

CHAPTER 1



NEW BEGINNINGS (1928)

As Dub did a regular midnight walk around the perimeter of his yard, a dark figure appeared at the end of the driveway. It approached with a familiar gait. Dub tensed every muscle in his body and stuffed his hands in his pants pockets. Fists clenched.

“Hey, brother,” he said.

“Hey, Dub.” Tim’s grip tightened on the laundry bag containing his only possessions.

“Mama sent that letter over two years ago. Said you were doing some bad stuff.”

Tim responded with a nervous chuckle and shrugged. A moment of silence extended as if an entire year were going by. A brief wind blew into his face, filling the void.

“Some stories are never fully told. The rest manifest through our illness and perversities,” Tim said.

With a raised voice, Dub said, “Stop the bullshit talk, college boy.”

“That’s why even you escaped Morriston and didn’t look

back, Dub. You couldn't face the past anymore. For me, I couldn't live in the past, and that's why I didn't get off the train here in Abingdon, Illinois, back then."

Tim gave the bare minimum facts about the last two years, and Dub gave an even briefer update on their family.

Tim's shoulders curled inward. After taking a deep breath and dropping his head, he said, "What else can I tell you right now?"

The brothers stood in the darkness lit by the moon. Each scanning the night shadows without acknowledging the presence of anything around them, including each other.

Dub finally faced Tim dispassionately, breathed in deeply, and explained the meager accommodations at the back of his property.

Tim ambled to his new residence. A single step and modest stoop led to the shack's thick mahogany door that Dub had retrieved from the curb of a mansion-sized plantation house on the other side of town. The crawl space beneath the windowless, dark wooden structure suspended on twelve-inch stilts helped keep the building cool inside.

The next morning, the starkness of life came into view from slivers of sunlight oozing through the slat walls. Tim lit one of the two oil lamps hanging from the ceiling.

A scan of the room revealed little. A beige wardrobe steamer trunk leaned in the far corner. A small table accompanied a single chair. The cot and its matted feather pillow challenged his back, prompting him to stretch to release the tightened muscles. A smoke-stained blue kerosene heater with bear claws for feet stood in the opposite corner.

He avoided spending time observing himself in the mirror, the only item on the wall. Walking to a pedestal topped by a white porcelain bowl, he lowered his head and closed his eyes as if in prayer. Upon opening them, tears obstructed his view of

the surroundings. With surrender, he reached toward the floor for the tin bucket beneath the stand and made the first trip to the well, beginning the cycle of days to come.