

See Jack Die

(Part 2 of 5)

Copyright 2008, 2012 by Nicholas Black

Free-ebooks.net Edition

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage, photocopying, recording, and(or) any retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in review.

Other books in the See Jack Die Series: **See Jack Hunt**

CHAPTER 12

JACK'S APARTMENT.

FRIDAY MORNING, EARLY . . .

Bang, bang, bang!

I heard the pounding, and at first I wasn't sure if it was inside of me, or actually the front door. Then I heard Ricky's muffled voice talking to somebody outside the door. I almost fell on my face twice on my way to the door. My balance wasn't up and running, yet.

I pulled open the door and Ricky walked in, talking to somebody on his cell phone.

“ . . . we'll be there as fast as we can. Thanks, Rupert.” He disconnected the call and took a quick look at me, “You look like hammered dog shit.”

Thanks. It's always nice to have friends.

“Come on,” he pressed me as he headed to my mini-refrigerator, opening it up and rifling through it for anything tasty; which there wasn't. “ . . . Rupert just said that he had a hit on the book. Says it's important that we go see him . . . *eeeeee-mediatly!* His words.”

I told him I needed to take a shower and brush my teeth. He tossed me a half-wrinkled shirt and told me that we were going . . . *now*. I acquiesced. What the hell, maybe old Rupert had figured something out.

Hopefully he tells us the book is a scam.

Or even better, that it's some useless old gardening book.

A how-to, maybe, about building grass huts.

Renaissance Kama-sutra.

Something I can use to narrow down the list of my possible neuroses. Anything that proves to me that I'm not seeing the spooks. Give me tumors. Give me stagnating neurons. I'd even take a double shot of paranoid schizophrenia.

I'll be the mad scientist, with a smile on my face from ear-to-ear.

DALLAS PUBLIC LIBRARY . . .

37 MINUTES LATER . . .

Rupert met us at the large doors near the front entrance of the library. The library wasn't even officially open, yet, but he had a set of keys and a look on his face that seemed to have been carved out of stone. There were bluish bags under his bloodshot eyes.

“I would have called last night, but I didn't get word until just a few hours ago, and I had to make all of the necessary skeptical inquiries.”

“Rupert,” Ricky said, “. . . you sound a bit loco there, buddy.”

“You must excuse my crass nature this morning,” Rupert apologized as he led us to the 'dangerous' books room. “It is quite rare that we find a book of this magnitude and cultural significance.”

We found ourselves sitting at the rectangular table, quietly staring at the *Book of Sighs*, while Rupert shuffled through a stack of papers he had printed recently. They had that hot-ink smell.

“Alright, Rupert,” I said as I steepled my hands, “give us the goods.”

“Yes, of course,” he said as he pulled two pieces of paper to the top of the pile, then adjusted his Coke-bottle glasses. “Gentlemen, our search yielded some remarkable results for this particular volume. If it *is* what it looks to be, then it will be just incredible.” He shook his head, looking from the printed pages, down the book, and back. “. . . incredible.”

“Rupert?” Ricky nudged. “You’re killing us, here.”

“Oh, right. Well,” he said, clearing his throat several times in that kind of gross way that made me want to clear my throat, and get a pneumonia shot.

He laid the first page down on the table, a few inches from the book. On the printed page there was a small grainy picture of the book. Well, of some book.

“What we have here, this book, is one of three.” He lowered his voice. “This book, called the, 'Book . . . of Sighs' . . .”

Ricky and I glanced at each other nervously.

My tumor just got a fraction smaller.

Rupert continued reading, “. . . these books date back to three twenty-five AD. Do either of you know the significance of that year?”

We both looked gloss-eyed at him, our shoulders and eyebrows lifting, and dropping.

He had a smug grin, deliciously sinister, “. . . that dates back to the *Council of Nicaea*. A quick lesson. In three-thirteen, Constantine—the new emperor of Rome—ended the persecutions of the Christians. They were a small percentage at that time, but the religion, now protected, grew quickly. The various other pagan religions made up the remainder of spiritual thought at that time. But there was movement in progress.

“They all felt that they were fulfilling a mission and ministry based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. By three-fifteen, many people saw the advantages of belonging to Constantine's new imperial faith, and

the churches swelled in ranks. Constantine himself was a pagan, only pushing Christianity for political means. He was trying to keep Rome from ripping itself apart. Religious turmoil is not something new.”

“Oh, yeah,” I said. “I read the *Da Vinci Code*. I remember that part. The Council of Nicaea was where they all got together and voted on which texts were going to make-up the bible. Lots of wheeling and dealing.”

“That is, of course, a very simplified version of the actual events. But basically . . . yes,” Rupert nodded. “Constantine was a smart ruler. He knew that he needed everyone working together for a common cause. Why not bring all the religions under one umbrella?”

“That's good politics,” Ricky added.

“ . . . and to do so they needed a holy figure that everyone would follow. That is why they elected only scripture that supposed Jesus Christ to be godly. That is to say, they needed Jesus to be born of God. Part God, himself. The masses wouldn't follow a prophet, or a religious scholar. But the son of God . . . now that's someone we can all get behind.”

“But how does this relate to our book?” Ricky said, cutting to the chase.

Rupert tapped his long bony fingers down on the second page. Your book, the *Book of Sighs*, it was also produced at this Council. And there are certain historians that claim it was drafted by scholars right along side the bible. At the same time they were building the foundations for Christianity for the next two thousand years, they were working on these three books. All identical copies.”

Where are the other two? I asked.

“Destroyed by a mysterious fire, in Italy. The circumstances point to some kind of religiously motivated terrorism, but it's all speculation.” Rupert slid his teeth back and forth, almost to the point where they started to grind like fingernails on a chalkboard.

“So we have the only copy?” Ricky said.

Rupert nodded. “And you should see where it's been. The book was kept in secret for hundreds of years, hidden in Rome, then Italy. It spent sixty or seventy years in Spain, in the late fifteen hundreds, before being lost in transit. It was heading to South Africa, and the only remaining stories claim it ended up in the jungles of the Congo, controlled by tribal leaders.”

“This book is well traveled,” I said. The things it must have seen.

“Well traveled to put it lightly. Somehow, it appeared in the jungles of Brazil, in the hands of a group of Indians that descended from African slaves. A British explorer wrote about it in eighteen ninety-four.”

He went on to explain that it was regarded as a sacred object, never to be touched, or even looked at by anyone but the chief of the tribe, and his oldest shaman. And then . . .

“ . . . and then there is no trace of it. Not once. It disappeared into the jungles of Brazil, south of the Amazon. It was thought to no longer exist . . . until yesterday, that is. When you two walked in with it.”

“So it's a collector's item?”

Rupert's mouth turned into a giant 'O'. “To put it mildly . . . it is, most likely, priceless. Millions don't begin to describe what some people would pay. I think it probably belongs in a well-guarded safe, in some museum.”

“*If* this is the same book . . .” I said rather skeptically. “If this actually is the *Book of Sighs*?” And even as I said the words I could feel Ricky's eyes burning a hole in the side of my head.

“Let's suppose it is the real thing,” Ricky proposed. “What now?”

Rupert's face contorted in concentration as he pondered the possibilities. He looked like one of those dogs with too many wrinkles. Like a folded skin blanket.

“Well, first things first, don't go showing it around. People might use various means of deception to procure it,” Rupert said carefully.

“Like bullets?” I asked, looking back and forth at Ricky and Rupert.

They both nodded.

“Is this book *that* valuable?”

Rupert leaned in, interlacing his fingers, his elbows pressing into the table, his eyes locking on mine, “Imagine what was *so* important that it had to be written alongside the bible, and then hidden for almost two-thousand years. Try, if you will, to grasp what was intended by Constantine when he had this book created. We can't possibly fathom what importance this book has.”

Ricky reached over and ran his hand over the *Book of Sighs*.

“Your hand just touched a piece of history,” Rupert said, his eerie voice echoing through the small room. “A piece of history that has been kept secret at all costs.” He nodded. “That book has a higher price than any of us can imagine. And the information it holds hostage in its impossible code . . . that has no price on it.”

“You can't put a price on the truth,” Ricky said softly, his eyes taking in the newly discovered magnificence of the *Book of Sighs*.

And my degenerative brain disease just got a bit less virulent.

My advanced schizophrenia didn't seem so viable.

The tumor just shrunk a tad more.

Looking at the book I realized the frightening reality that I might *not* be going crazy.

Shit.

CHAPTER 13

JACK'S APARTMENT.

FRIDAY NIGHT . . .

We left Rupert feeling a bit awestruck. This book—the *Book of Sighs*—it was pretty important. If it was real, that is. And we had no way of knowing for sure. But something told me that it was legitimate. That this wasn't a fake. No prank here.

Ricky agreed. Why would Ms. Josephine have given me a fake super-secret book that nobody can interpret? Something else struck me, too. Ms. Josephine had said that I would eventually be able to read it. Perhaps all of this seemingly nonsensical research was toward that very aim. I mean, who could resist the temptation of figuring out what some 1,700 year old book was trying to say?

What was Constantine trying to keep secret . . . but was important enough to have three copies of it?

Lots of questions that none of us, even salty old Rupert, could answer. Ricky thought we should take much more care with the book, even recommending that we get a safety deposit box for it. It wasn't a bad idea, but I was worried that without the actual book, maybe I wouldn't be able to figure out any of the coded pages. We agreed to sleep on it. Literally, *sleep* on it, until a better idea arose.

Two hours later I find myself flipping mindlessly through a *National Geographic*. On page 79 there are a series of photos from the Typhoon damage in Burma. And these pictures are so, I don't know . . . sharp. Edgy. Grainy, just to the point where you can actually feel the black mud underneath your fingernails.

As I went from one glossy page to the next, seeing dead bodies next to collapsed buildings, I felt very greedy and arrogant, and ashamed. Here I am, I got a little pop on the head, and the state is shelling out gobs of money, care, and personal attention so that I can *cope*.

These people, with their broken lives, their crushed cities, places that look like they were destroyed back when Atlantis disappeared—they've been left with nothing. Just pieces of broken concrete, and rusted rebar, and shards of glass and trees . . . and death everywhere. This is beyond catastrophe. In the blink of an eye, 100,000 people ceased to be among the living.

Why?

Were they in the wrong place at the wrong time? Did they not have faith? Or did they have the wrong faith? Is this the world that Constantine was trying to build, or the one he was trying to protect us from?

Or is it all a dice game?

There were a few black-n-white photos of a family—all kids—huddled together holding a small dead child. There wasn't a parent to be found. All of the kids looked like they hadn't eaten a good meal, ever. And they have this blank look in their eyes. This empty stare that says, this is just the way it's supposed to be.

Like they expected it.

Like they deserved this devastation.

And those pictures, those pixelated, grainy, black-n-white photographs, I stared numbly into them as if they were just more Rorschach Inkblots. I was waiting for impressions. But I'm so used to faking it, that my mind doesn't know how to actually interpret this level of sadness. I am actively trying to empathize with these people, but it's difficult.

Where is the humanity in that?

Where is the divinity?

And then I glance over at the book, sitting on that same wooden chair that matches the other three chairs in my apartment. That fucking book.

The sky had turned blue and peaceful, growing closer to black with each minute as the sun hurries away. Ricky would say we were between dogs and wolves.

It's quiet in here. My apartment has a low hum. It's a mixture of all the different appliances and lights and the air-conditioner all strumming along together to create their unique collaborated sound. But all of it kind of cancels itself out. It makes the world some foreign place beyond the protective borders of my balcony and the front door.

So all is as quiet as it will ever be.

I close the National Geographic, my fingers a bit sticky as if those children sweat ink onto my fingertips. And I take a deep breath and lay back. I'm guessing that at some point, I should feel the drummer's beat inside my chest, and that I will suddenly be able to read this book. But nights, quiet nights like this, they have taken on a far more foreboding nature.

Nights like this are when I see the spooks.

So I decide to change the way I have been handling all of this. I make the choice to just sit back, alert and aware, and study them, just like Dr. Smith studies me. The same way that Rupert studied the minutiae of fine details on the book's cover, distilling from it knowledge.

I lean back and relax, taking my slow, deliberate breaths . . . just the way Dr. Culligan said I should when I need a *time-out*.

And I'm breathing, in 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . out 4 . . . 5 . . . 6 . . .

Positive pools of warm energy.

I'm using my thumbs to lightly massage my temples. Then the top of my eye sockets. My eyebrows. The upper part of my nose.

My palms press and circle around my cheekbones. Then I make soft imaginary rivers of energy from my temples, to the area just in front of my ears, and down to my lower jaw. All of it just like the good doctor told me.

Self-meditation.

It beats self-medication, I guess.

And in 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . out 4 . . . 5 . . . 6 . . .

Positive rays of healing power.

I open my eyes, expecting to see things that will get your average guy locked away for a long, straightjacketed time. My eyes work their way slowly and tentatively, starting from one corner of the room to the other, studying each and every shadow. I don't want to miss anything.

The black outside is beating out the blue, and it no longer looks peaceful and kind. The sun is running for cover, afraid of something. And my eyes continue to scan. Under a table, beneath a chair. To the corner where a lamp sits idly on a small end table. And I know, out of my peripheral vision, that something is going on around the chair where the book is. But still I don't rush my eyes there.

I have to be a scientist about all of this.

I need to be an objective observer.

I must be a detective. Todd Steele.

In 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . out 4 . . . 5 . . . *holy shit!*

My eyes skipped past a dresser, and right to the chair where four spooks are gathered. My heart rate, maybe it jumped up a beat or two per minute. My mouth, perhaps it was dryer than it had been recently. And the little hairs on the back of your neck that tell you things are not as they should be, those hairs are all standing at attention.

These spooks don't seem to notice me, not at all. And, come to think of it, they never have paid me much attention. Well, except for that first time, when those gatherers were digging in my chest. And I'd rather forget all that.

But these spooks, they seem wholly concerned with the book, as if it's glowing or something. Maybe it is, to them. They're just crawling around, checking it out the same way they were checking-out that dead traffic cop in the morgue. They look like primitive scientists.

The way they're all crouched, it's like they are considering something. Trying to figure out how to open it. How to steal it. They definitely seem bothered. One of them appears to be much more animated than the others.

He, or she, is probably the ring leader of this invisible posse. This spook is circling the chair, very careful not to touch it, even with his shadowy fingers. Like the others I've seen, these are short, 3 ½ to 4 feet tall, bent forward and almost crouching as they walk. Their limbs, and especially their fingers and toes are long and curled, as if they have to hang on to trees or something.

I don't understand why they would need fingers and toes like that, but then I don't understand why I'm looking at creatures made of shadows, either. I'm feeling braver, now. More confident than I ever have been around them. Not that I'm some expert, or anything. But I'm pretty sure that this isn't an everyday thing for most people.

I wonder—as they huddle around the chair, gazing at the book—if I sent out some alarm when I felt the name drumming inside of me. Like a locator beacon or something.

A tracking system from the netherworld?

Satan's *lo-jack*?

And then another possibility crosses my mind: what if I initiated a pager? Maybe my messing with the book sent out some signal. A call to the other side. And this is their advanced party coming to check it out. If that's the case, the grim reality sets in that they will eventually come looking for me.

To make contact.

To establish communication.

Perhaps this is the way it's done. At first you see them for a few fleeting moments at night. Then during the day, when you're tired. Pretty soon you see them after a set of sit-ups in the park. And when they're convinced that you're not going to pull a major freak-out, they make contact. This idea, while it sounds reasonable enough, sends shivers down my spine. I don't want to get the kind of attention that those other things—the gatherers—gave me before.

All of the sudden the cold hugs my body and I feel myself shaking. I'm trying to breathe in 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . out 4 . . . 5 . . . 6 . . . but all that's happening is I can't breathe at all. My body is trying to stockpile oxygen and I'm starting to hyperventilate. I know they can probably hear me, now. My cover is blown.

Somehow, though, they don't notice me losing control. And accidentally, I have performed my first experiment. They can't hear me. Suddenly, the shivering stops, as if my brain told the rest of my body to nut-up! Be a man.

I get a little bold, and whisper, “Hey . . . *spooks*.”

Nothing.

“Spooks!” I say a bit louder. “Over here you spooky bastards.”

They're still focused on that book.

I carefully crawl to the edge of my bed and sit, my feet dangling just a few inches from one of them. And in a natural voice I say, “What do you want? Why are you messing with me? Why does this book interest you?”

And those rude little bastards don't answer. Not only can they not see me, but I'm not sure they can even hear me. “Hey, you little bitches!” I bark.

With an empowered sense of strength and vigor, I kick my left foot a few inches forward, pushing through one of them. And that will go down as one of the dumber things I have done in my 4-and-change months of life.

They all stop what they're doing and turn to face me. Suddenly the book isn't so important to them. They are not moving, now. Just looking at me. I can't see any eyes, but I know from their body positions that they're only concern is me. That I am now much more important than some dusty old book.

Those shivers I had before, they were like a massage compared to the sheer fucking panic that engulfs me like a typhoon.

I close my eyes, leaning slowly back, knowing that they're probably surrounding me. I keep my eyelids shut with more force than the muscles in my face have ever had to exert. I try that breathing in-and-out stuff, but that's not happening. At this point, I'm just hoping they don't start hacking at my chest, again.

It could have been minutes, maybe hours, I'm not sure. But when I finally opened my eyes . . . they were gone. The book was still in the chair, seemingly untouched. I glanced at my chest, there was no gaping hole in it. So that was a relief. I looked back across the apartment. Nothing.

All gone.

Their excursion, or my delusion, was over.

I got up, my shirt was drenched with sweat, and walked to the kitchen where a stainless steel wash basin was dripping water at a semi-constant rate. The drops at the bottom of the sink were like bright pearls, with tiny diamonds around them. So many colors in just those pearls of water and the brushed grey and silver of the basin. All those shades I wouldn't normally stop to notice.

I ran the water for a moment, and when it was cold to the touch I cupped my hands and splashed my face several times. Each time I felt more alive. More safe. Grounded in reality. Whatever it was that was happening to me, I was learning to control it. If I didn't mess with them, then hopefully they would leave me alone.

To observe.

To study.

I took a couple gulps of water, straight from my hands. I didn't much care if that was sanitary or not. I was so thirsty that I didn't have time to fill up a glass and drink like a civilized adult. The liquid invigorated my body. The coldness crawled from my stomach and throat outward. Kind of like it was charging me.

Stopping to breath, I realized that, for the first time, I felt good. Really good. I was lucky, even. This, whatever it turns out to be, is special. And that made *me* feel special. I'm not like the next guy in

line at the grocery store. I'm not the same as my neighbors, or the old lady on the bus. I have a purpose.

I am supposed to do *something*.

Something important.

I lift my head, cold pearls of water falling down my face, down my neck, and melting into my shirt.

I take a deep cleansing breath, and turned around. And a dead girl is standing right in front of me.

CHAPTER 14

JACK'S KITCHEN.

14 SECONDS LATER . . .

I froze.

She was young, maybe in her 20s. She had long dark hair that looked flat, almost wet. She was searching my face with wide wanting grey eyes.

Her face was somber, lifeless.

Her arms were at her sides, her shoulders hanging off of her body as if she was the saddest creature on earth.

Everything about her was cold and dead. She didn't say anything. She didn't move. Just inches away from my face, she might have been a mannequin. A life-size poster of a girl. This is pretty much what you imagine when you're thinking about hauntings.

Nothing moved. Nothing at all.

And then she blinked.

I felt myself not being able to breathe. I felt flush and dizzy. This was way beyond anything I had bargained for. I need air, but am too afraid to move so much as a muscle. But she wasn't going anywhere. Just her silent, probing glare. And all around us it's freezing cold. Like, frost-on-windows cold. Your-breath-making-mist cold.

The back of my jaw is starting to quiver, and I'm worried she'll see my fear. Feel it. Feed from it.

And my only choice is to close my eyes, hoping she'll be gone when I open them. So I squeezed every muscle in my face, as if it was my only protection.

My barrier of safety.

My safe zone.

And when I finally open my left eye, just a fraction . . . she's gone.

I glance around the kitchen, then out into my apartment. But it's clean. Well, relatively speaking. I take a moment to catch my breath, her image still very clear in my mind.

There was something about her that stuck with me. And it was much more than the fact that a ghost—for lack of a better explanation—was just standing inches from my face, in the middle of my kitchen. It was more than that she was as cold and dead as a corpse. Her face was somehow, I don't know . . . familiar.

Somewhere, at some point, somehow . . . I had known her.

CHAPTER 15

SATURDAY MORNING

4:52 AM . . .

I think I'm awake. Although, my body doesn't seem to be responding to anything I do. My eyes can move, but other than that I'm completely paralyzed. And this is one of the more worrisome positions I've been in. Not that this whole night hasn't been completely unraveling.

I've been lying here for probably 15 minutes. I can hear the things going on around me. Somebody up above flushed their toilet a couple minutes ago. A cat outside in the parking lot was hissing at something. My refrigerator just dumped a fresh batch of semi-cubed ice. And here's me, just still as a board.

An inanimate object.

A useless thing.

A piece of frozen meat.

I can feel myself breathing. My body doesn't know my mind is awake. And I have this awkward feeling that I am actually two different pieces—the mechanical *me*, and the mental *me*. The first thing that starts to grip me is panic.

What happens if there's a fire?

What if somebody comes around looking for me? I can't move. Not a single muscle will listen to me. No cooperation with my body.

I hope this isn't forever.

I pray that this state I'm in will wear off, like drugs. Like, when you're coming down from anesthetics. Sobering up. Then the thought crosses my mind that this is a vivid dream. A super-intense, lucid dream. A hallucination. I'm just tricking the other parts of me.

I try desperately to scream, and I start to squirm around inside of myself. A snake stuck inside his old skin. A butterfly in its cocoon. Like, the conscious part of me is not connected to the physical part of me. Not completely. And I feel sick, like I'm on a boat that's rocking in the middle of turbulent waters.

What in the hell is happening?

I hope I don't throw-up in my immobile state. I might drown. To drown in your own puke, not only would it be the pinnacle of embarrassment, but I imagine that it will be horribly painful. Drowning

scares me more than any other type of death. Give me arrows, or lightening. I'll gladly take fire, or a firing line, even. Stone me, eat me, crush me up into little bits. But please, don't let me drown.

Because—and I'm not sure why I have this intense fear—drowning is *slow*. You see it coming. You know the pain is on its way, and then it chokes you. And you're trying to fight the urge to breathe, but you don't have a choice. And then when you do, death grips you.

See, with drowning, you're dead way before you actually die.

You die, but are aware that you haven't yet died. It's a prolonged struggle into the abyss. Some people, it takes them several minutes to finally pass on. Can you imagine?

And I feel this nauseous wave wash over me as my eyes start to water. I can't control any of it. Desperately, I am trying to remember any of those relaxation techniques that the doctors taught me. Something designed for people to get calm. And I'll just do the opposite of that. I'll do it backwards and wake-up.

This is my plan, and it's fairly moronic.

Since I can't control my breathing, the old 1 . . . 2 . . . 3 . . . thing isn't going to fly. I don't have any feeling in my fingers or toes, so all of that positive energy crap is untenable. Somebody might find me and shake me back. Unlikely, though. Ricky isn't supposed to come over for several more hours.

It's still dark outside. And as I'm coming to terms with my helplessness, something in my apartment starts to shake and vibrate. It's the glass patio door. Earthquake is the only thing I can imagine. In Texas? If it's an earthquake, I'm done for. This whole place will flatten and crush my body like a bug under a falling load of bricks.

The shaking continues, but it's only just the patio door at first. Then the chair with the book on it starts to vibrate, too. Just those two things, the door and the chair. Everything else in the room is still.

But more and more, different objects in the room start to shake and quiver. And they're getting so energetic that they begin to blur. That's it, I'm losing my mind. That's what all of this is about. It has to be. It's the only explanation that makes any sense. I just passed that mad scientist stage in my rotting cortex.

The entire room—everything in it—is jiggling and blurry, and I feel this deeply powerful hum pressing me, like I'm stuck in a giant speaker box. The hum is pressing me from every side, and I feel like my body is sinking deeper and deeper into the depths of some dark lake, or ocean.

And then it starts to fade, while the things—the chairs, dresser, kitchen cabinet, the *Book of Sighs*, the wall mirror, and the stand-alone lamp in the corner—they all bend and morph. They stretch and shift, longer in places, thinner in others. It's as if everything in my apartment went through some metamorphosis.

Like everything was pliable and elastic. The lamp was taller, and tilted to the left. The dresser warped down in the middle, the edges twisting slightly. The refrigerator was no longer a perfect rectangular shape, but more of a trapezoid—the right side a few inches higher than the left.

The chair where the *Book of Sighs* was sitting, it has stretched to nearly twice its original height, thinned in the middle, so that the book is hanging off both sides.

And all of the color in my apartment—the soft browns, the blue carpet, the white trim around the door thresholds, even the brass door knobs—it's gone. All the color has been washed-out and replaced with shades of grey. Just like the droplets of water in the basin of the sink.

The things that were black, they're not even black. They are still dark, but everything is a version of grey. Cold dead color. Outside—beyond my convexed, bulging glass patio door—is a wet blue sky.

The same sky that rests in the time between dogs and wolves. Perpetual dusk and dawn. And I can't see any stars.

This place I'm in, this dream world, it's a contorted, perverted version of the world I know. Even the clock on the wall is bloated and surreal, like it had been next to a blowtorch too long—pregnant and fat at the bottom, the hour and minute hands, twisted and gnarled. Maybe this is my brain trying to make sense of my disease.

My advanced neuropathology finally taking over.

My tumor eating up the parts of my brain that kept me sane.

And I can't explain why, but I feel this sharp, icy cut in my chest. Not pain, so much as a cold, razor's touch. My head tries to lift, but all that happens is that my perspective shifts so that I am looking down at my chest. My clothes, they're all ripped and shredded.

And on my chest, there's a giant incision. Not the 'Y' incision Ricky told me about from an autopsy. This is the straight cut made by those things . . . those Gatherers. The long, deep cut made by them when I first awoke in the hospital, and nobody seemed to care.

As I look at this cut, I realize that it isn't sewn shut, or gaping open. It's just there, the skin choosing to stay closed instead of pouring my guts out into the world.

This is death, my new life.

I feel like I'm on the edge of a slide, about to fall off. I'm unsteady inside my broken body, and I know that at any moment I will fall off some cliff, pass some invisible line in the darkness. I sense myself sliding downward, again. Once more, I see the back of my eyes, from the inside. I see the inside of my nose, and my jaw, and my throat.

And I'm sliding, falling out of me.

And once inside my chest I see the dark bluish light pouring in from my incision, from my gaping hole. A rush of cool air grips me as my legs and lower body slip through this incision.

I'm reaching for anything that will give me purchase. I claw at the insides of my body for something to hold on to. Some piece of me to keep me from leaving my body. But I can't feel anything.

I reach for my ribs, but can't feel them. To say I was unsettled would be putting it mildly. And just as I was ready to give up, I heard a soft voice,

“ . . . *not yet.*”

And within seconds I was back behind my eyes, again. The room still shaking and blurry. The room slowly quieting. The vibrations eventually stopping. And everything back as it had been. The sky was no longer between dogs and wolves. It was a bright amber, with orange fingers of light spreading across my apartment.

I heard trucks and birds and people and refrigerators.

The clock on my wall, the one that was pregnant and melted just seconds ago, it was now circular and functioning, again. And it said, *7:17 am.*

I sat up the second I could feel my body, grasping at my chest. My white t-shirt was soaked with sweat, and looking through it I could see that my incision was gone. My chest was fine.

Whatever it was that wrestled away control from my madness, it came in the form of that voice. *Not yet*, she said.

Not yet.

I went right across the room, looking at the *Book of Sighs* in the normal wooden chair. I grabbed the regularly-shaped phone and dialed Dr. Smith's number. Perhaps I need to have a more candid and honest conversation with my caseworker.

I don't know what's happening to me. Magic, brain disease, voodoo, prophecy? Maybe I'm going nut-bag fucking crazy. Jury's still out.

But I need help.

Licensed help.

CHAPTER 16

SATURDAY MORNING

10:08 AM . . .

“Let me tell you what I think is going on,” Dr. Smith said, leaning back in his comfortable leather chair as it squeaked a bit. I was on the couch this time. Last night put me in the class of patients that lay on the couch.

“You're having lucid dreams.”

“Can I take a pill for that?” I asked, my hands folded behind my head.

“No, no. This is actually very good,” he explains, having been told about the vibrating universe that was my apartment last night. I might have left out a few of the minor details—the spooks, the *Book of Sighs*, the dead girl in my kitchen. But he had enough to go on. You have to spoon feed these doctors, or they'll figure out you've been lying to them the whole time.

He went on, “. . . this is quite a wonderful point in your mental healing. Your brain is rewiring. Fixing itself. The fact that your dreams are so vivid means that you have much more *REM* activity than we originally thought you would have.”

“So,” I posed, “. . . what, exactly, *is* going on in my head? Because this feels a lot like crazy.”

He laughed. *No, no*, he said. This is a *good* thing.

What's happening, he explained, is that I was experiencing NREM—Non-rapid Eye Movement sleep—sometimes. And at other times, my REM sleep—where the dreams happen—is in overdrive.

“You need to understand that because you are actually getting good, quality sleep most of the time, your REM sleep is on . . . well, as if it's on steroids. That's a bad example.”

“I get what you're saying,” I said, a bit confused. “NREM, that's without the eye movement?”

He goes on to explain that NREM sleep is conventionally subdivided into several different stages, on the basis of EEG (Electroencephalograph) criteria. In the adult *Stage 1* is observed at sleep onset, or after momentary arousals during the night—like when the spooks start crawling around—and is defined as a low-voltage mixed-frequency EEG tracing with a considerable representation of a *theta-wave*.

“A what?”

“Theta wave,” he replied. “Four to seven hertz, or, uh, cycles-per-second of activity.”

Stage 2, he said, is a relatively low-voltage EEG tracing characterized by intermittent, short sequences of waves of 12-14 hertz—also called “Sleep spindles”—and by formations called K-complexes. Those are biphasic waveforms that can be induced by external stimulation.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

