opportunity to examine each other to find out the changes...

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“You’ve actually got a dick...” Adora noticed with a smirk.

“Thanks!” I replied sarcastically and I felt myself reddening on my cheeks. “You’ve actually got some tits...”

“Touché, mon ami!” Adora laughed. “My tits are huge!”

“Oh, no...” I moaned as I looked down at myself.

Adora was the first ‘real’ girl that I had actually seen naked and my brain had noticed...

“Nice, cuz, real nice...”

Adora was blushing as I bit my lip and closed my eyes, not that it made any difference as something just got harder.

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I had to admit that after *that* episode I thought I’d never hear the end of it but then something much worse happened to Adora a week or two later. I had gone looking for my cousin one morning and I had found her in her bathroom, crouched down and with several fingers up herself.

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“Err, I’ll leave you alone...” I muttered as I turned to leave.

“I’m on my goddamn period, you dick, and I can’t figure out these damn things...”

It was only then that I noticed the three or four bullet-shaped objects on the bathroom floor.

“Oh – I’m still leaving; ewww...”

“Thanks, asshole!” Adora growled. “I’ve never done this before – I barely had pubes before all this happened...”

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Needless to say, neither of us had spoken about me getting a rise out of my cousin, nor about Adora’s tampon problems...

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### ***South Clark Street and East 16<sup>th</sup> Street***

We began to attract some unwanted attention by the time we reached South Clark Street and East 16<sup>th</sup> Street.

As we passed under the railroad tracks, northbound, we found ourselves with an escort. It was that pink whatever from the other night. Despite her garish colour-scheme – Adora liked the purple pizzazz – she had a great body and an awesome taste in motorcycles.

We had no desire to be associated with her as she was a complete unknown and I had registered *Fusion’s* reaction to her, which had been full of disdain. We accelerated but she kept pace with us as we roared through the tunnel beneath the West Roosevelt Road junction. We took a left at West Polk Street and crossed beneath the railroad tracks still with the purple pizzazz following us.

We stopped in the park beside the canal and we both turned to our new ‘friend’.

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“You must be Sunset Phoenix.”

“Oh, new vigilantes – cool!”

“Why are you following us?”

“I was curious...”

“Well?” Artemis growled. “Is your curiosity satisfied?”

“Not really. What do you call yourselves?”

“We are not ready to reveal that information; not yet,” I replied.

“But we’ll let you know,” Artemis added.

By her tone I noticed that my cousin had taken an instant dislike to Sunset Phoenix.

“Okay; I know when I’m not welcome – see ya, wouldn’t want to be ya!”

With that, Sunset Phoenix started her engine and accelerated away.

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At the end of our 'eventful' night, we headed for East Monroe Street.

There, our families owned a condo. South Wabash Street which crossed East Monroe beside our building also bore the 'L' and as we passed beneath Madison/Wabash station, we peeled off into an alleyway where we quickly pulled off our weapons and stowed them in a previously cached holdall. In went our masks and out came a pair of dark leather jackets. The building had originally been selected by our families for the anonymity that it offered.

That anonymity allowed us to ride our motorcycles down into the subterranean parking lot and park them in a private container-type storage area. Our weapons were left with the motorcycles under lock and key before we made sure that the container was secure and we headed for one of the four elevators that serviced our floor.

We rocketed up to the 71<sup>st</sup> floor where our condo took up the entire floor.

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### ***Later that night***

#### ***Winnetka***

The Shelby GT530 Mustang turned left off Winnetka Road into the drive of a large property.

The gates slowly swung open as the driver pressed a button in the car. She pulled the car around and stopped directly in front of the stone steps that led up to the front door. She walked up the door, unlocked it and walked straight inside before she closed and locked the door behind her.

After walking through to the kitchen and making herself a coffee, she headed downstairs into the basement. There she walked toward what she called her Resource Room. The door was steel and had a combination lock beside it. She entered an eight-digit code and passed through the door.

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It had been seven years.

It had taken the lives of my parents and it had consumed me. It had made me what I was at that moment. I had intended to do good, to ensure that nobody else suffered the way my family had. But then, in the middle of December, I received a package delivered by an anonymous courier.

The package had contained a file. On opening the cover, I was shocked by what I found.

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There were three colour photos.

I recognised the girl in each photo, even though I had not seen her since the first photo was taken. The girl was eight-years-old in the first photo, maybe ten in the second and maybe twelve in the final photo.

Beneath the photos was a heavily redacted form. In between the blacked out portions I recognised the name: **KARA NEWTON** and then in another box: **FRASIER**. The date of birth was instantly recognisable: **JUNE 18<sup>TH</sup> 2001**. I hated the next box – **DATE OF DEATH: 12<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2014**. There was a red stamp in the top right corner: **DECEASED**.

Somehow, it gave me closure – at least I knew what had happened to her all those years ago. She had lived another four years after she had gone missing. I perused the next pages with shaking hands. There were multiple full-colour, glossy photos. They were horrible. They depicted a naked girl of around twelve-years-old and one side of her head was visibly broken. Even in death, I recognised the face.

Below the photos was a report, most of which was black out, I zeroed onto one piece of information, one phrase that contained a name: **KILLED BY STEPHANIE WALKER**. Finally, there were more photos – this time of a girl with long-blond hair. Then some un-redacted information detailing one Stephanie Walker. I again zeroed onto some critical information: **LAST KNOWN LOCATION: CHICAGO (SEE FUSION)**.

My sister would be avenged.