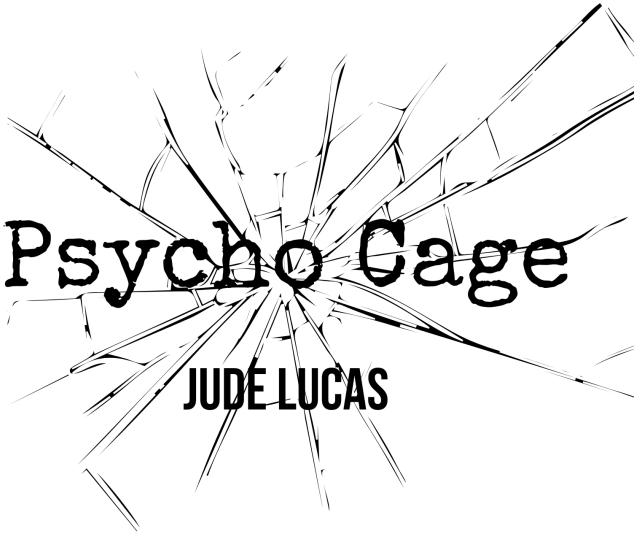


SIMPATICO
PUBLISHING
STORIES WITH SOUL
AND VOLTAGE

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Chapter 1
Welcome to the Cage

Dear Reader,

This book is a live wire.

It doesn't beg for your approval. It doesn't flinch.

Psycho Cage is a scream in the dark—Ethan's fists, Willa's defiance, Clay's unraveling truth.

These kids aren't broken; they're built wrong on purpose.

Their world is a shattered mirror, and every shard cuts.

Don't expect tidy endings or soft landings.

This isn't a story—it's a reckoning.

If you're here for comfort, turn back now.

If you're here for the ache, the chaos, the pulse of something real—step inside.

You're already one of us.

Welcome to the cage.

Jude

Chapter 2
Ax and Skateboards

The Florida sun's a bastard, scorching the asphalt as Tupac's beats thump through my veins—hair's whipping wild in the wind, Merc purring beneath me like a caged beast ready to claw free. I'm not here for Clay's Douchebag Dad flexing up front or some kid bouncing in back like a yappy mutt. I'm here for axes—Grandpa's voice growls in my skull, rough as gravel, etched from years of smoke and grit: "Men use their hands, Ethan—keeps the demons at bay." Fuck yeah, I feel 'em clawing already, restless under my skin, begging for a release only steel can give.

Bullseye Lodge looms ahead—Mercedes growls to a stop, tires kissing gravel, and Jade strides out, camo hugging his frame tight, serpent ink curling down his neck like a warning carved in flesh. He's all grins, ushering me past glass-walled booths—orange mats slap the floor, wooden targets loom, red-white-blue circles screaming some patriotic bullshit I don't buy. A blonde chick's mid-throw, axe spinning wild—bounces off the wood, arcs back chaotic, nearly clips her skull. She sidesteps, giggling like it's a game. I'd pay cold cash to see that blade split her open, crimson splashing the mat—Willa'd love it, hexing that laugh into a scream, her witchy ass grinning beside me in my head.

Jade shoves an axe into my grip—solid, heavy, the blade whispering under my fingertips like it's alive, humming with promise. I step to the line, left foot forward, right planted firm—eyes lock the target, a bullseye begging to bleed. No hiding it—I'm built for this, every muscle coiled, every nerve sparking. Wrist flicks sharp, axe sails—slams dead center, wood splitting with a wet crack that echoes like a gunshot. Jade's hollering, "That's a bad axe, Ethan!"—throws a fist my way. I bump it, grinning wide, teeth bared—Clay's muttering "asshole" somewhere behind, but he knows he's in my debt. Always will be, the fucker.

Jade's grin stretches, voice dropping low, conspiratorial: "Knife booth's new—where'd you pick that up?" I flip my switchblade, casual, letting it dance between my fingers—he flinches, eyes darting, then slides me a machete, its edge glinting hungry. "Boss'd freak, but try it." I nail a playing card—bullseye, clean through, blade sinking deep—one slip and that steel's in Jade's neck, his grin fading fast as blood would. "Blades are my life," I say, keeping the itch buried, pulsing hot in my gut. "Sixteen?" he asks, sizing me. "Seventeen soon—September," I shrug, tossing my hair. "Swing by summer—knife guys are rare." Instagram swapped, deal sealed—Merc hums me out, that blonde staring as I roll, her eyes hooked. Kayla'd scoff—cheerleaders can't throw for shit—but she'd beg me to teach her, that pout working overtime, lips promising trouble I'd take.

Mom's spaghetti sauce simmers thick, pulling me back from the axe-throwing high as I slouch at the dinner table—David's stuffing his face, meatball dripping red down his chin, barking about some dead-end job he'll shove me into—"Duffney Street's slow, Ethan—won't fuck it up too bad," he laughs, swigging beer. Brent's glued to his phone across from me—two years older, my shadow, but I'm the king here—his eyes flicker up, catching mine before dart-

ing back down. Baby Kacey's in her highchair, flinging nuggets like grenades—I swat 'em mid-air, smirking—"Nice try, kid." Mom hovers, piling more into my bowl like I'm five—her second glass of wine trembles in her hand, a far cry from the Oxy cocktails she drowned in before David's cash cleaned her up—almost.

I scoop the pasta, fork twisting fast—David's still yapping—"Business someday, kid"—but I tune him out, my phone buzzing hot in my pocket. Willa's text lights the screen—"Come over, E"—her witchy pull yanks me, and I'm already half gone. Mom nudges me—"Talk to your dad"—but I shove the phone down, ignoring her—Brent smirks, knowing I'm out. I snatch my skateboard, the door slamming behind me—David's "Where the fuck—" cuts off as I roll into the humid night, the air thick with mowed lawns and palm trees whispering boredom.

The neighborhood stretches out, a copy-paste prison—fancy cars gleam in driveways, hedges clipped too perfect, white houses glaring under streetlights like they're hiding something rotten. Mrs. Kelly waves from her yard, fussing over roses—I flip her an Ollie, grinning as she gasps. Mr. Gadding buffs his ride, yelling—"Slow down, punk!"—but I laugh, wind whipping my hair—fuck his rules. Two girls giggle ahead—short skirts, eyes tracking me—I kickflip smooth, tossing my hair—"Hey, cuties"—they blush, and I'm gone, wheels humming toward Willa's street.

Her house looms—peeling paint, that witchy scent of Palo Santo seeping out—I ring the bell, and she swings the door wide, all black denim and bikini top, jumping into my arms. Her lips crash mine, cherry tang sparking me alive—I'm hers, but I own this too. She grabs my hand, bouncing up the stairs—neighborhood fades, her pull's all I feel—"Ink time, E"—and I'm in, grinning—"Fuck yeah."

Willa drags me up the creaking stairs, her grip tight and warm, denim shorts brushing my hand as we step into her room—the air shifts heavy with Palo Santo and rain-soaked forest, a faint floral curl weaving through like a spell's quiet breath. Candles flicker on a corner table she's turned into an altar—crystals catch the glow for earth, a bell hums soft for air, water rests still in a glass cup, and a red candle spits flame, her core blazing bright. A pentagram sprawls across the center, sage and Palo Santo sticks crisscrossing it—her witchy world pulses alive, drawing me in deep. She's danced with this since we were kids—rose petals and sand back then, now blood and mugwort—and I can't shake the thought she's hexed me, her pull lodged tight in my skull.

I sink onto her bed, the mattress groaning under my weight, and eye the tattoo gear lined up—needles, ink, gloves, all primed like weapons for war. "Upside-down crosses?" I ask with a grin—she slides on gloves, the cool plastic snapping against her skin, and the gun's buzz fills the room like a low, hungry growl. Her fiery red hair tumbles down, framing her face in a rebel halo—winged eyeliner cuts sharp, purple LED glow casting shadows over her cheekbones. "St. Peter's cross," she murmurs, her voice low and dripping with mystery—"he flipped it, didn't deserve Jesus's death." The needle bites my neck just below my earlobe—pain flares, but her touch ignites it—I'm hers in this moment, yet still king of my own chaos.

She flips open a leather-bound book, pages creaking as devil paintings spill out—horned figures with sleek wings—and I lean closer, hooked on the heat of her nearness. "Lucifer's Venus," she whispers, her finger tracing the lines—"morning star, brightness in Hebrew." Our hands brush—hers soft, mine rough—and I pull her in, the spark flaring hot between us. Another page turns—a devil man stares back, fiery hair spilling wild, bloodshot eyes glinting with a single tear—he's

me, chained but unbroken. "Rebelled and fell," she says, her voice weaving a hypnotic thread—"steals body and soul—believe in him, E?" I grin—"Fuck yeah"—and yank her closer, lips crashing into hers, cherry tang mixing with her dark hum.

Her skin burns smooth under my mouth—I graze her neck, teeth sinking just enough to draw a gasp, marking her with a bruise that blooms like our own private hex. Sweat slicks us—the Florida heat presses in from outside, her witchy fire blazing here within—she pulls back with a giggle and grabs that devil book, settling against the pillows. Candlelight dances across her face—she's a goddamn goddess flipping through those pages—"He's chained," she murmurs, "but free in me." I'm lost in her—fighter softens for a breath, but my itch holds strong—Willa's mine, and I'm hers, the fresh ink stinging as that upside-down cross brands us both.

I leave Willa's house with her witchy hum still buzzing under my skin as I grab my board and roll out into the night air, thick and humid with Florida's heavy breath of cut grass and salt curling around me. Clay's waiting at the skate park—a text lights my phone, "Library steps, bro"—and I weave through the neighborhood's fake perfection, my wheels humming past white houses and clipped hedges that hide their rot while the wind whips my hair into a tangled mess. I kickflip past Mrs. Kelly's roses—she gasps like always—and laugh low, speeding toward the concrete ramps glowing under the streetlights' harsh stare.

Clay slouches on the steps with his cap backward, puffing a blunt that trails sweet smoke into the night—he spots me and his grin spreads wide as he calls out, "E, my man!" I drop my board, roll up smooth, and snatch the weed from his fingers, taking a long drag that burns my throat with a sharp, sugary bite before I exhale and grin back—"Fuck yeah, Clayboy." We skate lazy circles under the buzzing

lights—ollies and grinds flow easy, our boards clacking against rails as we trade laughs and drags, our friendship carved deep from years of skate scrapes and shared nights stretching out ahead like this one promising trouble.

He pushes hard off the ramp's edge for a kickflip—his board twists mid-air but he lands awkward, his ankle buckling under him as he sprawls across the concrete with a curse spilling loud into the quiet—"Fuck, E, it's twisted bad!" Two girls roll by—tanned legs flashing under short skirts, giggles bubbling up—and they pause, leaning in close as they offer, "Need a lift?" I nod quick—"ER, now"—and we pile into their beat-up hatchback, Clay wincing in the back while I ride shotgun, grinning as the blonde driver floors it through the empty streets. At the ER, Clay hobbles in—a nurse patches him up fast—but my eyes catch the woman beside us, her finger wrapped in a dishtowel that's gone from white to a screaming crimson, tears streaming down her face as she sits in a world of hurt.

"What happened?" I ask, keeping my voice casual though I can't peel my eyes off her—her bloody mess pulls me like a train wreck I don't want to miss. She glances my way, her free hand tidying her hair bun like she's got some pride to hold onto even now, and winces as she fidgets with the towel soaking red. "I was chopping an onion with my new knife and it slipped, I guess," she says, her voice tight with pain—I chuckle low, easing the air—"Must be one hell of a knife—you holding up?" Her mascara leaves tracks on her cheeks as she nods—"It really hurts"—and I lean closer, drawn in—"Mind if I take a peek?" She throws back, "What's your name?"—"Ethan"—and she offers a small, pained smile—"I'm Vanessa."

She flinches as she unwraps the towel, and fuck, it's intense—her finger's nearly hanging off, bone glinting under the blood that drips down her hand and soaks the cloth deeper red. "Fuck, that's serious,"

I say, my eyes glued to the crimson flow—she shivers, "I need to be more careful around knives," and a nurse guides her away, leaving me staring after her.

Clay's out soon—ankle taped, girls flirting soft—but I'm gone, slipping into the restroom with the lock clicking shut behind me. I lean against the sink—Vanessa's bloody hand floods my head, red dripping, bone stark—my breath catches as I drop my pants, gripping myself tight, stroking hard and fast while the dark rush builds wild and filthy—fuck, it's me, alive in this. I finish quick, panting heavy, smirking into the scratched mirror—"King shit"—then wash up slow and roll back out, Clay none the wiser as the night stays mine to rule.