



Prologue

“He marks out the horizon on the face of the waters for a boundary between light and darkness.”

Job 26:10

*M*y eyes were locked on the horizon, observing the glory of the beautiful warm colors through my bedroom window. I tried to fully take in this moment. The heavens turned into a wonderful canvas as the warm hues swelled across the sky, just before the darkness came. Soon this composition would dissolve forever, as no two sunsets were exactly the same.

The ancient Egyptians deemed the west to be a symbol of death, and it was the reason most of their burial grounds were located west of the Nile River. Their belief was that the sun would be born on the eastern side of the horizon every morning, then it would die each night when it set to the west. I understood this symbolism as I continued to watch. The colors slowly started to

lose their vibrancy, merging, as the day finally ended.

The darkness swiftly poured into my room and began to swallow me whole; it crawled over my bare feet, up my legs, ascending my chest and finally engulfing my face. I would have liked to believe I was not afraid of the dark, but whenever night fell, I felt an uncontrollable chill slither down my spine; it seemed to be a message, a warning. I discerned a feeling that the darkness was not just the absence of light, but an entire, unseen entity within itself. My hopes were set on the light that would inevitably, and soon, return.

I was sitting alone in my house, waiting on my company for the evening; they were about half an hour late. I sighed and impatiently checked the clock resting on my carefully crafted end table, made of the rarest African blackwood. I struggled to make out the time, as my eyes still hadn't adjusted to the change. Being alone in the silent darkness made me start to think about my life—my fortunate situation that came from an unfortunate past I barely remembered.

Anxiety brewed inside of me, and a sharp pain traveled through my chest. Following this pain was a heaviness that seemed to sink me further down into my chair. It was a burden too big for me, a yoke I could not bear. My legs grew numb, so I rose from the chair and leaned against the open window, looking out to my private beach. As the clouds swiftly moved across the sky, the glow of the moon and stars were revealed, giving me just an ounce of what I thought was peace.

I listened to the familiar sound of the waves crashing

onto shore and felt the warm summer night breeze flow through my hair. Taking in a few deep breaths, I inhaled the refreshing seawater air. My breathing began to slow to match the rhythm of the waves as I shut my eyes. This routine calmed my nerves, and the painful weight on my chest started to wear off. Though I was feeling better, the uncomfortable feeling was still there. I began to reflect on what I had been so desperately trying to avoid, the mystery of the man who rendered me an orphaned boy: my father.

His name was Gabriel. The night he passed away was one I would never forget. The night of his death was etched in my mind and yet, I could not even recall his face. Was there a reason why—of all people—my father had to be the subject of this inconvenient gap in my memory? The dissolution of his countenance had eaten at my core ever since. My father, like I, did not like to take pictures. As impossible as it seemed, I wasn't even able to find a single photograph of him. It was as if he had never existed.

That night, the woman who was babysitting me while my father was away answered a knock at the door. A few hours later, I distinctly remembered strangers storming into our home and taking me away. I was not sure where I was going, but I was terrified.

As a lost and confused three-year-old boy, I grew up in foster group homes, mainly trying to discover pieces of my past that would help me put a face to the only family member I'd ever known—my mother had passed away during my birth. On the subject of the cause of my father's death, what I found left much

to the imagination. He had suffered an undetermined trauma, but they said it was a heart attack that actually killed him. Vague information is all I managed to rummage up. My life quickly cascaded into a stranger-consumed existence that provided little to no information about my father. In consequence, I felt like my identity was incomplete, shattered like a broken vase that I could never truly mend.

As a kid, I suffered greatly from insomnia and paranoia that stemmed from nightmares I started to experience frequently. The others called me crazy when I would tell them what I would see in these dark visions. I soon learned to keep all of those stories to myself.

Growing out of my awkward phase, the others in the group home began to deem me the pretty boy, but I was still very much an outcast—mainly by my own choice, I suppose. Our priorities were vastly different; I wanted to better myself, while most of them unfortunately led troublemaker lifestyles. I spent my days working myself to the bone, at one point juggling three jobs. I wanted to make sure that when my time was up, I was ready to take on the world.

I was never adopted, so I eventually aged out of the foster care system at the age of eighteen. It was then that I received an extremely generous amount of money—seven figures—claiming to be my inheritance. No one could give me answers as to where the money had come from, seeing as my father and I had lived in relatively mediocre conditions before his passing. I was skeptical of the news of this sudden wealth, but sure enough, it was specified for me: Adrien Seth Reed, of the same birthdate as my

own, born in the same hospital and the same city. There was no denying that it was mine.

Using the money that I had already saved up on my own, I donated half of it to the foster care system and then the other half to local homeless shelters. Choosing to spend my time volunteering at the shelters, I was able to help many of the guys I grew up with that had unfortunately ended up there. I quit all of my jobs and invested chunks of my inheritance money into local businesses, so I could spend even more time volunteering while I continued to grow my wealth.

Wanting a permanent place to call home, I purchased a brand-new house in Wellfleet, Massachusetts, located off the shore of Cape Cod. The location on the beach was somewhat of a safe haven for me, but I was still vexed with the insomnia that had plagued me for as long as I could remember. The comforts of my new home weren't suitable enough to put a stop to my nightmares as I had, for some reason, thought they would.

A man with extremely pale skin, red eyes, white hair and a face slightly obstructed by a black woolen scarf was always the primary subject of my nightmares. My first nightmare of this strange man occurred the night of my father's death, just moments before I was taken away. The man seemed to be an illusion; he disappeared without a trace before the others arrived.

The nightmares came almost every night and displayed no sign of ending. I would sometimes spend hours sketching images of this mystery man. The drawings would gather in my nightstand, never to see the light of day again, as the finished

images absolutely terrified me. I didn't know whether he was a figment of my imagination or something entirely different. Every time I woke from my sleep, the presence of this man was nurtured, as he seemed to become even more intertwined within my real world.

There was only one thing that came close to overcoming my troubles: Jenna McBrayer. The love I had for her helped with my worries, insomnia, fears and anxiety when I was with her. For those moments, I mostly forgot about the mysterious, white-haired man and the twinge of the mystery my father left behind. It was only when I was with her that I felt I could temporarily overlook my obsession of the past and create an overlaying existence with ease. However, there was still a hole that needed to be filled, something that was missing.