

CHAPTER ONE

PROLOGUE

Landon loves summer and tries to stay outside as long as he can until his mother would yell out the backdoor for him to come inside. He sat in the weeds pulling blades of grass apart, placing them between his thumbs and then blowing, creating a whistle sound. Sometimes, it would take a good part of the afternoon to find the perfect blade of grass.

Kids his age were out playing together, climbing trees, riding bikes, but Landon liked the field. His family home had 100 acres of land with places to hide and explore. His father said the land has been in his family forever and grew wheat when it was a farm, but eventually the wheat stopped growing and things dried up. Now it's one big playground for him. It was mostly quiet on his road, with the closest house across the way and a mile down. The house sat back from the road so if anyone did visit, they would see them coming. No one ever did visit.

Landon pulls another blade of grass from the dirt and smiles. It is perfect. It is the right size and thickness. He rips it in half placing one side

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between his thumbs and blows. The loud whistle forces Landon to giggle making him drop it. His eyes frantically search for the dropped blade of grass; squirming around and lifting his knee, he finally finds it sticking to the side of his leg. Inspecting it, he notices the edges are torn from blowing on it too hard. He scrunches his face, and then smiles. Closing his eyes, he puts the blade of grass in his left hand and closes it, making a fist. His smile gets bigger. He could feel the edges heal themselves. He opens his hand and sees the blade of grass back to its original state... perfect. Instead of using it as a whistle again, he carefully puts it in his front pocket to save it for later.

The sun wasn't quite touching the horizon yet; which was a good thing. His mother wouldn't come yelling for him to come inside. The fireflies were starting to flicker, and he could hear a cricket somewhere nearby, somewhere off to his right. He loved to capture them and put them in jars to take to his room. His mother hated it and would always make him release it back into the yard. It wasn't easy hiding a cricket. As soon as it would start chirping his mother would stand in his doorway smiling. She always said, "Would you like to live in a jar?" Even

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though he knew the routine, he still got up to find it.

After a few minutes without any luck, Landon yawns. He was calling it a night. With his blade of grass tucked safely in his pocket, he turns to head for the house, but stops. There was something standing out there with him. He squints his eyes, trying to focus in on the object in the distance. It wasn't a *something*; it was a *someone*. They were facing him and not moving. Landon calls out, "Dad?"

There wasn't any response. Landon tries louder, "Dad? What are you doing?"

Landon starts to move towards the figure and realizes that it couldn't be his father. This figure was shorter and heavier. Landon felt his body shiver.

The stranger appears to be watching him. He could feel his muscle tighten and his breathing getting a little heavier. It was too late in the day for any visitors, and he was sure if there were they wouldn't be standing in the field...staring at him.

Landon begins to slowly sidestep towards the house that was about 100 yards away. The stranger takes a step forward; Landon releases into a full sprint.

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He reaches the house screaming, “Mom! Dad!” He sees the screen door laid slightly open. “Mom, there’s someone outside. Mom!” Landon yells, but there still wasn’t a response.

He darts through the door and stops immediately staring into the hallway that leads to the kitchen. He watches a shadow engulf his mother who is lying lifeless on the floor. Landon cannot move. The shadow spins around. He cannot make out a face, but can tell it was looking at him. He is afraid.

As he stands there frozen, he sees his mother’s foot move. The movement ignites Landon. “Leave her alone!” he yells as he dives towards his mother. The shadow releases a deep bellow as it vanishes through the wood floors. Landon falls next to his mom who is lying on her stomach with her face turned towards him. She’s covered in blood and breathing slowly.

“Mom, are you okay? Get up. There’s someone outside.”

His mother takes a shallow breath. Landon shakes her shoulder pleading, “Please, get up.” His mother’s eyes just stare at him and a tear slowly runs down the side of her face. Her shallow breathing stops, leaving her lifeless body

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staring at her youngest son. Landon's eyes swell as tears pour down the 10-year-old's face.

"Please, mom. Please!"

He stares at her before lowering his head crying with his hands pressed firmly against her back. He lifts his head and thinks for a moment. It worked on a blade of grass, so maybe...

Landon pushes harder against his mother, closing his eyes tightly. He whispers to himself, "Get up." He opens his eyes and doesn't see any movement. He tries again. This time he pushes harder against her and closes his eyes as tight as he can. He can feel under his firmly pressed hands that nothing is happening. This time, he is too afraid to open his eyes. Tears are still streaming down his face.

He can hear noises, thumping, and what sounds like growls all around him. He lets go of his mother, clasp his hands together and tucking them between his thighs. His eyes are still tightly closed. He can hear running around the house and the footsteps are getting closer. Landon still doesn't open his eyes. The footsteps leap next to him as Landon feels arms scoop him off the floor and whisks him up to stand.

"Landon, open your eyes, buddy."

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He can hear his father's voice panting for air. Landon's eyes spring open to see his father crouched down in front of him. He yanks Landon's arm and heads for the door. Landon looks behind him and sees his mother still on the floor, but beyond her was shadows engulfing the kitchen. They were pitch black and reminded him of spilled ink pouring out of a tipped over bottle. He hears his father say, "What do we do now?" Landon doesn't look at his father or whom he was talking too, he can only watch the dark shadows dance over his mother.

"I'll take Landon."

"He's too young."

"We don't have a choice, Don."

"There has to be another way."

"We don't have another way. I'll suppress it enough until it's time."

Landon watches the ink get closer. "Dad?"

Don spins around and looks down the hallway, "Fuck! Okay." Don crouches back down to his son, "You have to go now. Don't argue. Remember, I love you."

Don holds out Landon's arm to the stranger's voice. Landon can feel hands cold as ice grab his arm and lead him out to the yard. Landon is being dragged off the porch but

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doesn't take his eyes off his father. He watches the ink spill through the hallway and engulf his dad. His father only stood there, watching his son, with a smile on his face.

“Dad!” Landon’s screams curdle through the fields. “Dad!” His father is gone. The stranger holding his arm doesn’t say anything, but Landon can see everything get darker.

In seconds, he watches his surroundings coat with a bright light before dimming. His eyes are filled with tears looking around. His confusion, fear, and anger cloud his judgment to see who the stranger is who is dragging him away.

“It’s okay, Landon. Everything will be okay.”

