

## Prologue

A madness filled my nights. Well not nights exactly. I worked nights so I guess I should say a madness filled my days. Regardless, I hoped maybe writing all of it down would help me gain some measure of control over my sleep. I was plagued by a recurring nightmare. I don't know how most people's recurring nightmares play out but in mine every detail seemed to happen in exactly the same way. Never varies.

This was how it started. I was outside and it was always late in the afternoon on a cloudless day. A warm summer like breeze blew my hair into my face, stinging my eyes. It does this every time. I reached up and pushed my hair back into some semblance of order. Listen, I was having this same wretched nightmare every day of my life and the timing was great, it always finished just before I would normally wake up and get ready for work. It's crazy silly, like getting lost in the fun house when all your friends had gone home. You realize you're alone and what was fun now is terrifying. In my nightmare, I find myself standing in this strange meadow that was sloping down and away from me. I'd never seen a meadow like this. It was filled with waist-high grass as green as new spring leaves and as the wind blew this grass started swaying like hula girls at a late afternoon luau on Waikiki.

Storm clouds rolled in from off the horizon, spinning and tumbling like a wicked ocean reaching out a warning just ahead of its hurricane. The clouds were always changing color from a steel-like gray to a boiling black with lightning flashing highlights into their creases. In my heart, I knew this storm carried an evil that only God and his angels could fight. I feel fear as it rides on the tips of the wind. This storm was bringing something wicked and it was coming on fast. The lightning flashed, budding from the clouds like small flowers then exploding into blossoms that grew across the length of the sky casting a searing white light that blinded me. Then there was the thunder. It was a thunder that could only have been born at the center of the earth. Everything shook. I stumbled backwards as the grass around me was blown as flat as a dirt road then I'm shaken to the ground as well.

Now on my back I opened my eyes and my vision cleared. I was looking up into this raging storm. I saw a horror torn from the pages of some ancient and forgotten manuscript not meant for the eyes of man. I was seeing a monster and I mean that literally. This was nothing like the movies I'd seen, it was a real horror being born from the violence and power of the storm. It had a bulbous shaped head that seemed to stretch out for miles across the sky as it pressed down out from the

boiling clouds. A black face formed on the surface of the creature's head and what began to grow and hang from it looked like a hundred wild black snakes whipping around with a mass uncontrolled purpose. I struggled to my feet looking for some kind of shelter but there wasn't any. Not even a tree. With nowhere to run, I stood frozen in my terror as I realized it was me who had become their purpose. These wild black snakes began to resolve themselves into tentacle-like appendages dripping with some kind of heavy black oil that was beginning to rain down on me. Where this oil landed, it soaked through my clothes and started to burn my skin. The tentacles reached up toward the heavens, then turn back toward the ground, and me. They dropped from the sky like lightning. There wouldn't have been time to hide even if I could have found shelter. These tentacles are just there, reaching out toward me. They looked like long broken fingers bending in impossible and horrid ways. They stroked my face and then each probing finger splits in two, creating even more dripping black fingers for this monster to use as it began to caress my waist. The tentacles tighten, holding me captive so this monster could paint its sticky black oil over my entire body. Everywhere they touched there was pain like hot grease. The black oil penetrated into my skin causing blisters to rise and erupt oozing more of the black oil from my own body. It smelled like a hundred dead and decomposing rats left in the walls of an old house long abandoned.

The creature's face began to grow a deep-set pair of eyes that ignited and burned a red as red as a setting summer sun. I think that they could burn holes right through me, blazing from their black distorted sockets. These eyes spewed hate. That hate was all I could feel. A hate just because I was here and still alive to witness this monster's birth. A hate that let me know that this girl should have died years ago when my dad had tried to beat me to death. I began to feel remorse. I should have just let myself pass away at the hospital where I'd slept in a brain-dead coma just so this monster wouldn't have had to waste its time killing me today.

It was just when I think these thoughts that a deeper darkness opened in its face right below its eyes. Inside this new and growing darkness, I could see stars. Midnight had come to that one spot. An evil midnight for sure, full of dark matter and black star dust filling the space between dead angels and dying suns all born in a distant age. It was the age when creation had only happened a moment ago. I know this sounds crazy but it seemed as if these stars had been waiting for me. Waiting for me to see them since their birth just so I would know all was out of whack with both space and time. I felt these stars. They were watching me, knew me and now they had learned the truth. I was the one who'd cheated death once. Now I was being called upon to settle that debt.

The tentacles encasing my body reached up and tightened around my throat choking me with their oily stench. I gasped for air but found I could no longer breathe. A sadness passed through me. I thought, I would never know the wonder of drawing a breath again. The light faded from my eyes and I could feel a distant pain somewhere in my body but I could no longer tell where it was coming from. My life was slipping away. I had only moments left. I wondered at how a life was nothing more than a collection of these moments and now mine were done. That's when I scream. Not in the dream but in real life. I would bolt awake at that exact moment every time. Never gentle.

A mist floated around in my head. I always hoped the memory of the nightmare's events would pass from me upon waking. Fat chance that. It seemed fate had already chosen for me that this will be the nightmare I will never forget.

So that's it. Now the world knows why an eighteen-year-old Robin Randle believed in monsters.