

# PROLOGUE

*August 29, 1999*

She was only half sleep when she suddenly smelled the potent smoke in the room. She thought to herself *was this just another dream?* This was no dream. In fact it was very much real. The ringing wasn't just in her head either. This was the smoke alarm going off in her home.

“Oh my God! Jeremy wake up! Wake up!” She shook her husband who lay beside her unconscious to it all. This is the one reason that she begged him to go to a sleep clinic. He could sleep through an earthquake and the sound of a trumpet. “Jeremy get up! I think something is on fire!”

Dazed and barely awake himself he slowly rose and sat up. It took him a second to realize he wasn't dreaming either. He instantly jumped out of bed and stumbled over to the front door. The door knob was extra warm to touch. He braced himself for the worst possibility, a fire. Like a band aid on a wound, he swiftly pulled the door open. Just as they feared Jeremy and Lynn could see the amber glare against the newly painted wall over upstairs balcony. He had to deal with something caught on fire before, but those were small.

Like the barbecue pit last July that was up a little too high. Or the time his daughter let the grease in the skillet burn down. This time no one was cooking. His two sons were asleep down the hall. So where did the fire come from?

“Baby the kids!” He could hear his wife shouting behind him. The smoke was getting to his lungs. “We gotta get them and get outta here!” Jeremy grabbed Lynn's hand and led her out the bedroom. As they

walked towards the kid's room down the hall, Lynn peered over the balcony watching the living room couch and coffee table in flames.

Through the flames she could see a window had been shattered. This was arson. Someone wanted this house burned down. Someone wanted this family gone. But who? There wasn't any time to answer that now, they had to get out as quickly as possible.

Just as Jeremy attempted to open the door, there was a crescendo of shattered glass that came through the other side of door. "Tee! BJ! Get on the floor!" he yelled through the door. The door knob was too hot. He couldn't hear what his sons were doing. In fact he couldn't hear if they did anything at all. All he could hear was the crackling of the flames that were on the other side of the door. Jeremy prepared himself for the reality of what he would face on the other side. He took a few steps back. "Lord please protect my boys." He prayed aloud. Just then he gave all his strength and rushed towards the door.

Using his body weight, he managed to break the door open. Jeremy looked in horror to find the bunk beds in flames. They screamed at the sight. Lynn rushed in behind him.

"No!" She screamed as she ran to the beds. "Lynn! No!" Jeremy grabbed her arm to hold her back. "My babies!" She belted out a mix of screams and sobs. Jeremy continued to hold her back as he sobbed along with her. Lynn kept fighting her husband off to get to the bed. After finally releasing herself from his grip she ran over trying to find some indication. Some hope that maybe they weren't in the bed.

"Lynn get back!" Jeremy yelled after. There was too much smoke and flames for her to see. The house was under attack. There wasn't time to let it sink in that they have just lost their two children. They knew they had to do the hardest part. Let go and get out. Jeremy pulled his wife away to get to the door. Flames were now spreading in the bedroom and downstairs. Making their way towards the stairs they continued to cough excessively. Too much smoke has already been inhaled

They crawled the rest of the way. Jeremy had made it back to the top of the stairs when he noticed Lynn was no longer next to him. She was still lying at the doorway of their son's bedroom. He rushed to her aid to find she wasn't conscious.

"No! No baby! C'mon stay with me." He pulled her arm hoping she would wake and continued crawling.

She still was not moving. He sat up on the smoke stained carpet to check her pulse. Nothing. “Lynn come on now, we gotta get outta here.” He whispered to her. Sobbing and coughing himself, he turned her over on her back to perform CPR. “Please c’mon baby we gotta make it. We ...gotta ...get ...outta here.” She coughed up as she came to. “Oh thank God! Baby c’mon let’s go!” Jeremy relieved moved her in front of him. He couldn’t believe this was happening to his family.

He thought about the back patio as a final escape. They may have a chance getting out that way. Once they gotten to the steps they stood to their feet and raced to the bottom of the stairway. Lynn noticed the weather beaten wooden steps were creaking more than usual.

Running through the kitchen, towards the back they saw the door wide open. Did someone come in before setting the place on fire? Lynn stood outside on the patio as she watched her husband stand in the kitchen in deep thought. Jeremy was still thinking of his son’s. He couldn’t believe they didn’t make it. He refused to believe it. Maybe there’s still some hope. “Baby c’mon! What are you doin’?”

She ran over to him and grabbed his arm. He didn’t move. He grabbed her arm back and pulled her into a hug, Lynn was confused. Why isn’t he coming outside?

“I gotta get our kids.” Jeremy whispered as he embraced his wife. Lynn jerked back looking at him in confusion. She stared at his tear filled eyes.

“Baby, no. They’re--” Interrupting her he embraced her once more and gave her a kiss. The kiss was a reminiscent of the one they shared on their wedding day.

“No-No--they’re gone.” Shaking and sobbing Lynn held on as tight as she could to him. She knew if he went back in he would not make it out. The flames had spread through the kitchen. Lynn looked behind him at the counter where their oldest daughter once took her first steps.

“I’m getting our boys.” He released himself from her grip and turned. “Jeremy! Jeremy come back please!” She screamed after him. She watched as he dodged the flames rising around him. He made his way back to the steps. He was halfway up when the stairway collapse beneath him. Lynn watched him disappear through the steps. Screaming after him she ran in herself. There wasn’t a way around the flames anymore. The smoke had clouded her vision as she tried moving further in.

“Jeremey!” coughing and sobbing she desperately moved closer to try and make it to the steps. Her eyes were burning she could now barely see. Now that she was back in there was no way back out. She dropped down to the floor and crouched to the clearest corner of the wall.

Realizing there was no way back out; she curled up in a ball and buried her head in her knees. “Jeremey.” She sobbed. After watching the flames make its way towards the stove, she closed her eyes in defeat.

A white Buick pulled up to the burning house. Cops and firefighters were already at the scene. “Oh no! No! No!” The driver of the car watched the horrific scene. A young girl sitting in the passenger seat watched in stunned silence. She closed her eyes repeatedly, hoping she would see something different each time she opened them. This was a hard sight to witness. She closed her eyes one last time. Took a deep breath, and opened her car door. Rushing across the street she prayed aloud to herself. “Please don’t let them be home lord, please.”

Suddenly a stretched out arm stopped her in her tracks. “Whoa young lady you can’t go past this line.” The arm belonged to a tall fireman. He peered down at her as he motioned her to move back.

“What...what happened?” She choked.

“Arson we believe someone in this family had an enemy and took it out on the whole darn family.” The woman covered her mouth as she gasped. “We were able to get the parents out before the fire got to them but they didn’t make it. Too much smoke inhalation.” The fireman explained. “What? Oh my God!”

The woman covered her face and shook her head in disbelief. She then looked up as if she just had an idea. “What about the kids?” She asked.

“Oh they’re just fine. They’re the one that called us” The fireman pointed over at the police car behind the woman. Two boys sat on top of the car with jackets wrapped around them. A family friend and neighbor were sitting next to them hugging them. “Yeah they said they were trying to make a snack in the kitchen when someone threw ‘fire balls’ in the house. So they called us then ran out the back yard.” The woman began sobbing and covered her face again. Remorseful, the fireman realized he must be speaking with someone close to the family. “I’m so sorry for the loss ma’am. How did you know the Weiss family?” The

woman looked up and wiped away the running mascara from her cheeks. She looked towards the house as paramedics wheeled away the bodies.

“They were my parents.”