

Ren walks through the streets of London, the icy wind hitting the back of his neck, and causing his entire body to feel the same overbearing loss of warmth. He can't help but shiver as he walks quickly, holding himself as he attempts to stave off the cold weather. He's not even close to home, and he doesn't know these streets. He only knows the way there thanks to his phone, which chimes in occasionally in his earbuds to tell him the next set of directions. Then suddenly, he stops. He looks to his right and sees an alleyway. Darker than the night sky, but according to his phone, a shortcut that could save a lot of time. He knows that the towing company he called to pick up his car won't be long before they get to his house, and he also knows some of his groceries simply won't last in the car for long enough without proper storage. So, he takes a deep, shuddery breath, and walks into the darkness.

As he walks, more slowly now, he feels the wind seemingly push him forward a bit, fate finally playing its hand. He stumbles, looks up to regain his balance, and suddenly...

"Give me your fuckin' money or I swear to God, I will *slice* you!" A young boy shouts at him, holding a knife towards Ren. Ren is caught off guard, his heart jumping into his throat as he freezes with fear. He opens his mouth, but nothing comes out except one word.

"What?" Ren is almost speechless. He can't help but be. This boy, 17 at most, has him completely frozen with fear. And if he wasn't so terrified, he'd feel almost humiliated. And so, his statement is followed by a fear-stricken silence.

"What do you think you're playing at?! I said give me your *fuckin'* money, man!" The roadman waved the knife in a threatening manor, as Ren stands like a statue made of the stiffest of stone. He slowly reaches into his pocket, feeling for his wallet, but he soon notices something that makes him pause. "Hurry the fuck up already, man!" Ren wants to move, but he can't. He's too busy pondering if what he's about to do is what he truly wants. He sighs a deep breath of preparation as he swiftly pulls out his wallet, holding it forward.

"There, just take it... Now please, let me go." Ren's voiced is shaky, as he lets his wallet be taken from his grasp. The roadman puts it in his pocket, but as he uses his hands to do so, a powerful gust of cold air suddenly blows towards them, and his hood is pulled off his head, revealing his face. He's pale. Perhaps from the cold, or maybe he's as nervous as Ren. Either way, Ren doesn't get time to process this, as the boy yells, lunging towards Ren. "No!" Ren yells in fear as he tries to push the kid off, the knife slicing part of his hand as a result. But he gets ahold of his arm, as they fall to the ground. The roadman sits atop Ren, as they both struggle for control. The boy punches Ren in the face, stunning him, as he raises the knife high, and...

The boy yelps in pain, as he drops the knife. He looks down and sees a knife sticking out of his side. He soon falls to his side, forcing the knife out as he gasps for air. Ren closes the knife, not caring for the preservation of the blade, as he returns it to the pocket his wallet was once in, as he rushes over to the roadman.

“Fuck, I’m so sorry! Just hold on, I’ll call the police! Just hold on!” Tears fill his eyes as the boy begins to lose the life in theirs. Ren quickly pulls out his phone and dials 999, rushing so fast he nearly drops the mobile device. The operator picks up after only a few rings. Ren immediately begins shouting, the operator not even getting a word in. “Please, you’ve got to help me! I was walking down an alley, and I was mugged! I tried to give my money over, but... Fuck, I think he’s dying! Please, get an ambulance over here! He’s just a boy! He’s...” Ren looks over to the boy, and sees his eyes staring blankly at the wall, no longer writhing. No longer groaning. No longer... Living. “...He’s dead.” Suddenly, a muffled voice begins to speak, as Ren stares at the body.

“..Mr. Sicarius...” As the body begins to get colder, and Ren’s eyes become more emotionless, the voice gets louder. “Mr. Sicarius?” Ren slightly twitches his head in response before the voice speaks a final time. “Mr. Sicarius!” Ren quickly looks up, as he is suddenly in a courtroom, on a witness stand, people looking onward with anticipation.

“Sorry, yes?” He looks into the eyes of his lawyer. They look concerned for a moment, but they soon regain composure.

“Mr. Sicarius, I ask again, did the young Mr. Primus attack you that night in the alley?” The Lawyer waits patiently, as Ren prepares his answer.

“Yes, sir. He lunged at me with the knife in his hand when the wind knocked his hood off his head.” He answers almost soullessly, sounding like his life had been ripped out of him. Is it guilt? Lack of care? Trauma? Truthfully, he isn’t sure himself.

“And what did you do in response to this, Mr. Sicarius?” The Lawyer begins to pace up and down the room, appearing to ponder something.

“Well, I attempted to grab the knife, and my hand was cut in the process-“ Ren is about to continue, but his lawyer interjects.

“Sorry, but would you mind showing this wound to the jury, please?” Ren’s lawyer stops pacing, looking at Ren, as he keeps his hands in his pockets. Ren nods, raising his hand, peeling a bandage away that shows a deep, long, yet stitched cut that feels even worse than it looks. The jury suddenly emits noises

of concern and empathy, as he then re-adheres the bandage to his wound once again. “So, your hand is cut, and what did you do next?”

Ren sighs. “Well, it caught me off guard enough for him to knock me over... That’s when he got on top of me... When I had to...” Ren’s eyes fill with tears as he looks down, sniffing. His lawyer looks to the jury, before sighing.

“As you can see ladies and gentlemen of the jury, my client feels nothing but remorse for what happened. And he only did it when the only other option was for him to lose his own life. And if you don’t believe he feels remorse, I’d like to show exhibit C. The final one in this case... photos of Mr. Sicarius at the crime scene taken by journalists of the British Broadcasting Corporation.” The lawyer gives a signal, as the photos are brought and shown to the courtroom. Ren can be seen, crying profusely, even screaming in agony for his actions. “As you can see, this is a man who has been broken by his actions. A man broken by the loss of a life, even if the person who lived that life had tried to end his.”

The lawyer continues, “And if that’s not enough, eyewitness reports say that they followed loud screaming, only to find my client attempting CPR, and trying his best to pack the stab wound of the victim to stop the blood loss. And so, I ask you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, despite all that, is my client the type of man to end a life carelessly? Is he the type to deserve a guilty sentencing when he is clearly feeling guilty enough? That’s up for you to decide.” Silence follows, and the judge soon chimes in.

“Mr. Sicarius, you may leave the stand.” Ren does as he’s told, wiping tears from his eyes as he walks quickly, sitting so that he can sink lower in his chair. “The Jury may now leave to make their decision. We will take a recess while they make this decision.” As the jury stands to leave, Ren sits quietly, pondering how awful this could go. How quickly his life could be over in such a small amount of time. As he decides to walk outside to the streets of London, he roams the exterior of the building, stopping by a trashcan and leaning against it. He waits there for some time before being called back in, the jury waiting in the courtroom, the speaker raising their voice to reach the entire courtroom once everyone takes their seats.

“We have reached a decision.” The juror tells the judge their verdict as they sit back down, with Ren sitting up in excitement.

“Mr. Sicarius, the city of London finds you...” The Judge pauses as Ren sits up even more, nearly standing as his heart races quickly, and his mind racing even faster. “...not guilty on all charges.” He slams the gavel, as he speaks one last time. “You are dismissed.” Ren weeps tears of joy as his lawyer pats him on his back. They soon both leave, and Ren walks confidently, smiling with joy. But as he walks out, he turns his head to a weeping woman being held by a man—the boy’s parents.

He stops, frozen in place as his face drops to that same emotionless stare he had when the boy died. The same kind of lifelessness the boy had in his eyes. He moves towards them slowly, sighs, and takes a seat behind them. Then, the moment he sits, he's suddenly in a therapist's office.

"Hello, Ren. What would you like to talk about today?" the therapist leans forward, placing down her clipboard. "You seem a bit upset. Would you mind sharing how you feel?" Ren looks off at the wall with his eyes blank as he speaks.

"I've been having... them, again." Ren's voice is shaky, and he slowly looks at her as he speaks, before his eyes dart away again. The therapist leans back again, picking up her clipboard.

"The flashbacks, right? What did you see this time?" The lady begins to write on her clipboard, as she listens closely to Ren.

"Everything... the alley, the body, even the cold weather... they're getting more vivid. I'm starting to feel more every time they happen. And I hate it." He begins to fidget, as he slightly shuffles in his seat, the therapist taking note of this as she takes literal notes on her clipboard.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Ren. Have the medications been helping?" She writes still, occasionally looking up slightly at Ren.

"No... not at all. I need you to up the dosage again. I need them to work." Ren stops fidgeting, looking at her seriously.

"Ren, these dosages can't keep going up. It's not good for your body, and soon, it'll affect your mind as well. Are you sure that it's been doing nothing at all?" She stops writing to look up at Ren, as he shakes his head. She sighs in response. "Alright... but no higher. I'm serious about this, understand?" Ren nods. "Good. Let's move on. Can we talk about the thoughts you've been having? You told me recently you'd been imagining committing suicide with no actual plan to do so. Can you tell me what those thoughts have been like?"

Ren returns to fidgeting. "It's not exactly suicide. I keep visualizing murdering myself... hurting myself. I sometimes even imagine me as... the kid." Ren looks down at the floor as the therapist writes quickly.

"You mean... the boy you had to defend yourself from?" She looks intensely at Ren as he nods, before she begins writing again. "Why do you think that is? Do you think you should have been the one to die?" Ren nods, as she pauses her writing. "Ren... why would you ever think that?" Ren looks up, with a blank face, as those same soulless eyes return yet again.

“Because I deserve it. Because I’m a monster for what I did. For how I feel. For who I am. For everything. And worst of all...” He pauses, sighing deeply, before looking into her eyes as his voice loses all emotion. “Because despite everything, I still don’t feel bad for what I did that night.” Ren doesn’t falter as he remains emotionless, watching her. He sees her shift uncomfortably in her chair as she speaks.

“So, you’re saying you don’t feel remorseful for the death of the boy?” She writes slowly, more sloppily now, as Ren leans back in his chair.

“You want the truth? No, I don’t. I did what I had to do. And I shouldn’t have to feel bad just because the parents couldn’t parent their child.” He leans forward again as he continues to keep eye contact.

“I see... Ren, have you ever thought you might have Anti-Social Personality Disorder? It’s often referred to as sociopathy and psychopathy by most, despite those two being very different parts of the same spectrum. ASPD typically...” As the therapist’s voice sounds further away, Ren’s mind slowly drifts away as he stares at her eyes and mouth, simply seeing her speak, but not hearing a word. Then, he stands, attempting to walk away. The therapist attempts to speak louder, but the silence simply gets louder in response. She gets up as she walks over slowly to Ren, attempting to gently grab his arm. He responds by turning around quickly, reaching forward faster than she could have expected as he goes to grab the hand that’s going towards his, before he—

Turns the TV on, sitting on the couch of his apartment. He looks at the table in front of him, empty bottles of medication sprawled out in front of him. He soon zones back in as he watches the news to see what’s happening in the world around him.”

“...and so, we all mourn the loss of the married couple, who lost their lives tragically this last week, their bodies found holding each other, police suspecting they committed suicide after the loss of their chi-“ Ren shuts the TV off, not wanting anymore negativity than he’s already going through. He makes his way to the bathroom, starting a shower. He waits for the water to warm up before undressing, and enters. As he lets the water soak him, he pours the soap on his hands, washing his face and body. As he rinses his face off, looking down only to see blood covering his hands and body. He screams in fear as he begins scrubbing violently, rinsing himself off, but the blood stays only on his hands. He throws himself out and to the ground as he still tries to wash the blood off. As he rises, he looks in the mirror, seeing the boy’s body behind him, rotting. He turns around, the body now gone. He then looks down yet again as he sees the blood has disappeared as well.

After getting back in and finishing his shower, he gets out, dries off, and gets dressed while making a phone call. The line picks up before the first ring even ends.

“Hello? Doctor? Look, I need the medication raised. Can we please talk in person? What do you mean *no*?! **I’m fucking losing my mind here! Fuck this, I’ll find something better, then! Fuck you!**” He hangs up, punching his mirror. It shatters as his fist meets the glass.

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A man closes the door to his car, his hands covered in blood. He is in full black, his hood concealing his only exposure to the light. He takes a trash bag with his other hand, entering a junkyard. As he makes his way to a pile of garbage, he prepares to throw it into the pile before he hears a voice behind him.

“Hey! You! What are you doing?!” The man shines a flashlight at the suspicious man. He stops in his tracks, before turning, smiling slightly.

“Sorry, just taking out some trash. It’s just some scrap. I work here.” He holds his hand up, keeping the light out of his eyes. Then, as the man turns off his flashlight, he reveals himself to be a police officer. The man’s smile falters slightly.

“Someone tripped a silent alarm. Was that you?” The officer walks a bit closer, his left hand not moving with the rest of his body. The man takes notice of this before responding, maintaining an innocuous demeanor.

“Yeah, sorry! Forgot they turn those on! I’m used to coming here in the day! I got the okay to dump some garbage. Perks of working here, right?” The hooded man chuckles slightly as the officer slows his approach.

“Right... so Steve said you could come in, but didn’t deactivate the alarms?” The officer eyes him up and down, eyebrow raised. The man chuckles again before shrugging.

“He must have forgot, I guess. He’s getting around that age, right?” he jokes. But the officer suddenly takes a more serious stance.

“That’s not the name of the guy who owns this place.” A chill goes down the man’s spine. He wants to speak, but he can’t seem to find the words to save himself. “Sir, I’m going to need you to step away from the bag.” The officer puts his hand on his gun as the man tries to speak again, inching closer to the police officer.

“Officer, please, I haven’t done anything! You don’t need to—” The officer pulls his gun out and points it him.

"I said get back! Now!" He keeps his finger along the slide and off the trigger until he has to shoot. The man throws his hands up, before backing away slowly. "Up against the garbage! And stay there!" He does as he's told. The officer makes his way to the trash bag, opening it. With his hands already gloved, he opens the bag, and begins looking inside. As he opens it, a putrid smell rises from the bag, making the officer gag. He holds his breath as he moves the bag around, then sees something petrifying. He's stunned for a moment before he regains his composure. "Dear God... alright, put your hands behind your..." He looks up only to realize the man has disappeared. The officer jumps up to his feet. He quickly turns his radio on before speaking into it frantically. "I have a suspect who ran off, leaving a bag filled with what seems to be—" The officer falls to the ground after a fist meets the side of his face with a mighty force behind it. As the fist drops, blood now appearing behind what appears to be a bandage, Ren kneels by the officer. "You peelers always have to complicate things, don't you? Good thing I decided to bandage this." Ren walks toward the bag, reaches inside around the dismembered body, and pulls out some rope. He then turns around, and suddenly, he's in a shed, with the officer tied to a chair, Ren now holding a knife.

"Oh good. You're awake." Ren gets closer. "Sorry, hope those ropes aren't too tight... after all, I wouldn't want the coroner to see the marks." Ren turns around and approaches a table behind him. The officer makes muffled yells of protest, as Ren turns again. "Oh, right. Silly me." Ren walks closer, ripping the gag off his mouth, and the officer immediately shouts out.

**"Someone help! He's going to kill me! Plea-**" Ren shoves the gag back over his mouth, wrapping it back around his head, now even tighter than before. He gets closer to him, as face-to-face as he can be, his complexion red with anger.

"If you do that again, I will make sure the first one to find your body is your son, so stay quiet..." He slightly loosens his grip, and his face returns to its usual color. "...It's soundproof anyway." He lets go of the gag. The officer, shaken by the mention of his son, remains silent. Ren takes notice of his sudden cooperation. He turns again, looking at the table. "What? Think I wouldn't do my research?" He turns, holding up the officer's badge and wallet. "Give me more credit than that." The officer soon returns to reality before speaking.

"Listen, just tell me what you want, and I'll get it for you, okay? Money, drugs, whatever. I've got connections, people who would give me anything for me to look the other way. Just let me go. Please." The officer stutters in desperation. Ren chuckles before grabbing a knife and getting closer.

"Don't you *dare* insult me like that. Money isn't my concern." Ren points the knife toward the officer.

“Well, what about getting away with this? Because if we’ve been wherever we are for very long, I know my partner has been looking for me already.” Ren smiles slightly, before pulling out the officer’s phone, which was already unlocked.

“About that...” Ren shows him photos of his partner shot dead on the ground outside his car. “...See, there’s nothing you can offer me. Or at least, not the real you.” Ren then shows texts he sent on the officer’s phone while pretending to be him, making it look like the officer believed his husband was cheating on him with his partner in the precinct. He had sent a photo of the body, making it appear like some sort of breakdown on the officer’s part that ended in murder. “A tragic story, sure... but a believable one. Just like all the others.” He then shows the officer’s phone gallery, now full of photos of others Ren had killed. The parents of the boy, his therapist, and his second therapist, who’s dismembered body sat next to the officer’s partner. “See, I was looking for a scapegoat. I knew the police would close in... and then I saw you at the scene of that boy’s murder. Not to mention how you acted in the courtroom. When I saw the trauma in your eyes from the event of his death, I couldn’t help but put my head down and laugh when I realized how perfect everything had lined up. That’s why I booked the therapist I did... your therapist. And the second one, well, it was the only option anyway, so I knew we’d both be moved to him. Your partner was more so for fun, but it certainly helps.” Ren gets closer. The officer is simply too stunned to speak as Ren takes the officer’s gun out of the holster. “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure to end it quick. Besides, it has to be a headshot to make it look real.” The officer jumps.

“No, wait, come on! There must be something! I mean, think about it! What about my kids? What about—” Ren aims and pulls the trigger, the bullet entering one side of the man’s head, and painting the walls with a deep red as it exits the other side.

“Shut up already.” Ren unties the officer’s hands, puts the gun in his right hand, tightens the grip, and lets it fall to his side. He then unties the legs, puts things back where they were, and walks outside. Once Ren gets a far enough distance, he watches as someone exits the house in front of the shed. A young boy walks over to the door. As he opens it, the boy screams a blood curdling “**Dad!**” Ren, emotionless as ever, walks away.

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“There’s something wrong here.” Two detectives surround the body, tape blocking off the entrance to the shed. The other detective responds.

“What?” He looks down at the body.

“His gun... Caper was a left-handed shooter.” the first detective remarks. The second detective responds, as he looks down at the gun, held fast in the grip of the cooling corpse.

“To be fair, I doubt he cared about proper shooting etiquette when he was ending his life.” The second detective looked away again.

“Maybe you’re right... I don’t know.” The first detective looks around again, before spotting something. “Hey, wait, look!” He walks over to what appears to be a hidden security camera, the top half covered by cloth. “Someone come and grab this when we wrap up! This could give us a better idea of the state he was in when he did it.” As the officers look around, Ren stands in the room, wearing his uniform as he takes photographs. His heart jumps into his throat. With determination, he knows what he must do. He takes his final photograph, and as he turns and takes his first step, his location changes once again...